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 Radical fideists like Kierkegaard do not cite logical reasons for defending their belief that God exists.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)
Introduction: The Problem of Faith

‘To believe in God is to realise that life has a meaning.’

Ludwig Wittgenstein

‘It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has no existence.’

Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.116

Theism is the belief that there is a Creator, God, who may be encountered within, but who is not limited to the material world. It engenders a balance of immanence and transcendence. (Thompson, 2007:62) The theistic view of God has over the centuries yielded a rich legacy of dialogue and debate, and for close to twenty five hundred years in Western culture, the theistic Deity has been thought of as a transcendent Spiritual Being that is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. (Peterson et al, 2003:10) This conventional view of theism forms an important belief framework for three living religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. (ibid, p.9) The word ‘God’ itself is used in a various senses, from referring to a transcendent, infinite Being who is Creator and Lord of the universe to any finite entity or experience with special significance or inspiring special gratitude. (Hinnells, ed., 1984:81) Other uses of the word ‘God’ between these extremes include those referring to God as the object of an experience that bears special significance, but which is not an actual experience. Given the wide variety of senses the word ‘God’ has, I hereby state that my aim is to focus on the God of Christianity. In the course of my writing, the pronoun ‘He’ will be used to refer to God as this is familiar practice in philosophical enquiry, theology and Christianity. In descriptions of God, we need to appreciate the self-transcending quality of religious experience and language. God is said to be in and outside of our ordinary experience and the words we use. The transcendence of God means He is beyond any concept, language or experience, and cannot be limited or contained. When we say that God is infinite, we mean He is present everywhere. Hence there is no way to experience Him without experiencing something else at the same time as well. It is in His being found within everything that God is therefore described as immanent. (Thompson, 2007:62)
Theists in present times often find it futile proving God’s existence, and clearly some philosophical developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have led many to believe that we simply cannot prove anything metaphysical, or that which concerns supposed realities beyond what we can immediately perceive. (Hill, 2007:38) This essentially rules out any proof for or against God. Immanuel Kant and Ludwig Wittgenstein held this view. I feel that when we consider the arguments about the existence of God, we need to remind ourselves that God is not the kind of ‘thing’ which might or might not happen to exist. (Thompson, 2007:105) Theologian Paul Tillich, who argued that religion is a matter of our ‘ultimate concern’ as it challenges the very meaning and significance of our lives, said, in Systematic Theology (Vol.1):

'..The question of the existence of God can be neither asked nor answered. If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence, and therefore, the answer, whether negative or affirmative, implicitly denies the nature of God. It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as to deny it. God is being itself, not a being.' (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004: 258)

Among Christians, a popular objection to proving God’s existence is that there appears to be something morally wrong about searching for such proof. For example, Karl Barth, one of the most influential Christian theologians of the twentieth century, argued that beyond revelation, God cannot be known. For him, to claim that God’s existence could be proven simply placed human abilities above God. All knowledge of God must instead emerge from God Himself and not from human reason. (Hill, 2007:38) Kant argued that reason can prove only things within the world of sense perception and given this, we err if we venture beyond this. Wittgenstein’s argument was that language cannot talk about anything outside our perception. All talk about God is consequently meaningless, and even if God and religion are of the greatest importance, they simply transcend language. Eighteenth century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid claimed that belief in God is natural and that there is no need to prove God’s existence, any more than we need to prove the existence of the physical world around us. (Hill, 2007:38) The key questions for us to ask at this point would be these: If we cannot argue for God’s existence, can we still say God can be believed? Can such a belief ever be rational? Christians who object to the
idea that God can be proved like a mathematical theorem will nevertheless say that we have
good reasons for supposing that God does exist, or can be believed. (ibid)

Extensive discussions on religious knowledge are often couched as the contrast between
faith and reason, and the relationship between faith and reason has historically been dogged by
controversy and conflict. Christians are usually in agreement that we have good grounds to
suppose that God exists, and that non-Christians have access to many of these reasons too.
Their point of disagreement lies more with deciding which arguments are the soundest and the
degree that these effectively prove God’s existence in the manner that a mathematical theorem
can be proven. In fact, as Hill (2007) says, a most significant task of Christian thinkers today
would be that of coming up with a good account of the relation between faith and reason that
‘takes the good points of both extreme views but avoids the problems associated with them’.
(p.89) Some religious thinkers advocate that faith and reason are incompatible and that they must
exist in a relationship of mutual rejection. Descartes and Spinoza believed, however, that faith
and reason are compatible, claiming that while they may have separate sources, one could
supplement the other. Pascal believed that one avenue to God is through personal conversion
and acceptance of God beyond reason’s persuasions, but ironically, it is rational arguments that
he offered to convince his readers to embark on this journey. In Pensees (1660) Pascal wrote
that ‘the heart has its reasons which reason does not know’, suggesting that some people might
turn to suppressing their faculties of reason so that they are able to believe. (Peterson et al,
2003:40)

Reason is the natural ability of the human mind to discover truth. Some philosophers
argue that it is necessary for any thinking person to use reason in order to have enduring
conviction for a belief. For these philosophers, it is when ‘warrant’ is provided for our beliefs that
we avoid irrational or irresponsible belief. (ibid, p.121) Rationalism is the belief that knowledge of
what exists is obtainable through reason alone. Put another way, rationalism entails that we
justify beliefs according to reason. In rationalism, we deductively justify beliefs by beginning with
one or more necessary (indubitable) premises that through clear, logical steps are expounded on
progressively until we derive the desired conclusion. Hence reason has a pre-eminent
epistemological status due to its potential for objectivity and testability. In much the same way, reason plays an important negative role in belief justification. The reasons one has for holding a belief has a bearing on the degree of certainty that belief constitutes knowledge. Some types of belief are subject to verification but not falsification, an example being beliefs about existence. Others, such as universal claims, are potentially falsifiable rather than verifiable, and falsifiable beliefs are not justifiable and do not constitute knowledge as they are not true.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the widespread opinion was that religious claims could not be proved or disproved, and that there was no meaningful way of thinking about these claims at all. (Hill, 2007:87) Kant, who came to be associated with this particular outlook, argued in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that reason is reliable only when we are talking about the content of experience, and since objects like God are outside of the realm of experience, these could not be reasoned about. (King, 2004:113) Seen in this light, all the arguments for and against God, and indeed most metaphysics, are just pointless. Kant’s arguments and fundamental view that religious matters intrinsically cannot be reasoned about found steady support from many quarters, even though in the eyes of some, this view spelled ill for Christianity. For others, this signalled clearly that the time had come for Christianity to rethink particularly the ways in which its followers know or believe its doctrines. (ibid) Friedrich Schleiermacher argued in *On Religion – Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) that Christianity was based on ‘feeling’ or a direct experience of our dependence upon the Divine at all times; it is not really about making the kind of metaphysical claims that its ‘cultured despisers’ now ridiculed. For him, reason plays no role in establishing Christian doctrines. Instead, reason’s function lies with building doctrines for the expression of the basic, non-rational ‘feeling’. (ibid, p.88)

A definition of faith is more challenging in contrast. ‘Faith’ as used in religious contexts, is rather complex in its meaning. Faith usually involves a cognitive aspect and believing that the religious doctrines are true. A volitional aspect is also involved or implied, ‘expressed in commitment to the object of faith and obedience to what is commanded and there may also be an affective aspect of trust or love’. (Peterson et al, 2003:54) Whereas philosophy (in relying on human reason) proceeds by analysis and argument, the religious believer, in contrast, through a
reliance on faith, reaches a supernatural certainty about truths, some of which are accessible to reason, while others are not. As Geisler (1976) points out, even if we have certainty that God exists, natural reason will not be able to help us go a step deeper towards comprehending such issues as the existence of a Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead. Faith is needed for this. Religious faith thus involves a belief that is beyond what could be made reasonable by evidence at hand; a belief that draws a type of implicit or explicit reference to a source that is transcendent. In this thesis we focus primarily on the 'belief' aspect of faith.

Voltaire defined faith in two ways - first, as a belief in things which he personally believed and secondly, as a belief in things he deemed incredible. Faith, said Voltaire (1901), consists in believing not what seems true, but what seems false to our understanding. He also added that 'the faith which they have for things which they do not understand is founded upon that which they do understand; they have grounds of credibility'. (p.210) Kierkegaard pointed out that while in general, having faith means believing certain things to be true, there is a further crucial, more significant aspect of adopting an existential attitude and existing in 'fear and trembling'. Another philosopher, Robert Audi, distinguishes between propositional faith (belief in the truth of certain things) and attitudinal faith (trust in a person). It is important that I highlight two components of religious faith as a complex thing that influences a person in every aspect of life – the ‘assurance’ and ‘hope’ that it offers the believer. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen', suggesting that having faith is partly to believe in something beyond available evidence. As Hill (2007) notes, it is also 'more than that, for it is to hope as well. This is something we can choose to have’. (p.94)

The dichotomy in definitions above highlights the tension inherent in the contrast between faith and reason. There are uses of reason that need not be debated. For certain, all religious communities use reason in the process of teaching to children and new converts the belief system of the respective religions. Reason also plays a key role in assisting the faithful to understand and appreciate the nature of their faith. The controversial question is more of what role (if any) reason should play in the validation (and invalidation) of religious belief systems. While we may have to use reason in understanding faith, might it also be true that having faith at
all rests on our having good reasons to believe that one's faith is true? This forms the crux of the
problem of faith and reason. This tension itself stems from an important question regarding
religious knowledge: Is it possible to obtain knowledge of the metaphysical without the use of
reason? As Thompson (2007) says, 'Whereas for science, there is trust in the rational process by
which views of the world are formed, evaluated and modified, for religion, trust is placed in a
particular view of the world, regardless of whether reason supports it.' (p.201) When religious
thinkers encounter the challenge of the scientific method, they either seek to minimise the factual
content of belief claims or claim that religion is an issue of faith, one where human reason and
empirical facts do not count for much. This latter approach, implying that human reason is ‘fallen’
and incapable of helping us know God, was adopted by Kierkegaard and in the twentieth century
by Karl Barth. (ibid)

Concerning the role of faith in religion, a wide range of views exists. As we have seen,
some claim that the fundamental truths of religion, particularly Christianity, cannot be established
by empirical investigation or by argument from first principles. Statements like 'There is a God
who exists' or 'Jesus has risen from the dead' simply have to be embraced by a mental and
emotional leap beyond what reason attempts to establish. However, when the believer says he
has faith that God exists, is his belief a reasonable one and is his confidence justified? In this
connection, some people hold the view that purely intellectual interest in God misses the heart
of true religion. They also say that abstract analysis of religious concepts and the logical
examination of theological beliefs are plainly not helpful to the believer when it comes to
appreciating the intimate, personal involvement typical of religious faith. (Peterson et al, 2003:9)
As Peterson et al (2003) point out, 'intellectual interest or philosophical interest in religion is not
the same thing as passionate religious commitment'. (ibid) In other words, however rigorous the
intellectual investigation is, this helps no one gain devout faith. The God of Philosophers is simply
not the God of Faith, believers further argue, and authentic religious faith comes not as the
culmination of philosophical inquiry. In fact, the latter seems to go against the spirit and intent of
religious faith.
Fideism is the position that Ultimate Truth is based upon faith rather than reason. Its fundamental thesis is that essential religious doctrines cannot be rationally verified and thus can only be believed on faith alone. When the fideist says he has faith that God exists and that He loves us, he is saying firstly that he accepts this independently of and in opposition to any reasoning or evidence, and secondly that proving or disproving God’s love for us is inconsequential. (Peterson et al, 2003:45) More than this, accepting doctrines on faith is a valid and reasonable action to take, according to the fideist. Christian belief, on this account, seeks no justification for itself through any appeal to universal categories of reason, but instead relies on its own internal and self-consistent logic as revealed by God. In all matters of theology, ‘truth is thus apprehended by faith’. (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:280) Fideism is thus the opposite of evidentialism, but it is also the way which people since Kierkegaard’s time have typically come to think of faith. When religious people refer to ‘faith’ they ‘must necessarily mean believing something for which there is no evidence, or at least not evidence that most people would accept as sufficient for belief’. (Hill, 2007:89) All Christians are thus fideists in that respect. Sometimes fideism is seen as Protestant ‘irrationalism’. It also claims that Christianity is not to be defended as a religion but instead should be seen as a call to a relationship with God. Also common among fideists would be the view that faith is in part an emotion or passion that guides or constitutes an entire way of life. Pascal, Tertullian, Kierkegaard and Brunner are advocates of this apologetic. Kierkegaard’s philosophy appears to me to best exemplify this orientation. Whereas various Christian theologians have adopted more moderate forms of fideism as part of their position that salvation is solely through faith, Kierkegaard adopted a more radical form of fideism, arguing that religious faith calls for accepting beliefs that are rationally unverifiable, non-rational and even absurd or contradictory.

Evans (2006) describes Kierkegaard as possibly the greatest Christian thinker since the Middle Ages. (p.9) Kierkegaard’s deepest concerns are seen as twofold – an ‘emphasis on the ways that sinfulness and finitude limit human thinking, and on the ways that certain human emotions and passions are necessary in order to get at religious truth’. (Evans, 1998, 112) Often seen as the archetypical fideist, Kierkegaard’s overall position does not accommodate any rational evaluation of faith perspectives. (Peterson et al, 2003:56) He is seen by many to be the precursor
of the existentialist school of philosophy. Existentialists raise questions like: Why am I here? How can I deal with the fact of my own death? How do I approach the meaninglessness of my life? These fundamental problems of human existence can result in despair, or existential angst. However, unlike some existentialist philosophers who came after him, Kierkegaard believed Christianity’s promise of eternal life offers the believer a kind of hope. His chief impact on theology was through the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann, the former of whose commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (1919) was drew much inspiration from Kierkegaard.

While Kierkegaard was concerned with a belief in God, it is not in the mere existence of God but also with how we can believe that God will keep the promise of eternal life or life after death. In this sense, the problem of faith thus became the central problem of religion for Kierkegaard. As he saw it, faith is a reasonable enterprise based on the human predicament; it definitely entails risk and requires a leap. As Peterson et al (2003) says, for Kierkegaard, ‘religious faith always involves a commitment, a ‘stepping out’ and entrusting ourselves to something that goes beyond what we have conclusive proof of.’ (p.53) This commitment is the single most important decision of the believer’s life, and is never tentative, partial and proportionate to the amount of rational evidence at hand for a particular conclusion. A ‘believer’s commitment to God is supposed to be total commitment, even when one does not have total proof that one’s belief in God is correct’. (ibid) A radical trust is called for, and this radical trust of faith, according to Kierkegaard, is the highest virtue one can reach. All arguments that reason derives as proofs of God are circular because we can only reason about the existence of an object that we already assume is in existence.

Kierkegaard’s philosophy is not in the form of a rational, systematic argument as what he presented was not a doctrine or ready-made truth. Instead, he wrote as an attempt to show the reader the truth about himself. Instead of coming across as a religious authority, he utilised textual devices, pseudonyms, situations and metaphors for the dramatisation of his ideas, demonstrating how these are apparent in everyday life. The reader is then left to choose between the different possibilities within the text. In this sense, the reader is made to assume
personal responsibility for the existential significance to be derived from Kierkegaard’s insights. Rather than add more knowledge, Kierkegaard aimed to tear away the false knowledge that he saw as having pervaded or poisoned society. Rather than seeking to make God and the Christian faith perfectly intelligible he emphasised God’s absolute transcendence of all human categories. Christian dogma, according to him, embodies paradoxes offensive to reason. The central paradox of Christianity is that of the eternal, infinite, transcendent God whose incarnation is a temporal, finite, human being (Jesus). When encountering this paradox one can choose to have faith or simply take offense, but one simply cannot believe by virtue of reason. This view hence directly counters the Hegelian claim that faith could have the status of objective certainty. For Kierkegaard, the quest for such certainty presents no more than a snare. Kierkegaard’s sought to invert the Hegelian dialectic that says that anyone with the capacity to follow the dialectical progression of the ‘transparent’ concepts of his logic would have access to the mind of God (which to Hegel is equivalent to the logical structure of the universe). (Carlisle, 2006:51) To Kierkegaard, scientific knowledge is the greatest impediment, rather than the means, to redemption.

Kierkegaard argued that in Christ one can realise complete freedom and selfhood. Christ, by His Incarnation, bridged time and eternity. Christ said He would manifest Himself to those who love Him, and the manifested Christ would transform the lover into the likeness of the thing that is beloved. (ibid, p.65) This fundamental truth does not have its basis anchored on human reason though we recognise its truth through our minds. For Kierkegaard, there is an immense burden of responsibility that lies with the individual chiefly because his existential choices determine the fate of his soul – either it lives forever or is damned. Anxiety or dread is the ‘presentiment of this terrible responsibility when the individual stands at the threshold of momentous existential choice’. (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kierkegaard/) It is a dreadful burden indeed that anxiety exerts upon us as we seek to choose for all eternity. However, there is at the same time exhilaration of freedom as one exercises his own choice. Through this temporal choice made by the individual at the very instant that time and eternity cross paths, the individual creates a self that will be judged for eternity. (ibid) However, for Kierkegaard, this choice of faith is not made just once. Rather, through constant avowals of faith, it has to be
renewed, and according to Kierkegaard in *The Sickness Unto Death*, one’s very selfhood depends on this repetition.

In sum, Kierkegaard’s fundamental concern lies with the individual who engages himself in a personal struggle for faith and personal meaning in life. He does not blindly advocate faith’s absurdity even though his interest is in the dynamics of Christian faith. For him, God is incomprehensible and non-rational, and what is of prime importance is not our conception of Him but the degree of passion with which we believe in Him. In speaking of God’s existence, Kierkegaard is referring to the paradox of the Incarnation, of God becoming Man in a temporal instant. This is to him an existential truth, with reference to a historical instance of existence as a temporal event. It is not a matter of demonstration but of faith and decisive significance. (Carlisle, 2006:139) According to Kierkegaard, God’s existence is grasped only by being wholly believed, and His existence is assured to us only when we abandon proof and take the leap of faith. Such questions as ‘Believe in what?’ go against the grain of religious feeling and are accordingly irrelevant when it comes to our choosing for eternity.

Chapter One in my discussion focuses on fideism and some of its proponents, the place of faith (as a non-rational belief in God’s existence) in religion and how it is contrasted with reason. It also considers whether it is possible for the faith believer to maintain that far from being deplorable that we have no objective grounds for theistic belief, this is precisely what makes the fideist’s inner decision to believe in God deeply meaningful to him. Chapter Two focuses on the Kierkegaardian view that genuine religious knowledge is grounded in faith beyond reason. Chapter Three is an exposition of faith in the eyes of Kierkegaard, with the discussion focusing on the place of faith, subjectivity and inwardness in his existentialist philosophy. References will be made to his works, including his Christian discourses. Chapter Four defends Kierkegaard’s radical fideism as a justification for belief in God. The idea of faith as non-rational belief that is contrary to the sum of evidence for that belief will be explored in the broad context of showing that belief in God is a matter of personal commitment and not really a matter of defending certain arguments. I conclude this thesis in Chapter Five by reaffirming that belief in God is a matter of faith and personal commitment, existing outside of the enterprise of
rationalisation. The overall point emphasised throughout this thesis would be that nobody comes to believe in God because of arguments. Religious faith is a matter of our feelings and passion more than our reason; it gives us hope, assurance, meaning or purpose in life and involves the whole person. The belief or non-belief in God is undoubtedly one of the most important concepts in our existence mainly because a belief in God’s existence offers some guarantee to the theist’s conception of the meaning of life. And when it comes down to a choice that must be made between despair and the God of the Bible, my argument is that a Kierkegaardian leap into the non-rational realm ought to be one’s choice. Kierkegaard’s works remind us of the important role intuition and risk play in religion. From these, subsequent new understanding of life and serious commitment follow. Even if no objective grounds exist to support our belief, Kierkegaard remains right in saying that this is exactly what makes the fideist’s inner decision to believe in God deeply meaningful to him.

For any theistic inquiry, subjecting all religious beliefs to rigorous philosophical examination will result in either ‘a modification of one’s views, the acceptance or rejection of theism, or deeper commitment’. (Peterson et al, 2003:12) It has been said that those philosophers who adopt an atheistic standpoint find it futile with arguing with believers. They are of the opinion that whatever arguments they put forward, believers will persist in believing just as before. For them, it is just that ‘the basic belief lies below the level of logical argument and touches an experience that is independent of subsequent interpretation’. (Thompson, 2007:67) A philosopher’s antecedent beliefs determine what grounds he will try to defend and how he will try to defend them. It is fitting therefore that at the outset I make a personal profession of faith. In the Judaeo-Christian faith, whose teachings centre on good intention, justice and the loving kindness of God, the topic of faith triggers many key questions that have no straightforward answers. And critical inquiry into matters like faith is often perceived as nurturing unhealthy skepticism. This thesis is intended as a plausible defense of radical faith as good and satisfactory justification for belief in God. Since success is a relative term, it seems to me that insofar as radical faith of the type that Kierkegaard adopts comes close enough to being a persuasive justification for belief, then it counts as a successful apologetic. There is no need to insist on its being impeccably foolproof, given the infinite disproportion between what as humans we can
think and say about God and what God really is. If someone’s philosophical integrity is considered questionable because of an affirmation of faith, then I feel no less questionable would be the integrity of those who wholly reject religious faith (whether this is explicitly stated or not). My view is that someone who considers theism unreasonable, irrational, or even delusional will refuse to accept any of its implications, and will accordingly deny its validity. This refusal amounts to a keenness to deny the theist’s basic beliefs any credibility in the first place.
Chapter One: Fideism and Believing Because I Want to Believe

Many religious people deem it a virtue to believe things ‘on faith’, citing the importance of taking a leap of faith instead of allowing oneself to over-rationalise things and getting mired in a plethora of confusing arguments. Non-religious people view this kind of attitude as suggesting that someone who believes things ‘on faith’ is unwilling to be open to rational discussion, to modify their views in the face of contrary evidence, or to offer any reason why anyone else should share those beliefs. (Hill, 2007:81) This chapter examines fideism, some of its proponents and the place of faith (as a non-rational belief in God’s existence) in religion. It discusses firstly the fideist’s reasons for saying that religious beliefs cannot be rationally evaluated and secondly (and more importantly), whether the faith believer can justifiably maintain that far from being deplorable that we have no objective grounds for theistic belief, this is precisely what makes the inner decision to believe in God a deeply meaningful one. A defense of radical fideism will be attempted only in Chapter Four. Besides defending the fideist view that religious doctrines must be accepted on the basis of faith and not rational justification, this chapter maintains that faith is not a form of irrational but non-rational belief formation. By non-rational, we mean that faith, as an expression of a type of assent and passion, has no bearing on the standards of reason. This is as opposed to ‘irrational’, which I take to mean being counter to the standards of reason.

Fideism as a philosophical term refers to a system of philosophy that denies the ability of human reason to reach certitude about God. It affirms through this denial that the act of human knowledge lies in an act of faith, with authority being the key criterion of certitude. (Peterson et al, 2003:45) Put another way, believing on faith means believing in defiance of rational guidelines. In Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher and many other religious thinkers, there are varying forms of the distinction between the God of faith from the God of metaphysics, the rejection of reason and the appeal to religious experience. Reason is commonly understood as the principles for a methodological inquiry, whether intellectual, moral, aesthetic, or religious. Religions like Christianity depend on some authoritative document that is seen as a product of Divine inspiration. The fideist says that one should simply have faith that God exists, with faith itself
being good reason to believe in God. Fideism certainly has a long tradition in Christianity, and in 1 Corinthians, what Paul says may be deemed an interpretation of fideism:

“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe . . . For the foolishness of God is wiser than (the wisdom of) men.’ (1 Corinthians 1:21, 25)

Fideism is one of the most influential arguments for a type of approach to knowledge and to the means by which we choose our direction in life. Fideism’s foundations in the distrust in human reason led to the logical consequence of skepticism, and in order to avert this conclusion, some philosophers have argued to the effect that Man must have faith, either maintaining the importance of faith over reason or advocating a clear and radical separation between reason and faith. In other words, they advocate that there must be a separation between science and philosophy on the one hand, and religion, on the other. From fideism, agnosticism, positivism, pragmatism and other modern forms of anti-intellectualism have arisen.

Fideists are in agreement that faith is, in part, an emotion or passion, and see it as guiding an entire way of life. Faith is personal, involving the inner person and calling for personal commitment. Involving our emotions more than our reason, it helps us become involved in a whole way of life. When the theist appeals to faith, he is saying that those beliefs that have not fulfilled the minimum requirements of knowledge do constitute knowledge. Although this is the only context in which the appeal to faith makes any sense, it would seem contradictory, even strange, to some that we should label as knowledge that which has not been rationally demonstrated, and all the more so when reason cannot accept as knowledge anything that does not fulfill its fundamental requirements. But the essence of faith is firstly that of considering an idea as having a referent in reality while rejecting the process by which reality comes to be known, and secondly, accepting the truth of an idea even though this idea is unable to meet the test of truth. The theist effectively renders the concept of faith inapplicable if he were to claim that the articles of faith can also meet the requirements of reason.
At the core of religious faith lies eternal significance. According to the New Testament, ‘Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.’ (Hebrews 11:1) Faith as a justification for religious belief, is accordingly non-rational and wish-driven, employed when supporting evidence is lacking. ‘Faith’ in a statement like ‘My belief that God (or the soul or immortality) exists is based on faith’ is an act of commitment – one is willing to bet his life on the truth of his belief. To have faith means to have trust or belief in God (or the gods of one’s religion) and to have the belief that one’s religious tenets are true. In this sense, faith is contrasted with reason because believers simply say that they have taken the leap of faith, and do not lean on reasons or intellectual arguments for demonstrating the truth of their beliefs. The leap is taken by the believer without any intellectual assurance that he is leaping in the right direction, but the risk is worth it as without God, one’s life is without hope and meaning. It is in this respect that the language of faith is a language of commitment and self-involvement, one in which a person expresses a new self-understanding that is in relation to the presence of the Divine. Since a person finds true fulfilment through faith, faith is perceived by some to be a higher virtue than reason. Kierkegaard certainly saw it as such.

So far I have said that in philosophy, conviction is recommended only when there is sufficient reason, whereas in religion there is a reliance on faith. The Incarnation, for example, either fulfills the requirements of knowledge or it does not. It is either evidence-based, internally consistent as a belief, and capable of being integrated with one’s previous knowledge, or it is not. The belief in the Incarnation should be accepted as true if it can fulfill these standards, in which case it then becomes a proposition of reason and cannot be accepted on faith. Conversely, if the belief in the Incarnation fails to meet the requirements of reason, then even if it is accepted on faith, it cannot be deemed rational. Given that faith entails belief in the absence of rational demonstration, all propositions of faith are non-rational, no matter what their specific content is. This mode of belief was argued for by Kierkegaard. Radical fideism of the Kierkegaardian variety is widely embraced at present among Protestant theologians. William James, in ‘The Will to Believe’ (1896) argued that Man has a psychological need for commitment and belief despite the lack of evidence, but religious fideists prefer instead Kierkegaard’s radical fideism, seeing James’ account of faith as being too mild.
Apologetics as a discipline is a defense of two kinds of assertions, and therefore two distinct methods are required. The philosophical apologetic defends the assertions of theism against atheism and other non-theisms. The theological apologetic defends the assertions of evangelical Christian theism against Islam, Judaism, and non-evangelical Christian theism. Philosophical apologetics does not presume the existence of a theistic God, and its aim is to verify or falsify God’s existence. In theological apologetics there is the presumption that God exists. Here, the paradoxical nature of the God revealed in Jesus is proof that it was not of human invention but of Divine revelation. The Christian apologist, in a way that accounts for faith and reason, seeks to advance a reasonable defense of Christianity’s truth claims. For many apologists, a key question is how one could persuade non-Christians to believe in God. Classical and evidentialist apologists generally favour deductive and inductive proofs for God’s existence, while reformed apologists and fideists tend to reject such proofs. However, in place of these proofs the latter two use indirect arguments for God’s existence.

Reformed apologists argue that belief in God, like the principles of logic, is properly basic and the presupposition of God’s existence is necessary for making sense of the world. Fideists, in contrast, argue that God can only be known through an existential or personal encounter in Jesus Christ. For the fideist, finite Man cannot come to know God with his unaided reason. Belief and unbelief are intellectually equal, and it is pointless to seek certainty or even a guide that affords us no more than mere reasonable probabilities. Faith and reason are simply two completely different spheres of thought representing antithetical philosophies. A true fideist revels in the absence of proof and for a sincere religious believer, the most primary assumptions are contained in the religious belief-system itself. Since religious faith itself is the foundation of one’s life, one’s ‘ultimate concern’, in the words of contemporary theologian Paul Tillich, the fideist argues that testing one’s faith by an external, rational measure is reflective of an absence of true faith. Hence it is sometimes said that ‘if we test God’s word by logic or science, we are really worshipping science or logic rather than God’. (Peterson et al, 2003:45)

Rationalisation as a psychological defense mechanism involves our justifying some belief or action after the adoption of that belief or action. Thus we can state the problem of faith as
follows: insofar as faith is possible, it is non-rational, and insofar as faith is rational, it is impossible. This central dilemma is a consequence of the fact that reason and faith cannot both be deemed as grounds for belief. The Christian cannot maintain faith's rationality, because once a belief is rationally demonstrated, it is no longer an article of faith. A rational person is one who accepts or rejects a belief because it is either supported or not supported by reason respectively. He only believes to the degree that evidence and support allow, and doubts a belief when the support turns out to be less reliable than previously thought. Once a person realises that a belief is clearly supported by the facts, there is no further step or 'choice' required for a person to have that belief. On the other hand, a very drastic epistemological step is taken when someone claims that he bases his belief in God on faith. Does this person not violate norms of rational belief formation? Is faith not therefore a form of irrational belief formation? Does the fideist not exemplify irrationality when he separates belief from the providing of reason?

If rationality in a belief entails that one must have reasons for the belief, then faith by definition, would seem not rational. In that case, might fideism be recommending that one not be rational? We consider first an example of a belief which is rational but for which one has no reasons. Suppose you are staring at the sunset, and you say, 'I believe the sun will set in the west again tomorrow'. I ask, 'What are your reasons for believing that?' You reply, 'Well, I just think so.' In demanding to know what reasons you have for thinking that the sun would set in the west tomorrow, you reply, 'Reasons for thinking the sun will set in the west tomorrow? I have no reasons. I simply see it happening every day!' Suppose I say, in response, 'That's irrational.' Hume would probably say that the 'reason' for the belief that the sun will rise in the east and set in the west tomorrow is the inductive argument that the sun has risen every morning in the past without exception. If someone were to say that it is a logical impossibility that it will not rise, Hume's response is that the 'reasonable' person will prefer the claim for which there is overwhelming evidence over the claim for which there is no evidence at all, even if it is not completely conclusive. But surely one can believe, without reasons, that the sun would set in the west tomorrow and be totally rational in this belief. It is possible, in some cases (an example being the belief in God) to be entirely rational in holding a belief even if one does not have reasons for that belief. More will be said on this in due course.
We now consider some theories of faith. The faith theory of Thomas Aquinas exemplifies the traditional understanding of faith. Aquinas did not see faith as opposed to reason, but rather as being guided by reason in some ways. (Martin, 1991:22) For him, religious truths may be grouped under those of reason and those of faith. The truths of reason include the proposition that there exists an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God. Reason, however, cannot help us know certain Christian doctrines such as there are three persons in one God. Aquinas maintained nevertheless that such truths can be known since they are revealed by God to human beings through the Bible or the Church. On Aquinas’s argument, even though a truth of faith, $p$, cannot be rationally demonstrated, the proposition $q$ (that God has revealed $p$) can nevertheless be believed on rational grounds. Three kinds of arguments are employed to show that $q$ is true: we see the ‘fulfilment of scriptural prophesies, the flourishing of the Christian church has without any promise of say, carnal pleasure in an afterlife or without any resort to violence in this life; and the occurrence of miracles within the Christian tradition’. (ibid) This theory of faith assumes God’s existence, for otherwise to suppose that God revealed truths through the Bible or through the Church would make no sense at all. Therefore, the basis of belief in God is not faith, but a precondition of faith in such Christian doctrines such as there are three persons in one God. According to Aquinas, a Christian who believes, for example, in the virgin birth, has very good reason for supposing his belief is true. Because Aquinas’s view of faith involves its being guided by reason, his theory has clear advantages over some recent ones.

There are, however, perceived problems with Aquinas’ theory of faith. When he justifies his belief in the rationality of Christian revelation by appealing to the success of the Christian Church, he ‘faces the problem that many different churches or similar institutions outside the Christian tradition have been successful in the way he specifies’. (ibid) As Martin (1991) says:

‘If this sort of success demonstrates that God revealed truths in the religious traditions dominated by these different churches or their equivalents, then conflicting truths were revealed, but conflicting propositions cannot both be true’. (ibid)
Another problem with Aquinas’ theory has to do with the view that the truths of faith are certain and can be indubitably believed. We cannot know with total certainty all historical events that supposedly provide the evidence for God’s revelation, and indeed there is inadequate evidence for some of Christianity’s historical assumptions. It is difficult to claim certainty for revelations that are based on historical events that we cannot know with certainty. Consequently, for us to accord such a high level of belief seems irrational in the light of historical evidence. (ibid)

We can also approach religious faith from the vantage point of the philosophy of language. (ibid, p.25) On this view, religious faith is understood in terms of the function of religious language. Wittgensteinian fideism has stemmed from the perspectives of Ludwig Wittgenstein, facilitated by his followers such as Norman Malcolm, DZ Phillips, and Peter Winch. On his theory, religious discourse has its own rules and logic and is embedded in a form of life. Given that we can understand and evaluate this discourse only on its own terms, it seems inappropriate to impose standards on such discourse from the perspective of science, for example. (ibid) Since religious discourse is a separate, unique language game different from that of science, religious statements, being empirically untestable, are unlike scientific ones. For us to demand that religious statements be empirically testable is to gravely misunderstand the kind of discourse that it is. Hence in the language game of religion, religious discourse is rational and intelligible when we judge it on its own terms. Because a term’s meaning can vary from one language game to another, for us to understand religious language we have to view it from within the religious language game itself. The task of the philosopher hence involves describing rather than criticising a form of life or its language and where necessary, he should eliminate philosophical doubt over how the language operates. The philosopher of religion, in particular, has to describe the use of religious discourse and remove any perplexity that originates from it. (ibid)

There appears to be problems with Wittgenstein’s theory of faith. Firstly, there seems no fundamental basis for our distinguishing one form of life from another or one language game from another. One can also ask whether in religion, there are one or many religious language
games or forms of life. For certain, Buddhism and Christianity are vastly different, and this alone
might compel the Wittgensteinian fideist to say that these constitute different forms of life
involving different language games. If so, then he would likewise have to concede that the
practices of different Christian denominations differ in fundamental ways. And since for the
Wittgensteinian fideist, the same terms in different language games have different meanings, we
have an absurd consequence where members of one Baptist sect and members of another would
not even be able to understand each other. (ibid, p.26) As Martin (1991) points out, there seems
no ground for our believing that the meaning of language is so radically contextual as to render it
impossible for us to communicate across practices or ways of life, for otherwise it would
certainly be inconceivable that there could be any debate between Christians and non-Christians,
and between followers of different Christian denominations. Hence the Wittgensteinian theory of
faith leads us to the conclusion that perhaps there is really no disagreement between the
deating parties — they are simply on different tracks talking past one another. Such a view is
highly unlikely at best, impossible at worst. (ibid, p.27)

In contrast to Aquinas or Wittgenstein, some religious thinkers have maintained that
faith requires no rational guidance. Kierkegaard argued that there is great merit in Christian belief
that not only goes beyond the evidence but even against it. Kierkegaard adhered to the position
that people with this faith totally disregard any doubts they may have. Maintaining that religious
faith is of far greater importance than reason in the achieving of human happiness, he interpreted
religious faith as a total and passionate commitment to God. Whereas Aquinas believes that the
Truth (namely that an eternal happiness is available) can be known, for Kierkegaard it is only in
faith that this Truth is ‘known’. For Kierkegaard, indeed, what makes it true and how it can be
true at all, is completely beyond all human grasp — it defies understanding and runs counter to all
possible understanding: from the perspective of reason it is absurd. (Hannay, 2003:144) In spirit
Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard are clearly similar, sharing a suspicion of using the intellect to
devise solutions to problems of the spirit, and the view of traditional philosophical justifications of
religious belief as irrelevant or misleading. Gouwens (1996) writes:
‘In place of philosophy or theology providing general structures of meaning (in the style of Bultmann or Tillich), or philosophy providing foundational accounts of religious or Christian belief, whether metaphysical, historical, rational or experiential (in the tradition of philosophy of religion), both thinkers recognised the limits of philosophy with regard to ethics and religious belief. Yet both also saw philosophy as having another role to play in clarifying the logic of concepts, in particular locating the point and sense of religious concepts, not in a philosophical justification, but in the practices and concerns of religious belief and faith. Philosophy, in other words, has an instrumental value; it does not ‘deliver meanings’, but assists a person to clarity of thought.’ (p.17)

Instead of basing Christian doctrines on faith, one could argue that they are basic beliefs, or beliefs that form the foundation of other beliefs. (Martin 1991:27) Foundationalism was once widely accepted as a view in epistemology, and although it has since undergone modifications, it still has many advocates. Such an approach to Christian doctrine has its genesis in a critique of the foundational approach to epistemology. Foundationalism asserts that not all our beliefs can be justified in terms of other beliefs without the justification process leading to an infinite regress or vicious circularity. Put another way, there must be some beliefs that do not need to be justified by other beliefs. As these beliefs constitute the foundation of all knowledge, they are ‘basic’, with the statements expressing them being ‘basic statements’. (ibid, p.28) Evidentialism is based on the tenability of Foundationalism. Evidentialism poses facts and events as a test for the truth of theism. It implies that it is not justifiable to have full religious belief unless there is conclusive evidence for it. William Paley, Joseph Butler, CH Dodd, John Hick, and JW Montgomery are evidentialists. If the known arguments for God’s existence (including arguments from religious experience) are merely probable, then no one would be justified in having full belief that there is a God, says the evidentialist. The same holds for other religious beliefs, including the doctrine of the Incarnation. Hence it would be unjustifiable for one to believe with full confidence unless there is sufficient evidence. This evidence may be in the form of a deductive argument that seeks to decisively prove Divine existence (such as the Ontological argument), an inductive one that leads to a probable conclusion concerning Divine existence (such as arguments from history), an
attempt to employ pure reason to build a case starting from a basic first premise, or through rational empiricism in building its case upon non-basic beliefs.

Evidentialism and fideism both regard Jesus Christ as the authority and Scripture as the story of Christ. The evidentialist sees the story of Christ as factually verifiable whereas the fideist sees it as self-attesting. The difference between them thus parallels that between classical and reformed apologetics, with a common criticism lobbied against evidentialist arguments for God being that they merely conclude that God probably exists. Evidentialism is contentious for two reasons. Firstly, it maintains that it would be wrong for a person to accept Christianity, or any form of theism, unless it is rational for him to do so. Secondly, it is not rational for a person to do so unless he holds his religious convictions based on other beliefs that offer sufficient evidential support to those convictions. Put simply, no religion is acceptable unless rational, and no religion is rational unless backed by evidence. Evidentialism implicitly assumes the tenability of Classical Foundationalism, on which it is primarily based. The foundationalist holds the view that the possibility of knowledge rests ultimately on a set of beliefs, which on their own do not need justification in terms of further beliefs - such foundational beliefs may be *a priori* or *a posteriori*. (King, 2004:186)

There are two traditional theistic responses to the challenge posed by evidentialism. One approach grants that the evidentialist challenge could be or has already been met. Hence for the theist to deem religious beliefs rational, he must demonstrate that the Christianity’s central claims are either self-evident, evident to the senses or directly or indirectly derivable from the evident beliefs. Descartes said that the belief in God is rational because it is self-evident, or could be made so through careful meditation on the concept of God. For Aquinas, the belief in God is rational as the existence of God follows deductively from propositions that are evident to the senses, such as ‘some things move’. Some foundationalists have included in the class of statements that are evident to the senses those involving observed physical objects like ‘There is a blue bird in the tree’. (Martin 1991:28) In modern times it is ‘now more common to limit statements that are evident to the senses to ones about the author’s immediate sense impressions, for example, ‘I seem to see a blue bird in the tree’, or ‘I am being appeared to
bluely’, or ‘Here now blue sense datum’. (ibid) Another type of response to evidentialism is offered by philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, of the Calvinist tradition, who argue that religious belief does not have to meet the evidentialist criteria in order to be deemed rational. These philosophers dismiss the evidential challenge as invalid by rejecting Classical Foundationalism on the grounds that it is self-refuting.

Modern philosophers who accept Foundationalism often dispute over which beliefs are properly basic and hence need no further justification. Beliefs based on perception might be properly basic in that if I see someone talking to me, I can believe that there is someone talking to me – there is no need for me to question this belief. Mathematical beliefs are also properly basic since if we understand what 4+4=8 means, then we believe it to be obviously true. (ibid) Classical Foundationalism as a theory of rationality says that if anyone is to believe anything rationally, he has to satisfy the demands of Classical Foundationalism. The other type of belief many modern philosophers distinguish from basic beliefs would be those that are based upon other beliefs. For example, my belief that Paris is in France is neither basic nor self-evident, but based upon the belief that the atlas is reliable, and ‘these beliefs are themselves based upon others, until we go back to the fundamental beliefs that are so obvious that further justification is unnecessary’. (Hill, 2007:92)

Thinkers such as Plantinga argue that some fundamental beliefs are held without being based on evidence or experience, with examples being the experience of other minds or the reality of the external world, which we simply know to be true. Hence there may be some religious beliefs that form an unquestioned basis for our thinking, and are based on faith and not evidence. Plantinga argues that traditional arguments for the existence of God are not needed for rational belief, maintaining that belief in God should be considered a basic belief that requires no further justification beyond itself. Although Plantinga does not hold that all the fundamental Christian doctrines are basic beliefs, this idea would certainly be in keeping with his general approach. (Martin, 1991:28) Plantinga, in Warranted Christian Belief (2000) argues that Christian faith is not irrational. On Christian faith, Plantinga grants that there are two kinds of objections, the first he dubs as de facto claims: claims that Christianity has no truth. (Hill, 2007:89) For
example, someone can cite evil’s existence as attributable to the fact that there is no all-powerful, all-loving God. The second kind of objection Plantinga terms the *de jure* objection. This objection does not focus on the truth and falsity of any beliefs at all. Instead, those who use such objections insist that ‘irrespective of whether Christianity is true or false, it is irrational to believe it’. (ibid) For example, if one were to say that we cannot really tell whether or not God exists, then one is irrational to have faith that He does.

Through examining the nature of knowledge, Plantinga seeks to undermine the *de jure* objections. For Plato, knowledge is a kind of belief. Beliefs can be false (one can believe that something is the case when it is not), but knowledge cannot be false (if what one thinks he knows turns out to be untrue, it means he was mistaken and never really had knowledge, just a false belief). In this sense knowledge is a kind of true belief. As Hill (2007) says, a sports fan may passionately believe that his team will emerge as victors in a game. When victory comes, ‘he was merely lucky that he was right, for he could just as likely have had exactly the same belief, only to see them lose…(h)ence something more to knowledge exists than just true belief’. (p.90)

Plantinga’s reply to this is that the difference between true belief and knowledge is ‘warrant’. For him, a warranted true belief is knowledge. Plantinga argues that a warranted belief is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly whose purpose is to yield true belief. (ibid) The memory is an example of such cognitive faculty. As I remember what I had for lunch I have knowledge of it. This is not simply belief, and it is (presumably) working properly right now. Given this, Plantinga thinks that faith in the Christian God can be warranted, simply because Christianity teaches that God exists and also that God has revealed Himself to human beings through the Holy Spirit who enlightens the believers’ minds. (ibid) Belief in God is warranted if this is actually true, because the Holy Spirit’s presence is a sort of faculty, like memory, that yields true beliefs. (ibid, p.91) Plantinga says further that if beliefs that come from memory are warranted, then beliefs that come from the Holy Spirit are likewise warranted. Such beliefs, in fact, are knowledge. What this suggests is that those who believe in God through the power of the Holy Spirit actually know that God exists and do not simply believe that to be so. And if, in fact, God does not exist, then Plantinga accepts that belief in God is not warranted. But, as Hill
(2007) points out, whether belief in God is warranted is contingent on whether God actually exists. If He does exist, we have warranted belief in God, and if he does not, belief in God is not warranted. To Plantinga (2000) this is an important conclusion:

‘Atheologists who wish to attack theistic belief will have to restrict themselves to objections like the argument from evil, the claim that theism is incoherent, or the idea that in some other way there is strong evidence against theistic belief. They can’t any longer adopt the following stance: ‘Well, I certainly don’t know whether theistic belief is true – who could know a thing like that? But I do know this: it is irrational, or unjustified, or not rationally justified, or contrary to reason or intellectually irresponsible or …’ There isn’t a sensible de jure question or criticism that is independent of the de facto question.’ (Hill, 2007:91)

Hence on Plantinga’s view, to believe in God is perfectly rational if He actually exists, and only irrational if in fact He does not. For theists to be accused of irrationality, very good reasons must first be offered to show that God does not exist, and Plantinga does not think that it is possible to show either that God exists or He does not, though he opines that arguments for God’s existence are more persuasive than those against. (ibid) Hence it seems likely that the faith of theists is indeed warranted and constitutes knowledge. Plantinga argues that Christians actually know that God exists, based on their conviction through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They ‘do not need to have it proven to them any more than we need to have it proven that we are really seeing what we think we are seeing with our eyes’. (ibid)

If we grant that Plantinga is right, then belief in God is properly basic and believers can simply believe it without the need to offer further arguments. Plantinga is quick to point out that this is not a kind of blind faith where we can believe what we like in the absence of proof. He acknowledges that blind faith is a leap in the dark, since it is ‘what happens when you choose to believe something (or act as though you believe it) when it is not at all clear to you that it is not true’. (ibid) Plantinga has us imagine a desperate mountaineer caught in fog who attempts to leap
a chasm without any knowledge of its dimensions. In a moment of confidence he believes that he will jump it safely, but there is no justification or warrant for this belief. (ibid, p.93) Plantinga draws this conclusion:

‘The case of faith...is very different. For the person with faith (at least in the paradigmatic instances), the great things of the gospel seem clearly true, obvious, compelling...Phenomenologically, therefore, from the inside there is no similarity at all to a leap in the dark...This is no leap in the dark, not merely because the person with faith is wholly convinced but also because, as a matter of fact, the belief in question meets the conditions for rationality and warrant.’

(Hill, 2007:93)

There are problems with Plantinga’s defense of the thesis that belief in God is basic. Firstly, for us to consider the belief in God as a basic belief seems to go against the spirit and intention of foundationalism (Martin, 1991:30) Foundationalism aims to provide critical tools for objectively assessing knowledge claims and to give knowledge a non-relativistic basis. Plantinga’s foundationalism is, paradoxically, radically relativistic and casts any belief beyond rational appraisal once it is declared basic. Secondly, there is something misleading about Plantinga’s claim that his proposal would not allow any belief to become a basic belief from the perspective of reformed epistemologists. However, we note that it would seem to consider any belief basic from the point of view of some community. (ibid) Martin (1991) offers this example:

‘Although reformed epistemologists would not have to accept voodoo beliefs as rational, voodoo followers would be able to claim that insofar as they are basic in the voodoo community, they are rational, and moreover, that Reformed thought was irrational in this community.’ (p.30)

Thirdly, on this view one notes how easy it is for any belief to be rational. If a group has a cherished belief that is held without reason, this belief could be deemed properly basic by the group’s members, rendering it impossible to critically evaluate any beliefs so considered. The
community’s members might well also end up uncritically and recklessly embracing its most cherished beliefs (and the conditions that correctly triggered such beliefs) as basic beliefs and justifying conditions. (ibid) Fourthly, Plantinga assumes the Christian community is in agreement about what beliefs are basic and what justifying conditions there are. However, we know this is not the case as some Christians’ belief in God is based either on traditional arguments or religious experiences; hence their belief in God is not basic. Besides, more significantly, there is no agreement on whether certain doctrinal beliefs are true, let alone, basic. Such examples include those ‘concerning the Pope’s authority, the composition of the Trinity, the nature of Christ, or the means of salvation’. (ibid, p.31)

Plantinga’s account of Christian faith is termed ‘reformed epistemology’. Epistemology is the philosophical enquiry into the nature of knowledge and belief, and what we can properly claim to know. (Hill, 2007:94) On reformed epistemology, we can say that faith is only in part about belief. Plantinga thinks that faith steps in when we cannot help believing what we believe, and faith is therefore rational since it is rational to believe what we cannot help believing. William Alston is another key advocate of this movement. Philosophers like Alston opine that belief in God is a basic belief, and faith can be rational even though not supported by reasons. Alston says that some people have certain religious experiences in which they can perceive God’s presence, and one does not need reasons to believe that one is experiencing God’s existence when he feels His presence. Suppose one thinks he can come into a kind of immediate contact with God, (that is, he thinks he feels God’s presence), then this individual does require reasons to believe that he feels God’s presence. This belief that one does indeed feel God’s presence is, according to Alston, a rational one.

While I share the view of Plantinga and Alston that belief in God does not require support from arguments in order for it to be rational, our divergence in view would be that the concept of religious faith, even if it is not irrational given its transcending the enterprise of reason-giving, is simply non-rational. Blind faith, for example, that a robber will return to me what he has willfully taken from me, is irrational. But while I say I want to be rational when it comes to my career, my family, and so on, the standard must differ where it pertains to the sphere of one’s
religious life, one's devotion to God and one's salvation. The critic might say that the religious believer is allowing himself to be irrational in religious matters, or even allowing himself to deny the importance of rationality. But normally people do care about the rationality of their beliefs. What I maintain is instead that when it comes to religion, embracing one's belief in the absence of reasons does not make that belief irrational. In fact, I would go a step further and suggest that insofar as faith is more a matter of passion than cognition, perhaps rationality does not enter the picture at all.

Hill (2007) argues along the same lines by having us consider the parallel analogy in marriage. He says that when we have 'faith' in a spouse, this trust and emotional dependence is different from belief in facts about them even though it may be based, in some way, upon such beliefs as he or she being sincere when pledging love to us. We do have a kind of control over this type of faith and trust. To trust someone wholeheartedly, is in a way to make a choice. Hill has us further see that doing so is equivalent to an act rather than a belief, and opines that we need not bring to bear the issue of rationality, saying that only cynics would argue that it is always irrational to get married, perhaps because no one can be trusted:

'We don't decide to put our faith in someone in such a way on the basis of arguments or evidence – but that doesn't make this trust irrational, because it would be pretty bizarre to behave like that. Of course, someone may place his trust in an irrational way. We can imagine someone becoming infatuated with a highly unsuitable partner and rushing into an unwise wedding. This suggests that in matters of love, it's possible to be irrational, but the whole business clearly goes beyond rationality, because there is more to it than just the strictly cognitive aspect.' (p.94)

The believer can say that even if religious faith were irrational, it does not follow that all religious faith is irrational. On matters of religion, there is nothing intrinsically irrational with the believer placing his trust in a God who seems to exist and to care, even when this has no proof. (ibid) Hence, the theist, however he characterises his version of faith, cannot avoid its non-
rational slant. Paul Tillich spoke of religion as an encounter with the eternal and the absolute dimension of life before which all else pales in significance. This is because here our focus is on choosing our commitments, our hopes, and our direction in life, not on abstract and theoretical questions. The fundamental truths of Christianity cannot be established by empirical investigation or argued from first principles. They are not \textit{a priori} true. Such assertions as God exists or that Jesus rose from the dead simply have to be accepted through a mental and emotional leap that transcends what reason on its own can establish.

Religious faith is thus a complex subject matter, and the dimension of its rationality (or otherwise) is but one of its less distinctive dimensions. For some Christians, faith is simply about adopting a certain attitude and embracing certain values and it accordingly affects the way we live. Hence it need not really involve belief at all. To add, religion and faith give the believer meaning or assurance in life. Some view faith as a gift of God that is supernatural in character. For the religious person, his leap of faith is far from trivial or frivolous, but the necessary first step to bridging the gulf between the finite and infinite, Man and God. Given the eternal significance of such a leap, which comes about not from haphazardness, it seems counter-intuitive to suggest that it is an irrational move on the religious believer’s part. Hence the importance of distinguishing between irrationality and non-rationality earlier, the former of which suggests delusion on the believer’s part; his being foolish, unthinking, and possibly even delusional. For the religious believer, his leap of faith, even though it falls outside of the whole enterprise of providing justification, is for him, passionately weighted and real, calling for an act of will, commitment and preparedness. Therefore, given that religious belief is an expression of a certain passion, and is not a matter of cognition, it is open to the theist to say that perhaps faith is at best a non-rational entity and not a matter of rationality at all.

We close this chapter with a summary of claims made so far. The relationship between Man and God, the finite and the infinite, continues to be as important to us today as it has been through the ages. For Christian believers, there is a far reaching and life-altering quality in the statement, ‘There is a God, who has a Son, and the Bible is His Word’. Someone who claims, ‘My belief that God exists is founded on faith’, is saying something distinctive about the manner by
which he is ready to defend his belief. If by faith one holds the belief that God exists, then he is not claiming to have any other beliefs that render it more probably true that God exists. Philosophers who accord faith with greater importance than they do to reason usually concede that we cannot meet the challenge posed by evidentialism. These philosophers, in granting that there is insufficient evidence for religious beliefs, cite faith as the proper attitude where it concerns a belief in God. Reason requires the objectivity and detachment seemingly useful in science, but which, for believers, is unsuited to the passionate involvement needed for attaining salvation. Some might even say that the intellectual objectivity found in philosophical argument amounts to a form of intellectual arrogance. Faith, believers argue, requires passion, rebirth and submission. This is ardently advocated by Kierkegaard, as we shall see in the next two chapters.
Chapter Two: Kierkegaard as Thinker

In Chapter One, we saw that fideism regards reason as incapable of helping the individual achieve knowledge of things divine. Since believing is not a reasonable act, and what is believed can neither be established nor disestablished by what is known, fideists advocate acts of faith, saying that one ought to believe that God exists, but that belief must not be based on any other beliefs. Most fideists view faith as being in part an emotion or passion. A more radical departure from past attitudes towards reason was made by Kierkegaard, who believed that faith must involve deliberately going beyond reason, and faith, at its core, is based on sincerity as its basis of believing. (Hill, 2007:88) Kierkegaard’s radical fideism involves a separation of faith and reason, with faith being viewed as a purely personal and subjective attitude. This chapter is devoted to a very brief exposition of some of this complex thinker’s key strands of thought. A detailed consideration of the central tenets of his philosophy is reserved for Chapter Three.

Kierkegaard can be deemed a counter-Enlightenment writer who wrote at a very important time in the history of philosophy. Enlightenment thinkers emphasised the use of reason for achieving a better understanding of life. He wrote as a reaction to what he perceived as problems generated by the Enlightenment movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which sought a combination of the concepts of God, nature, knowledge, and Man into one cohesive worldview. (O’Hara, 2004:9) Kierkegaard’s prime concern was about what it means to be alive, with the subject being the individual and his existence. In his view, while this purely subjective entity is the genesis of all reason, logic, philosophical systems, theology or even psychology, it is outside their reach. Through his writings, among them being Fear and Trembling (1843), Either/Or (1843) Philosophical Fragments (1844), Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1846) and Training in Christianity (1850), Kierkegaard advanced a highly original and eccentric critique and reaffirmation of Christian faith. Not keen to convince his readers simply on an intellectual level, he made the central focus of his work that of addressing the problem of how to be a Christian in Christendom. (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:169) Christendom, on his terms, was largely a contradiction of the gospel.
Kierkegaard’s Christian convictions guided his philosophical concerns. To him, religious experience is about personal commitment and value, and this experience is personally challenging, demanding serious choice and taking a risk with the person one desires to become. (Thompson, 2007:15) He aimed his philosophy at leading his readers to Christianity and guiding them towards an acute awareness of the poverty of a life without faith. Any attempt to label him as irrationalist \textit{par excellence} would not be fair, because he definitely had a meticulously thought out theory of the role of logic with regard to philosophy and theology. Although Kierkegaard was greatly influenced by Hegelian philosophy, a major part of his own work sought to overthrow this philosophy. His criticism of Hegel’s philosophy was that through the introduction of movement into logic, Hegel seemed to muddle good and evil, God and Man, time and eternity. Kierkegaard’s emphasis ‘on the Cross, sin, despair, and the Christ’s humanity, makes him similar to Luther in fearlessly following truth as it leads him’. (McEnHill & Newlands, 2004:172)

Kierkegaard’s works presented solutions and approaches to the problem of how to be a Christian, and his later works made this topic a focal point. (O’Hara, 2004:15) Employing a unique writing style, he challenged his readers to spend time thinking for themselves and their future. Kierkegaard used ‘indirect discourse’ to describe his own method of writing. Many of his philosophical and theological works were pseudonymously written, and he certainly published his popular works through the use of a variety of pseudonyms as well as his own name. As Taylor (1975) notes, Kierkegaard ‘deliberately withdraws behind the pseudonymous authors he creates’.

(p.29) There is uniqueness in this sustained and clever dialectical use of pseudonyms on his part. Like Plato who wrote dialogues without ever addressing his readers directly, Kierkegaard in his dialectic adopted a variety of narrative viewpoints, and through the use of pseudonyms, each name writes from a particular point of view. His indirect method of composition sees him employing philosophical viewpoints \textit{within a work} (characters in a dialogue) and expanding them to include portions of works, or full works. It is therefore perfectly conceivable how a superficial reading of Kierkegaard can lead to mistaken interpretations (and conclusions) of all kinds.

It is noteworthy that Kierkegaard modelled his indirect approach on Socrates and God, both artful communicators. Using irony and by professing his ignorance, Socrates lured individuals
into personal reflection. It is in this respect that Climacus notes that Socrates’ ugly appearance was an asset to his work as a teacher of ethics. This appearance helped 'to place the learner at a distance so that he would not be caught in a direct relation to the teacher'. (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.247-249) And it is precisely Socrates’ repulsive appearance that promoted the inwardness of the learner. (Sands, 2004:28). God as an indirect communicator is not directly present, and cannot be seen or heard. 'Is not God like an illusive author', Climacus asks, 'who nowhere sets forth his result in block letters or provides it beforehand in a preface?'(Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.243-244) As Sands (2004) says, 'By communicating indirectly, God lures individuals into an inner, volitional response to the truth…. (H)e wants to lead individuals out of untruth by helping them to become true. God can accomplish this only by breaking the direct relation so as to promote the actual breakthrough of inwardness, the act of self-activity.' (p.28) Hence it would appear that Climacus (and his other pseudonyms) are created by Kierkegaard to emulate the divine and Socratic examples.

In Kierkegaardian corpus, a particular pseudonym may be the author of several works, writing from a consistent and defensible position. His method of communication has perplexed many a reader, who has to ascertain if a particular ‘author’ is either speaking with Kierkegaard’s own voice, articulating a particular viewpoint or exposing the fallacy in an argument. Each Kierkegaardian pseudonym identifies the work thematically, and besides placing it in a dialectical scheme, anchors the work in a literary and philosophical framework. The pseudonym ‘Vigilius Haufniensis’ speaks on the psychological aspects of sin and anxiety. ‘Johannes Climacus’ addresses the dilemma of faith versus doubt. ‘Johannes de Silentio’ and ‘Constantin Constantius’ discuss the ethical sphere in poetic relation to Kierkegaard’s own relationship with Regine Olsen. ‘Anti-Climacus’ stands for idealized Christianity, and so on.

In Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1846), Kierkegaard said of Either/Or, 'The absence of an author is a means of distancing' (p.252). He added:

‘My pseudonymity or polyonymity has not had an accidental basis in my person...but an essential basis in the production itself, which, for the sake of the lines and of the psychologically varied differences of the individualities, poetically
required an indiscriminateness with regard to good and evil, brokenheartedness and gaiety, despair and overconfidence, suffering and elation, etc.... What has been written, then, is mine, but only insofar as I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the creating, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet, who poetises characters and yet in the preface is himself the author. That is, I am impersonally or personally in the third person as a souffleur [prompter] who has poetically produced the authors, whose prefaces in turn are their productions, as their names are also. Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to have that to a doubly reflected communication.... My role is the joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the author or the authors. ...but on the other hand I am very literally and directly the author of, for example, the upbuilding discourses and of every word in them.' (p.625)

Summarily then, Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous writing can be understood as an attempt to create distance from him as author. He wanted his works read independently of considerations of his own personality. The pseudonyms also served to remove his readers’ philosophical presuppositions, especially those who already embraced Hegelian philosophy. In addressing this group, Kierkegaard felt that the indirect approach was the best method. Also, Kierkegaard noted that the apostle speaks with authority, doing so directly and under inspiration. He was acutely aware that despite the genius he knew he was, he did not possess such apostolic authority. This stopped him from speaking directly until much later. When he wanted to present what ideal Christianity should be, he used a special pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, listing himself as editor. There is also the view that the pseudonyms were designed to orientate the work in a philosophical framework.

Kierkegaard’s unconventional style of writing, evident in his works that can often reflect lyrical beauty, is definitely as much poetic narrative as it is philosophy. As Evans (2006) says,
Kierkegaard was ‘adept at employing masks for the purposes of self-concealment and self-revelation, but …also maintained that the poet deals not with personal experience as such, but with the ‘possibilities’ and ‘idealities’ that experience generates’. (p.4) While Kierkegaard’s indirect method of communication is compelling because it lasted beyond a decade of his authorship, it can bewilder and baffle even those who comprehend his scheme. However, Kierkegaard himself took great delight in seeing this bafflement of the general public, and although Kierkegaard wrote that he has no relation to the pseudonymous works, this is not, strictly speaking, true. For sure, there was a deep and personal investment in and devotion of himself to his works.

Fear and Trembling dealt with the concept of faith and the issue is explored through the story of Abraham and Isaac. Kierkegaard argued here that given the paradoxical nature of religion, there are moments when conflict erupts between religion and the ethical demands of society. (O’Hara, 2004:19) Kierkegaard considered Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God’s command as exemplifying the true nature of religious existence. God’s demand that Abraham sacrifices his son constitutes a flagrant defiance of all logic, and is plainly baffling on the ethical sphere. Abraham’s faith and trust in God is commendable even though his actions cannot be rationally explained. Insofar as he is beyond words, his reasons are inexpressible, and he is beyond mediation. While his actions are ethically unjustifiable, ‘in obedience to God there is a higher demand which teleologically suspends the ethical’. (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:169) Hence we can see that for Kierkegaard, obedience to God in a religious sphere of existence not bound by ethical demands.

In Either/Or Kierkegaard highlighted two modes of existence - the aesthetic and the ethical to describe the human experience. (ibid) Hedonistic satisfaction of one’s own urges is what drives the individual in the aesthetic mode of existence. The ethical mode of existence as a form of existence is, in contrast, ‘more fulfilling since it is a sort of telos for the merely aesthetic form of existence’. (ibid) In his later works, Kierkegaard said that the ethical sphere of existence lies outside of the religious sphere of human existence. For Kierkegaard, the believer’s intellectual path progresses in this order: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. No natural
or rational progression to the religious sphere is possible, and so in that respect Hegel errs in saying that it is the culmination of an 'unstoppable, natural process working itself out through history'. (ibid, p.169)

Kierkegaard argued that since the 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and man remains despite God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, in responding to Jesus, the same leap of faith is needed. (ibid, p.170) The fact that Jesus presents himself to us as the one who is the truth can be embraced only in faith, in obedience to Christ whom we encounter in the present. This fact is not contingent on a judgment based on the historical evidence about Jesus. Instead, it is a personal encounter with Christ at this very moment. For Kierkegaard, human beings must decide between living an aesthetic life where one views the world without commitments, or living an ethical life. Since the religious sphere or the sphere of grace, based solely on Jesus Christ, lies beyond the ethical, we therefore have to go beyond the apparent choice of either/or. (ibid, p.171)

Kierkegaard presented the human condition as being in the shadow of despair. God alone reveals the fact of sin and this is an offence to human self-understanding. The offensive nature of Christianity is therefore 'not limited to the intellect, but to the very core sense of our self-understanding which is offended by God's estimation of it as sinful'. (ibid) For Kierkegaard, the offence of the Cross is not meant as a rational interpretation of the world, as in Hegel. Rather, it is a commitment to change the world through an individual's changed life that is in turn based on a leap of faith that is renewed continually from moment to moment. This subjective appropriation of truth is 'instantly translated into existential commitment, inducing both despair and triumph over despair through trust in God alone, whatever the appearance of things'. (ibid) When Kierkegaard said that 'truth is subjectivity', what he meant was that truth can only be appropriated by being acted upon and lived out in genuine Christianity. It also means 'personal, existential involvement, staking one's complete existence on faith in God'. (ibid, p.172) Because in a paradoxical way, God's grace makes this possible, Kierkegaard is not to be read as saying that all depended on human effort.
Philosophical Fragments centred on the subjective approach to knowledge. The Greeks said that the truth was in Man, waiting to be unravelled. By this account, to know oneself was to find God. In this work, the paradoxical nature of religion was discussed by Kierkegaard, with Christ exemplifying the Absolute Paradox, since Christ is God in time. This paradox within Christian faith, namely that the polar opposites of God and Man are incarnated in Christ, is not a truth derivable from Socratic reflection on what we intuitively know to be the case. Kierkegaard hence countered Socratic thinking by saying that this truth must lie with an outside source because it is so patently absurd and that something must change within the seeker, through the miraculous power of divine grace, so as to enable him to recognise the truth. (ibid, p.19) Put another way, only by faith can we know God. Likewise, Kierkegaard felt that Hegel was mistaken in his claim that the understanding that God and human beings share an affinity is a natural (and reasonable) affirmation. Kierkegaard was against Hegel's close identification of Creator and creature, arguing that in so doing Hegel's philosophical system actually places God in an overarching rational system, something which runs counter to true Christian faith. True faith demands instead a leap beyond that which reason can strictly prove. It is a leap in trust, with a measure of uncertainty, because sin estranges us from God. In Concluding Unscientific Postscripts, Kierkegaard further discussed the concept of faith as a continual and constant striving. He argued that when one claims to have knowledge of something, 'one does so solely through an act of faith'. (ibid, p.20) Indeed, Christian faith's 'unreasonableness' is a theme that recurs in Philosophical Fragments and the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. (ibid, p.170)

In later works such as Training in Christianity and For Self-Examination, Kierkegaard argued that 'official Christianity' or Christendom (state sponsored and supported Christianity in which members of a nation are presumed to be Christian by virtue of their birth and infant baptism) is an impediment to people arriving at true faith. In Training in Christianity, Kierkegaard tried to define what it means to be a Christian in Christendom. He drew a sharp contrast between genuine Christian faith and official Christianity in Christendom, the latter of which he saw as having incorporated Hegel's system into its presentation of the Christian faith. He also emphasised that the only avenue to salvation is through God's grace. Due to sin, human beings are unable to achieve their own salvation. Citing prominently and frequently the Bible passage
‘Come hither, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest’ (Matthew 11:28), Kierkegaard asked questions such as, ‘Can one learn from history anything about Christ?’ and ‘Can one prove from history that Christ was God?’ Kierkegaard’s answer to both questions was ‘no’. (ibid, p.20)

Kierkegaard argued that life hinges on paradox, an encounter with the absurd, and that once we become aware that we are always in sin, faith becomes a possibility. An exponent of God’s unconditional grace, Kierkegaard was not greatly influential in his lifetime, but in the twentieth century, his work gained currency when the existentialist movement was developed by Heidegger and others. He is commendable in his emphasis on the importance of individualism when it comes to one’s having to make profound decisions that will shape one’s life, ‘based on his convictions rather than an accepted path’. (O’Hara, 2004:11) Kierkegaard argued that doctrine shielded people from the true offence of the Cross, and that official Christianity stood in the way of people attaining true faith. For him, truth is subjectivity and it means one’s personal, existential involvement and his staking his complete existence on faith in God. The paradox in this, of course, is that everything is dependent on the God’s grace, rather than on human effort. This is ‘a dynamic form of faith in which there are no permanent states, but always the call to be faithful from moment to moment’. (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:172) We will study his ideas on faith in greater detail in the next chapter.
Chapter Three: Kierkegaard as Radical Fideist and Truth as Consisting in the Proper Relationship between Belief and Subject

This chapter focuses on Kierkegaard’s view that genuine religious knowledge is grounded in faith beyond reason. The topics discussed here include Kierkegaard’s views on the relationship between Man and God, his reaction against Hegelian philosophy, subjectivity of truth, faith and its relationship with the absurd, how the views of Kierkegaard and Pascal differ, despair, existence and the stages in life’s way. Kierkegaard held the fideist position that God’s existence cannot be known and that one’s faith cannot be founded on needs or rational justification, but on simply believing in God. Quite unlike many of his predecessors, he maintained that the most important aspect of a human being is passion, not reason. (Carlisle, 2006:1) His in-depth analysis of the human condition came to have a tremendous impact on such philosophers as Heidegger, Sartre and Wittgenstein.

The core of Kierkegaard’s work dealt with the problem of how to be a Christian in Christendom, which on his terms contradicted the spirit and intention of the gospel. Christian faith, according to him, is not about committing to memory a catechism or extolling Church dogma. It is a personal and subjective decision to heed the inner voice which cannot be that of the clergy or other human intercessors. Faith becomes the most significant task to be achieved by each human, simply because it is only when the individual decides on what his faith lies in that he stands the chance of becoming his own self. Kierkegaard’s philosophy has two strands. Firstly, to him, there is a difference between true Christian faith and official Christianity in Christendom. Secondly, as humans have sinned, they are totally incapable of achieving their own salvation. And salvation ‘can only come through grace, received from God who is wholly other than Man. Only by faith can we know God’. (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:171) Through a series of his writings, Kierkegaard advanced a highly original critique and reaffirmation of Christian faith. (ibid, p.169)

Kierkegaard said that ‘human beings are not primarily creatures of reason or rationality, but caring, desiring and feeling beings that act and make decisions based on this nature’. (O’Hara, 2004:10) Kierkegaard aimed to make existence deeply intense, for otherwise it is impossible for
us to see it as it is. According to him, at the heart of human existence lies utter uncertainty. Life is tentative, elusive and a tremendous risk, with no foolproof certainty that the way we choose is the right way. Anguish awaits the individual who comes to a full awareness of this fact. Such subjective truths are grounded on nothing as they do not depend on objective evidence. In overcoming existential dread and despair, Kierkegaard saw hope as being offered by the Christian promise of eternal life. There are many who consider him to be an irrationalist. Albert Camus says of Kierkegaard in *Myth of Sisyphus*: ‘Antinomy and paradox become the criteria of the religious…Christianity is the scandal, and what Kierkegaard calls for quite plainly is the third sacrifice required by Ignatius Loyola, the one in which God most rejoices; the sacrifice of the intellect. This effect of the ‘leap’ is odd, but must not surprise us any longer. He makes of the absurd the criterion of the other world, whereas it is simply a residue of the experience of this world’. (Camus, 1955:28) Besides clearing this misconception or misreading of Kierkegaard as an irrationalist, I will appeal to Kierkegaard’s philosophy in the defense of the fideist position that religious belief is a matter of personal commitment not grounded on arguments. Kierkegaard’s concept of faith will be explained in detail as we discuss how faith figures exactly in his existentialist philosophy. References will be made to his works, particularly *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846).

Strong Christian convictions guided Kierkegaard’s philosophical writing. His own faith led the way in the whole of his intellectual endeavours, and this manifested starkly in what and how he wrote. Kierkegaard aimed to deepen his reader’s relationship with God and hence advocated an inward reflection on human existence, namely the terror and uncertainty that every individual experiences in the face of his own impending death. The reader was to take individual responsibility for knowing who he is and where he stands on the existential, ethical and religious issues raised in the texts. He employed a rhetorical form that would lead people to be responsible for their own existential choices, and to become who they are beyond their socially imposed identities. In this undertaking he was inspired by Socrates, who used irony to undermine all knowledge claims that were either taken for granted or unthinkingly inherited from traditional culture. Kierkegaard pointed out in his dissertation, *On the Concept of Irony* that Socrates used his irony so as to facilitate his interlocutors’ understanding of subjectivity. Kierkegaard’s method
of indirect communication sought to prevent the reader from being reliant on the authority of the author and the conventional wisdom of the community. (Carlisle, 2006:26)

Kierkegaard directed his attention to Man's relationship to God, and painstakingly tried to show how God was concerned with the individual rather than mankind as a whole. Everything comes down to the individual before God, and true Christianity had nothing to do with regurgitating church dogma, nor having one's relationship with God mediated by clergy, traditions, or religion itself. Rather than rely on doctrine or others' advice, Kierkegaard said that one must walk the narrow path of faith on his own, and the end result is the 'single individual before God'. The intention of Kierkegaard's inverted Christian dialectic was to point out the absolute distance between Man and God. He emphasised that human beings are absolutely reliant on God's grace for salvation. To the inquiry on whether religion or spiritual ideas are true, Kierkegaard said that it is far more important for one to focus on the how rather than the what, and he posed the subjective problem of an individual's relationship to his beliefs. Kierkegaard pointed out that we all conduct our lives by placing simple faith in plans, purposes and people. But where it concerns the central paradox of religion, namely that Jesus, the eternal God existed in human form, a person could take offence or adopt the attitude of faith. If he chooses faith and believes in something higher and life-altering, then the suspension of reason is a necessity.

Kierkegaard's philosophy was a reaction against Hegelian philosophy, the latter of which deems religion as simplified philosophy. Hegel also deemed the faith of Abraham himself simplistic and second-rate when compared to philosophy's intellectual demands. In Philosophical Fragments, published under a pseudonym, the theme of understanding faith is examined by Kierkegaard. Here he questioned how we arrive at knowledge of religious truth. Like his previous works, this was written as a reaction to the philosophical sentiments prevalent at that time, chiefly those of Hegel's and also others. (Thompson, 2007:43) Hegel devised a system he deemed all-encompassing and which solved all philosophical problems. Although granting that some issues may need to be addressed in the future, Hegel believed a short postscript by his disciples could handle that with ease. Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments attacked Hegel's egotism and overconfidence in his system. (Thompson, 2007:44) Hegel system of thought was a
Concerning human reason, Hegel believed that Man progresses across levels of truth until he eventually arrives at the absolute truth. For Hegel's system, this Absolute Truth is God. God is hence immanent – He is contained or comprised in all that exists. Hegel also defined Man in relation to others, and Man's greatest good is as part of society. (ibid) Instead of the individual, Hegelian philosophy placed emphasis on the whole. Kierkegaard rejected it thoroughly, seeing the System as incomplete, with flaws in its logic and main tenets.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript continued with an examination of the themes that Philosophical Fragments left off. This work was his most acknowledged work featuring themes that later on came to be equated with 'existential' thought. A focal point in this book was Kierkegaard's criticism of the Hegelian System, although Kierkegaard also tackled such ideas as truth is subjective, the importance of the individual, the role of faith as opposed to reason as it relates to religious truth, 'the acceptance of paradoxical concepts, how to be, and the difficulties of being a Christian'. (O'Hara, 2004:63) Kierkegaard questioned the genesis of Hegel's system and raised issues with its emphasis on rationalism. (O'Hara, 2004:65) He had key objections to any systematic approach to knowledge so evident in Hegelian philosophy. Insofar as it was an affront to the accepted opinion of Kierkegaard's time, Concluding Unscientific Postscript was a turning point in philosophy. Adopting a new approach and new ideas, Kierkegaard wrote the following concerning the subjective issue:

'The system presupposes faith as given (a system that has no presuppositions!). Next, it presupposes that faith should be interested in understanding itself in a way different from remaining in the passion of faith, which is a presupposition (a presupposition for a system that has no presupposition!) and a presupposition insulting to faith, a presupposition that shows precisely that faith has never been the given.... (T)o avoid confusion, it should immediately be borne in mind that the issue is not about the truth of Christianity but about the individual's relation to Christianity, consequently not about the indifferent individual's systematic eagerness to arrange the truths of Christianity in paragraphs but rather about the concern of the infinitely interested individual with regard to his own
relation to such a doctrine.... The objective issue...would be about the truth of Christianity. The subjective issue is about the individual’s relation to Christianity. Simply stated: How can I, Johannes Climacus, share in the happiness that Christianity promises?... Now, if Christianity requires this infinite interest in the individual subject..., it is easy to see that in speculative thought he cannot possibly find what he is seeking...and thus all of its response is only a mystification.’ (p.14)

A system of thought, Kierkegaard pointed out, cannot be complete if the experience itself is never complete. Kierkegaard also criticised Hegel for having seemingly assumed the role of God in the System. As Hegelian philosophy would have it, the thinker (Hegel) is outside the System, and to Kierkegaard, a system where the thinker is apart from the system suffers from inherent weakness. To Kierkegaard, a reliance on reason or abstraction was also problematic. He wrote that ‘abstract thinking is conducted sub specie aeterni (from the point of view of eternity), and therefore disregards the concrete and the temporal, the becoming of existence’. (O’Hara, 2004:67) He likened abstraction or pure thought to one’s travelling through Denmark armed with nothing but a small map of Europe, where Denmark is the size of a dot. Rationality as a virtue was extolled by Hegel, and Christianity was the ultimate religion mainly because the doctrine of the Trinity sat well with his own understanding of logic. God the Father and Jesus Christ are identical as each is God, said Hegel, but they remain different from one another since they are distinct individuals. The fact that God has made Himself known through the Holy Spirit’s ‘birthing’ of the Church then reconciles this apparent ‘difference’. (Schacht, 1975:158) For Hegel, this definition of the Trinity paralleled his own understanding of logic, where opposites are to be synthesised so as to enable one to arrive at a deeper understanding of reality. Although Hegel referred to Christianity as the ultimate religion, we cannot conclude that he was a strong advocate of Christianity. In fact, he also declared that religion was subordinate to his own philosophy. He perceived reality as that which could be experienced presently, and rejected the notions of an afterlife or otherworldly existence. Since Christianity is based on faith, Hegel advocated that for one to be rational, he must transcend religion and embrace philosophy if he is to truly ultimate reality. Hegel advocated that if one wanted to attain unity with the ultimate reality, he had to become objective, because it is only through the attainment of absolute
knowledge that this unity can be achieved, and we can attain absolute knowledge only by
becoming objective. (ibid, p.71)

To Kierkegaard, it was pure arrogance if one were to devise a philosophy from a
detached standpoint, as Hegel did, as if a philosopher were beyond the system that he created.
Kierkegaard was concerned with the individual before God, and not the system. Subjective truth,
'the truth that is true for me' is far more important than objective truth. He did not deny
objective, propositional truth, but asserted that in order for truth (especially the claims of
religion) to have any effect on or value for the thinker, it must be appropriated subjectively. The
ability to verify the claims of religion benefits the philosopher only if these claims can be
personally appropriated by him for himself:

‘Who is supposed to write or finish such a system? Surely a human being, unless
we are to resume the peculiar talk about a human being's becoming speculative
thought, a subject-object.’ (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.120)

Thus whereas Hegel found truth in the Absolute Spirit and objectivity, Kierkegaard, in
contrast, found truth in the subjective. He redefined the nature of faith and made it radically
subjective and totally beyond the processes of ordinary systematic reason. In objection to Hegel's
efforts to take all of reality as a system of thought, Kierkegaard pointed out that Hegel had
forgotten about one’s existence, the single most important element. Hegel's philosophy, he felt,
stole people’s attention from the individual to universals, demanding that people think instead of
be. For him, this was precisely wrong, since life was too precious to be placed in a system of
abstract logic. One must instead become subjective to attain unity with the ultimate reality.
Hegel, he said, was simply mistaken about ultimate reality's nature and the manner by which a
finite, existing individual can come to achieve unity with it. According to Kierkegaard, truth
thought of as a relation of unity with the ultimate reality (or God), is attainable only by becoming
radically subjective, and not by adopting an objective, rational and cognitive orientation. And a
person can place himself in a relation to this ultimate reality only by suspending his reason and
taking a leap of faith, the latter of which demands subjectivity and passion, not objectivity and
rationality. Faith for him is a matter of passionate commitment in the face of objective
uncertainty. And faith as subjectivity cannot be grasped by either a doctrine or religion, or by a church, but only by an individual who chooses ‘the path of faith’. (Solomon, 2001:84) Hegel’s understanding of Christianity as a doctrine of the spirit is hence starkly at odds with Kierkegaard’s conception of Christianity as a way of life chosen not because it is true or plausible, but simply because it is one’s personal commitment without an appeal to reasons or Reason. The truly existing individual is both passionate and conscious, Kierkegaard said, and passion is essentially non-rational and subjective:

'It is impossible to exist without passion, unless we understand the word 'exist' in the loose sense of a so-called existence. Every Greek thinker was therefore essentially a passionate thinker. I have often reflected how one might bring a man into a state of passion. I have thought in this connection that if I could get him seated on a horse and the horse made to take flight and gallop wildly, or better still, for the sake of bringing the passion out, if I could take a man who wanted to arrive at a certain place as quickly as possible, and hence already had some passion, and could set him astride a horse that could scarcely walk – and yet this is what existence is like if one is to become consciously aware of it.' (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.276)

In the plain face of reason, Kierkegaard and fideists like him view God as the Unknown. Reason is unable to help us fathom the Unknown. Where it concerns the extreme case of the Incarnation, Kierkegaard said that since reason cannot comprehend what God is, it cannot comprehend the unity of God and the human being. This is simply the Absolute Paradox. So-called because of the absolute difference between God and Man, this paradox consists precisely in the fact that Man is a particular existing being, whereas God is infinite and eternal. To those who say the charge of irrationality is inescapable where religious faith is concerned, we have already seen how some philosophers have defended faith against this charge, arguing that that believing in God is not irrational. Their argument goes that even evidentialists must concede that not all statements require evidence or proof. As Plantinga might say, evidentialists assume that belief in God is an evidence-essential belief. Much of his work, as we have seen earlier, tried to
show that this assumption is indefensible. But we have also seen that Plantinga’s position is not without its accompanying problems. In Kierkegaard’s radical fideism, in contrast, we have a philosophy that sees religion in the (correct) perspective in terms of faith being inward and non-rational, not a rationality-driven or evidence dependent enterprise.

Kierkegaard saw Hegel’s System as having the further flaw of being an impediment to the role of possibility, of one’s having and making choices. For him, it is important for the individual to have possibilities and make choices because one’s choices define his actions and his life. An alternative view of truth Kierkegaard offered is that of truth being subjective. Kierkegaard made the assertion that ‘truth is subjectivity’, and in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, he drew the distinction between objective and subjective truth. Objective truth has no bearing on ethical and religious issues, and the real truth equates with what is true for the individual. Subjective truth, which is related to one’s experience and values, affects a person and directs his actions and decisions. (O’Hara, 2004:67) Indeed, inwardness (or subjectivity of truth) and the non-rational leap of faith are two central ideas in Kierkegaard’s religio-philosophical message. We will discuss each in turn.

In addition to Hegel, Kierkegaard also wrote as reaction to the works of another philosopher, GE Lessing. Lessing argued that if one could prove historically that Jesus lived, did this mean that one must also believe that Jesus was the Son of God? In Theological Writings (1777 – 1789), Lessing wrote:

‘If on historical grounds I have no objection to the statement that Christ raised to life a dead man; must I therefore accept it as true that God has a Son who is the same essence of Himself? What is the connection between my inability to raise any significant objection to the evidence of the former and my obligation to believe something against which my reason rebels?’ (O’Hara, 2004:44)

Lessing claimed further that it was one thing to believe that Christ rose from the dead and quite another to say that Christ was the Son of God (and of the same essence of God). He
questioned the necessity of this leap to bridge the gap. (ibid, p.45) While Kierkegaard was in agreement with Lessing that a gap exists, he argued that reason is useless for many matters, especially that of understanding Christianity. Even if faith is not based on reason, that does not mean it is not true. Proving events historically does not add to the argument, and for the individual, said Kierkegaard, there are two choices – one either tries to find some compromised set of beliefs that are in alignment with rational thought or one makes the leap across the gap. Kierkegaard used the phrase ‘virtue of the absurd’ to highlight the fact that when addressing some issues, we may well have to embrace what reason deems absurd. (ibid) It is no irony that to cross that gap, a leap of faith is required, and in *Philosophical Fragments* Kierkegaard presented these choices and their implications.

Kierkegaard’s most famous doctrine was that there can never be any proof for the subjective truth of a person’s faith. In applying subjective truth to salvation, Kierkegaard revealed to us that how one believes is as important as what one believes. For a belief to be true, it must be held passionately, unconditionally, and absolutely, without reservation or doubt. For Kierkegaard, once we analyse everything else away, existence is all that remains. It is something that is simply ‘there’. (Strathern, 1997:50) We have to live out this existence, or turn it into action by means of ‘subjective thought’, and this is the key element of our subjectivity that leads us to subjective truth. This is what Kierkegaard meant when he made the assertion that ‘truth is subjectivity’. For Kierkegaard, there are two kinds of truth. Objective truth like those found in history and science, are linked to the external world. Such truths can be confirmed by referring to the world around us. Hence in this sense, objective truth depends on *what* is said; the emotional or non-cognitive states play no part in one’s assertion of a statement’s truth. (ibid, p.51) Subjective truth, in contrast, depends on *how* a thing is said. Truth here is a relation between the proposition and the person who makes the proposition. No objective criteria exist in subjective truth. In moral and religious matters, subjectivity is crucial because the truth can only be grasped through subjectivity. It is the objective impersonality of truth that Kierkegaard rejected. When he argued that truth is subjectivity, Kierkegaard was challenging the received philosophical-scientific opinion of his day. The presupposition of a rational system is a rational world. A statement like ‘there are dark clouds hovering above’ is a truth that conforms to the
objective state of things in the world. When truth is objective, it is inconsequential whether I believe what I believe passionately, calmly, tentatively, or a friend tells me so. Truth, according to Kierkegaard, must instead be inward, subject-dependent, particular rather than universal, personal rather than interpersonal or impersonal. The subjective ‘I’ lies beyond reason and is not a part of this world.

Kierkegaard illustrated the difference between the above two types of truth through the example of two men in prayer. The Christian, for Kierkegaard, prays to ‘the true conception of God’ but does so in a ‘false spirit’. (ibid) The second man prays to his idol with the full passion for the infinite. For him, the latter has the greatest subjective truth, because his prayers are done ‘in truth’. In this respect, Kierkegaard’s concept of subjective truth may be likened to a form of deep sincerity or a passionate inward commitment mentioned in earlier paragraphs. For Kierkegaard, truth consists in the proper relationship between the belief and the subject, the one who holds the belief, and the criterion of its truth lies with how the person holds it. In the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, he said, ‘This is the importance of passionate intent. Objectively the emphasis is on what is said; subjectively the emphasis is on how it is said’ (p.202) and ‘Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person’. (p.203) For Kierkegaard, therefore, subjective truths are of immense importance given their fundamental link to our existence. In this sense subjective truth has to do with the very ‘foundation of our values – not so much with whether these values are ‘correct’, but the nature of our commitment to them’. (Strathern, 1997:52) In Concluding Unscientific Postscript Kierkegaard discussed truth as subjectivity:

‘In order to clarify the divergence of objective and subjective reflection, I shall now describe subjective reflection in its search back and inward into inwardness. At its highest, inwardness in an existing subject is passion; truth as a paradox corresponds to passion, and that truth becomes a paradox is grounded precisely in its relation to an existing subject. In this way the one corresponds to the other. In forgetting that one is an existing subject, one loses passion... (and) the knowing subject shifts from being human to being a fantastical something. When
the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates himself. What is reflected upon is not the relation but that what he relates himself to is the truth, the true. If only that to which he relates himself is the truth, the true, then the subject is in the truth.

When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual’s relation is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate himself to untruth.’ 
(p.198)

Here Kierkegaard was suggesting that the question of whether a person’s life is true rests on how those beliefs have been appropriated and have come to change the individual’s existence, not on the objective truth of the person’s beliefs. Kierkegaard was not implying that true beliefs are unimportant or unattainable for humans. Kierkegaard believed people need the truth (in particular, the moral and religious truth essential to human life) and this can be attained it solely through subjectivity:

‘Truly, no more than God allows a species of fish to come into existence in a particular lake unless the plants that are its nourishment are also growing there, no more will God allow the truly concerned person to be ignorant of what he is to believe. That is, the need brings its nourishment along with it, what is sought is in the seeking that seeks it; faith is in the concern over not having faith; love is in the self-concern over not loving…The need brings the nourishment along with it, not by itself…but by virtue of a divine commandment that joins the two, the need and the nourishment.’ (Christian Discourses, p.66)

Passion, Kierkegaard believed, while being ‘Man’s perdition’ is also exalts him. Religious truths are successfully grasped only if one’s life has the right kind of passion. These truths cannot be grasped without being appropriated to some degree, and they cannot be grasped by just anyone regardless of his level of emotional maturity or personal concern. Hence a life that is ‘in the truth’ is characterised not just by one’s believing the right things, but by the nature of its subjectivity. This position is epistemologically different from two others pervasive in western
thinking. In modern classical philosophy the main position is that if there is objective truth, a method must exist that offers us guaranteed objective access to the truth. This reasoning dominated the Classical Foundationalist ideal and its quest for the true method. Great rationalists such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, and empiricists such as Locke, have disputed over the nature of this proper method. This dispute lasts through Kant, Hegel, and even into the twentieth century, where the logical positivists tried to render philosophy ‘scientific’ via a refinement of its method. Some postmodern philosophers, out of disillusionment from the failure to find an objective method of reaching truth, have relinquished objective truth altogether. Kierkegaard did not agree that if there is objective truth, an objective method must be there that guarantees access to that truth. Though he granted that there is objective truth, he affirmed that for human beings there can be no existential ‘system’. Existence itself is in process, and since our thinking is always situated historically, contrary to what Spinoza and Hegel claimed, we cannot see things from God’s viewpoint. Nevertheless, truth can be realised in our lives because we are constituted in such a way that we can be personally developed in the right way, developed morally and spiritually through the attainment of what Kierkegaard termed as inwardness, seriousness, and subjectivity.

Kierkegaard, because of his view that subjective truth is superior to objective truth, objected to Hume’s view on the primacy of fact. (Strathern, 1997:53) Hume believed that morality is not derivable from the facts we experience and know and even if sobriety is conducive to consistent behaviour, we cannot consequently say that we ought to remain sober. Kierkegaard and Hume are in agreement that an ‘ought’ cannot be derived from an ‘is’. For Kierkegaard, even our attitude and values can, to a large extent, determine so-called ‘facts’. When encountering the same reality, the Christian and the hedonist may see different ‘facts’. In this respect, each individual is to a certain degree ‘the one who creates his own world, based on the values he holds’. (ibid, p.53) As Kierkegaard saw it, the individual alone is responsible for the world he inhabits. The individual sees the world that he wills to see, and this is dependent on his values that make him who he is. Kierkegaard hence argued that ‘the values that make the individual what he is, also make the world what it is’. (ibid, p.54)
The religious individual’s existence is thus based on his relationship to God. (Carlisle, 2006:80) Religious subjectivity hence possesses an eternal dimension that encompasses both God’s presence and the likelihood of eternal life. In faith and with passion, one encounters these subjectively, rather than as objective facts. Faith involves dependency on God’s grace, and this cannot be apart from a consciousness of sin. Whereas the ethical person works to achieve moral goodness, the religious life starts by acknowledging that he has sinned. The religious individual’s ideal of righteousness is not attainable by his own efforts. For this, forgiveness of sin is needed. (ibid)

In the Postscript, Climacus points out that there are two types of religiousness. ‘B’ refers to Christianity and ‘A’ incorporates all other religions. D. F. Swenson, as quoted by W. Lowrie (1942), gives a definition of Religiousness A and B:

‘Religion A is characterised by a passive relation to the divine, with the accompanying suffering and sense of guilt. But it is distinguished from religion B, or transcendent religion, in that the tie which binds the individual to the divine is still, in spite of all tension, essentially intact.... The distinctive feature of transcendent religion can be briefly stated. It consists in a transformation or modification of the sense of guilt into the sense of sin, in which all continuity is broken off between the actual self and the ideal self, the temporal self and the eternal. The personality is invalidated, and thus made free from the law of God, because unable to comply with its demands. There is no fundamental point of contact left between the individual and the divine; man has become absolutely different from God.’ (p.173)

In Religion A, the eternal or divine is a quality within each individual that needs to be cultivated and seen as a focal point in his life. According to Kierkegaard, this type of religiousness is such that one has to surrender his attachment to all finite things and cease the seeking of worldly satisfaction so as to have a relationship with God. Religion A, from a Christian perspective, does not accord enough emphasis to Man’s sinfulness and the need for salvation, even though it provides comfort, security and peace to the soul. (Carlisle, 2006:80)
In Religion B, or Christianity, we see that salvation comes only through God’s grace and love, through his incarnation in Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard incorporated the interpretation of truth in the idea of salvation. Sin (or in Kierkegaard’s terms, ‘untruth’) and the gravity of it, are emphasised and the unity of the Divine and human nature is recognised as paradoxical. As sin accentuates the radical difference between Man and God, only God can bridge the divide. In Christianity, this reconciliation has already occurred in the form of Jesus’ life and death, a paradox that cannot be understood by the standards of reason. It is upon the Incarnation that the individual bases his eternal happiness or hope for eternal life in heaven. (ibid, p.81) Therefore we have a situation where ‘in Religion A, the individual sacrifices her temporal interests for the sake of the eternal, in Religion B eternity and temporality are as one simultaneously, although the contradiction between them remains unchanged’. (ibid) In the Concluding Unscientific Postscript Climacus expresses that many so-called Christians do not actually transcend the immanent spirituality of Religion A at all. As Walsh (2005) notes, in religiousness A, the breach with the eternal is seen as relative, while in Christianity it is conceived as radical. (p.86) In religiousness A and B, ‘a positive relation to the eternal is sustained inversely and indirectly through the consciousness of one’s distance and separation from the eternal and through dying to immediacy (but) the expression of this sense of separation and death is conditioned by different estimates of the extent and implications of the individual’s breach with the eternal’. (ibid)

The virtue of the absurd is explored thoroughly in Kierkegaard’s writing. Kierkegaard was referring to the paradoxical notion that only the absurd is the ‘reasonable’ choice, since when dealing with issues such as faith, reason must be suspended and subjective passion embraced. (O’Hara, 2004:14) Church and Christian dogma are themselves paradoxes that offend the principles of rationalisation. In the bare face of the central paradox, namely that an eternal God became a temporal and finite human in Jesus, we can choose to adopt an attitude of belief or offence. Reason cannot yield an explanation or justification for this ultimate act, and so in that sense we cannot speak of having the choice of accepting any reasoning. The choice lies between either believing on faith and suspending reason (believing by virtue of the absurd) or embracing reason and eschewing faith. In the Bible, Job’s life is returned to him by virtue of the absurd and
through repetition of his faith. Abraham also is spared from murdering his son Isaac. Kierkegaard
also alluded to other instances of the absurd such as how Climacus hopes to make readers
believe in the truth of Christianity by trying to express something too sacred for expression. The
Christian God is also seen as personal yet transcendent, humanly able to both love and be in a
relationship. Because Kierkegaard highlighted these paradoxes, making them acceptable, those in
the twentieth century came to be acquainted with the idea of the absurd. Inherent in fideism is
this acceptance not only of the paradoxes, but by virtue of the paradoxes found in Christianity.
As Kierkegaard saw it, not only is the Christian faith true, it becomes more true by virtue of its
inability to be rationally explained. It would also be this very absurdity that makes the Christian
claim worthy of belief. For him, acceptance of the absurdity in the Christian claim can only come
about through total commitment or through a leap into faith.

Many of Kierkegaard’s works centred on the issue of faith and how Kierkegaard
conceived of it. His profound concern was with how we can believe that God will keep the
promise of eternal life. In many ways this problem of faith was the central problem of religion for
Kierkegaard. In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, he provided us with a definition of faith:

‘Faith is the objective uncertainty with the repulsion of the absurd, held fast in
the passion of inwardness, which is the relation of inwardness intensified to its
highest.... Faith must not be satisfied with incomprehensibility, because the very
relation to or repulsion from the incomprehensible, the absurd, is the expression
for the passion of faith.’ (p.611)

Jesus was the Absolute Paradox as God, the infinite and spiritual became a man, finite
and temporal. The believer, according to Kierkegaard in Philosophical Fragments, finds it an
impossibility to reckon and comprehend. He then suggested what Lessing did, namely that when
faith and reason collide, one must choose either faith or reason. The believer must choose to
take a leap of faith grounded in paradox; he must let go of the demonstration to help it,
acknowledging that the existence of God cannot be proven. Though it cannot be mediated by
proofs or reason, this leap is in no way a thoughtless one, but one involving volition; and it does
not proceed by quantitative stages or changes. It is a leap from the doubt that exists by virtue of the absurd:

‘In order to perceive the prodigious paradox of faith, a paradox that makes a murder into a holy and God-pleasing act, a paradox that gives Isaac back to Abraham again, which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops.’ (Fear and Trembling, p.53)

Kierkegaard added in Philosophical Fragments:

‘...so long as I am holding on to the demonstration (that is, continue to be one who is demonstrating), the existence does not emerge, if for no other reason than that I am in the process of demonstrating it, but when I let go of the demonstration, the existence is there...Therefore, anyone who wants to demonstrate the existence of God (in any other sense than elucidating the God-concept and without the reservatio finalis (ultimate reservation) that we have pointed out—that the existence itself emerges from the demonstration by a leap) proves something else instead, at times something that perhaps did not even need demonstrating...’ (p.42)

Thus, according to Kierkegaard, in order that Man arrives at an understanding of the Absolute Paradox, he needs the condition of faith. The problem of faith was considered by Kierkegaard from the outside, and he affirmed that faith constitutes the highest kind of life attainable for a human being. His writing was directed at making faith ‘difficult’ but possible again, and how an individual can arrive at religious faith was of great importance to him. Kierkegaard believed so much in the importance of faith that he said that faith has its truth in subjectivity. Indicating that ‘faith inheres in subjectivity’ and describing the risk involved in believing, Kierkegaard said in Concluding Unscientific Postscript:

‘Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual’s inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I
cannot do this I must believe. If I wish to preserve myself in faith, I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the objective uncertainty, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy fathoms of water, still preserving my faith.'

(p.73)

As part of Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegelian philosophy, he asked at what point faith would need to step in if everything is known. He asked rhetorically in a journal entry from 1842-43, 'Can there be a transition from quantitative qualification to a qualitative one without a leap? And does not the whole of life rest in that?' According to Kierkegaard, a person must take a leap of faith from unbelief to belief. Faith is itself a miracle, 'a gift from God, and...through faith, a person might find eternal truth'. (O'Hara, 2004:14) The choice of faith, once made, must lead one to realise that there must be continual choice and renewal of it through avowals of faith. This repetition is the relation which 'relates itself to itself', and taking away this reconfirmation of the vow of faith plunges the self into despair that undoes selfhood, and the relationship is broken with itself:

'Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself. But the synthesis is not the misrelation; it is merely the possibility, or in the synthesis lies the possibility of the misrelation. If the synthesis were the misrelation, then despair would not exist at all, then despair would be something that lies in human nature as such. That is, it would not be despair: it would be something that happens to a man, something he suffers, like a disease to which he succumbs, or like death, which is everyone's fate. No, no, despairing lies in man himself. If he were not a synthesis, he could not despair at all; nor could he despair if the synthesis in its original state from the hand of God were not in the proper relationship.' (The Sickness Unto Death, p.15)

Kierkegaard said that no Church, priest, logical system or intercessor can offer any mediation for the individual. Only one individual stands alone before God to repeat the process of confirming his faith, which means that the repetition of faith becomes the self. The ongoing process is a daily task, as Paul often spoke of 'I am becoming' rather than 'I am' in his letters. This
process explains Kierkegaard's belief that there is far greater weight in the act than the word. He saw faith as the opposite of sin, and with faith, we can atone for our sins. With faith, one becomes his true self, and it is this self that God judges. (ibid)

In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard explained the complexities of faith through the story of Abraham and Isaac from Genesis 22. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. God intervenes at the crucial moment and tells him not to sacrifice the boy, even though he was ready to do so. It turned out that God had meant it as a test of Abraham's faith in Him. Kierkegaard pointed out the irrationality of Abraham's faith in this instance: 'Because he believes God has demanded it of him, Abraham is prepared to do something obviously immoral. And given how God has already promised that Isaac will have many descendants, His apparent decision that Isaac must die is illogical'. (Hill, 2007:88)

Abraham's attitude involved a 'teleological suspension of the ethical' in that since there is trust that God has some final purpose for all of this, Abraham had to hold in check his own code of ethics. This, Kierkegaard explained, is by no means an easy task because faith is a trial - a risky enterprise undertaken with fear and trembling. (ibid) In making a leap of faith one deliberately chooses not to be rational, and in a later work, The Sickness Unto Death, Kierkegaard stated that everyone except the true Christian experiences despair. In claiming that 'in relating itself to itself and in willing to be oneself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it' (The Sickness Unto Death, p.14), Kierkegaard meant to say that the self ultimately finds rest only in the One who made it. Anti-Climacus is religious in the extreme, and therefore it was from this viewpoint that Kierkegaard wrote.

In Training in Christianity, Kierkegaard defined what it means to be a Christian in Christendom as being 'just as contemporary with His presence on earth as were those (first) contemporaries. This contemporaneity is a condition of faith'. (p.9) He cited the Bible passage throughout the first part, 'Come hither, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest'. (Matthew 11:28) In the work Kierkegaard says that we cannot learn from history anything about Christ, nor can anyone prove from history that Christ was God. As a radical fideist, Kierkegaard saw the philosophical search for God as fruitless because of God's
hiddenness. Although Pascal and Kierkegaard are in agreement in that sense, we shall see that there are clear differences between them in the ensuing paragraphs.

As Pascal was a moderate fideist, he emphasised that the truths of faith are beyond reason’s reach, and faith and philosophical reasoning are simply incompatible in their motives. While rationalism declares that any certain truths are unattainable by reason without faith, moderate fideism holds that the only certain forms of knowledge are attainable by faith. Mathematical truths like Pythagoras’ Theorem do not involve explicit religious faith. Therefore, in moderate fideism, all such truths, outside religion remain uncertain and even if they are certain they are categorised as some kind of non-religious faith. The former seems untenable, simply because even if one cannot be certain that the sun will rise tomorrow, as Hume said, one can surely be certain that 1+3=4, like Descartes, and in this respect, we can speak of having some certainties. What this means is that these certainties come from some non-religious faith, in this case, the ‘non-religious faith’ being faith in reason itself. For Pascal, placing trust in reason must itself be an act of faith, one that is not rationally provable. This is because if we could use reason to prove trust in reason, we beg the question by assuming what we are supposed to prove. Pascal argued further that our reason is not trustworthy at all if its genesis lies with some evil deceiving spirit instead of an intelligent and trustworthy God. Attempting to use reason to prove such a good and trustworthy God who created and designed human reason implies our begging the question and arguing in a Cartesian circle (by trying to validate God by reason and reason by God). The solution to this is a non-rational leap of faith right from the start.

Pascal offered many rational arguments for his faith in the *Pensees* (1660). He argued that if we submit everything to the test of reason, the mysterious or supernatural quality of religion would be lost. Yet if what we submit to the test of reason violates reason’s principles, we end up rendering our religion absurd and ridiculous. Hence according to him, the two forms of excesses would be firstly to leave out reason and secondly to not admit anything but reason. Pascal may be taken to be a strong moderate fideist because he denied the possibility of natural theology, or using argument to justify religious belief. Such a denial is based on such theological reasons as human reason being too tainted by sin to attain, on its own, knowledge of God. As a
radical fideist, Kierkegaard said that faith involves the passionate espousal of paradox and the casting aside of reason’s canons. In contrast to Pascal, he presented the view that faith is prudentially and morally foolish, and consequently, faith and reason are polar opposites - there can be no reasoned transition from a life without faith to one with faith. This transition consists instead in a leap from one mode of personal being to another. A radical fideist, therefore, could, like Pascal, hold that faith does not meet standards of evidence or proof, but could also, like Kierkegaard, maintain that the proclamations of faith are paradoxical.

As mentioned earlier, Kierkegaard’s radical fideism looked at faith as a purely personal and subjective attitude. He spoke of the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between God and humans, which makes trying to understand God antithetical to believing in Him. The Divine act of the Incarnation, as acknowledged by the believer, is paradoxical. Something like the belief in God’s promise of eternal life has no rational justification, evidence, and proof. The Incarnation cannot be comprehended as true or false by means of logical argumentation. For a statement like ‘Jesus died for my sins’, the promise of salvation, to be treated as objective, as being on par with ‘John died in a car crash’, is, for Kierkegaard, precisely wrong. For Kierkegaard, this leap which an individual must make from unbelief to belief is one of faith, and as a miracle, a gift from God, faith helps a person arrive at a relationship with God. Also, faith as a continual striving helps one become his true self, the one that God will judge.

Kierkegaard heaped scorn on those sought ‘the truth of religion in an objective, detached way through evidence and argument’. (Peterson et al, 2003:45) He considered them to have forgotten that their existence as human beings is at stake. Objective, rational inquiry is merely an ‘approximation-process’ that leads us no closer to God, since there will always be one more bit of evidence and argument to consider or evaluate, and this spells perilous delay for the individual whose task is to emerge from a state of untruth. As Man’s salvation depends upon their finding God, it is vital that there be no such further delay. In the intensity of one’s passion, subjective truth is found. For Kierkegaard, if we could prove God’s existence and his love for us it would then be impossible to have faith in Him. He next addressed the topic of the paradox:
'But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge? It is the unknown. But it is not a human being, insofar as he knows man, or anything else that he knows. Therefore, let us call this unknown the god...It hardly occurs to the understanding to want to demonstrate that this unknown (the god) exists. If, namely, the god does not exist, then of course it is impossible to demonstrate it. But if he does exist, then it is foolishness to want to demonstrate it, since I, in the very moment the demonstration commences, would presuppose it not as doubtful - which a presupposition cannot be, inasmuch as it is a presupposition - but as decided, because otherwise I would not begin, easily perceiving that the whole thing would be impossible if he did not exist. If, however, I interpret the expression to demonstrate the existence of the god to mean that I want to demonstrate that the unknown, which exists, is the god, then I do not express myself very felicitously, for then I demonstrate nothing, least of all an existence, but I develop the definition of a concept...For example, I do not demonstrate that a stone exists but that something which exists is a stone.' (Philosophical Fragments, p.39)

The answer, then, lies with one’s committing himself, taking the leap of faith and 'believing without having or wanting any reasons or evidence to show that one’s belief is true'. (ibid, p.46) Kierkegaard stated in the Philosophical Fragments that the highest level of any passion is to will its own downfall. It is in faith that this passion is realised, and we have the overcoming of reason in the face of the absurd, the Absolute Paradox. This is the highest virtue an existing individual can attain:

‘But is a paradox such as this conceivable?... The understanding certainly cannot think it, cannot hit upon it on its own, and if it is proclaimed, the understanding cannot understand it and merely detects that it will likely be its downfall. To that extent, the understanding has strong objections to it; and yet, on the other hand, in its paradoxical passion the understanding does indeed will its own downfall. But the paradox, too, wills this downfall of the understanding, and thus the two
have a mutual understanding, but this understanding is present only in the moment of passion.’ (p.47)

Christian churches attempt to group people in a crowd, but to Kierkegaard, this is wrong, chiefly because a crowd fosters personal irresponsibility. Kierkegaard advocated individual awareness, commitment and responsibility. There is far greater merit in relating ourselves to God than in relating to others, whether as person, race, vocation, or church. For Kierkegaard, the problems and sufferings of life are a reflection of the existence of God. Existence to him means our having fallen away from our essential nature – our undying relationship to God. Our alienation from God leads to our existential condition of mortality and despair. According to Kierkegaard, all human beings have the inner drive to find their essential selves. Reason cannot bridge the gap between God and us, and so the leap of faith becomes the only way we can renew our relationship with God as well as renew our authentic selves. The further our actions drive us from God, the deeper our sense of alienation and despair. The anxiety of alienation stirs in us a dynamic drive to find our essential self. Kierkegaard explained this dynamic drive as stages on life’s way. (King, 2004:124)

In *Either/Or, The Concept of Dread, Stages on Life’s Way, and Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard gave an account of human life involving three spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious, between which we have to choose. Each of these stages is a progression toward achieving the virtues of meaning, purpose, and value in life. The three stages are, simply put, three different ways to make choices. Of the three, the choice of the religious existence is the only way to achieving happiness. When we choose the aesthetic sphere we plunge ourselves into a hedonistic life of pleasure-seeking and constant striving for novelty. (ibid, p.25) The motivation behind this choice would be the fear of boredom, and a flight from despair, but eventually we will descend into depths of melancholy and despair. When we choose the ethical sphere, we choose a life of submission to duty and obligation. The ethical stage is a period tied to duty and affirmation of the social order. According to Kierkegaard, both the aesthetic and ethical stages are spheres within immanence; spheres where the individual is defined completely by the context he is in.
Given the awareness that the aesthetic man cannot find happiness in personal pleasures and that the ethical man simply mirrors the problem of an infinite satisfaction in values, Kierkegaard thus developed the idea of the genuinely religious sphere. It is from this sphere that stems the phrase ‘leap of faith’. This sphere calls for a submission to God that is true freedom. It transcends rationality, and for Kierkegaard it is typified by the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Bible mentioned earlier. (ibid) This non-rational step leads us to see the meaning, purpose, and value of life through the perspective of Divine Providence. Thus the truth of Christianity is subjective simply because it is real to the perceiver.

The religious stage is on a higher plane than the acceptance of the universal moral law because it is the highest subjective transformation in which the individual can experience complete freedom and self-actualisation. It is in the religious stage that individuals come to see themselves ‘before God’; seeing themselves as they really are, with a chasm between themselves and God due to the sins they have committed. Because it requires the highest commitment the individual can make, this stage represents the highest of either/or choices. Since no one can know what God demands, based on such uncertainty, Kierkegaard called this the leap of faith. Through this leap, God thus becomes the source of one’s ultimate meaning and hope. As an illustration of this leap, Kierkegaard chose Abraham, the Father of Faith. (Strathern, 1997:46) Kierkegaard pointed out that God’s commanding of Abraham to kill his son Isaac is an action that is completely outside common morality. Kierkegaard was telling us that the leap of faith is not rational, but absurd. In choosing to obey God’s command, Abraham ‘neither understands it nor is able to justify his decision except in terms of surrender to God’s will’. (ibid) As we noted earlier, this leap of faith demanded what Kierkegaard called ‘the suspension of the ethical’, and it remains the only way into the religious sphere of existence. Though there is an absence of rational grounds for religious belief, it is the only means by which one flees from despair and dread. It is in accepting God’s command and surrendering himself to God’s will, that Abraham attains true freedom.

For Kierkegaard, the paradox of faith lies in the fact that the individual is higher than the universal. Abraham truly ‘exists’, and for the existing individual, truth is that to which he is
passionately committed. Thus, for the existing individual, truth and faith are the same, both involving the tension of subjective inwardness. Kierkegaard said that our existence can be at any of the three stages on life's way, but despair and guilt will remind us of how alienated we are from our essential selves. How we respond to the either/or dialectic within us will point out to us the stage of our authenticity. It is only through the leap of faith that we can realise our authentic and essential self. The key to existence, said Kierkegaard, is having the courage to find our essential self, but sadly, most people tend to come together as a group for security. The major task the subjective thinker has to reckon with is that of transforming himself into an instrument that clearly expresses in existence everything that is essentially human.

It is only in the religious stage that the leap of faith can help us attain our true essential self in a relationship with God. A passionate commitment to God will liberate us from the meaninglessness and dread that we encounter in our existence, and it is in the religious stage, said Kierkegaard in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, that one must be willing to relinquish everything to God, including universal moral laws:

‘Consequently the believing Christian both has and uses his understanding, respects the universally human, does not explain someone's not becoming a Christian as a lack of understanding, but believes Christianity against the understanding and here uses the understanding—in order to see to it that he believes against the understanding. Therefore he cannot believe nonsense against the understanding, which one might fear, because the understanding will penetratingly perceive that it is nonsense and hinder him in believing it, but he uses the understanding so much that through it he becomes aware of the incomprehensibility, and now, believing, he relates himself to it against the understanding.’ (p.568)

Rationalistic inquiries and arguments concerning the truths of Christian doctrine hinder the subjective self-actualisation of the individual who struggles to come to a resolution. (Lowrie, 1962:93) Kierkegaard focused on developing only the religious sphere of existence for the individual because he felt that philosophers and theologians before him did not understand what
For Kierkegaard, being a Christian, or being religious in general, had to be everything in our lives. With authenticity, the emphasis is on the 'how', not the 'what', of knowledge, and in subjective truth, sincerity and intensity of the commitment are key. Kierkegaard even commented that to stand on one leg and prove God's existence is a very different thing from going down on one's knees and thanking Him. Since reason is inadequate for supporting our belief in God's promise, Kierkegaard said rightly, our only hope rests with an unconditional leap of faith. I must say, with all my heart, 'I believe'. The skeptic might ask whether we could perhaps look for a little bit of support from reason. Surely not. Salvation is a matter of the fate of one's soul. It is a matter of one's existence, not merely of one's state of knowledge. And salvation is not something one can acquire on his own, even if he is forced to do so. Salvation requires that God reaches down to me and lifts me to His kingdom. That gulf between God and the individual must be bridged. Salvation is completely different from, say, one's acquisition of wisdom. Christ is God's instrument for bridging the gulf between Him and the believer. Christ is, for the Christian, the Saviour, and the fact that salvation concerns my existence as a believer, the actual, historical reality of Jesus is all-important. Whether Socrates ever lived does not really matter, but if God never actually became man in the form of Christ, and if Christ never died for my sins, then one is, as Kierkegaard maintained, damned rather than saved. It follows, then, that because one needs desperately to know that Jesus really lived, and given that the evidence for his belief is merely probable (the sort of evidence that a historian can produce), one cannot rest easy in the belief that he has been promised eternal life. There is way too much at stake; one's salvation is everything - it is eternity of life rather than death. One’s terror and need for hope and assurance
thus reduces him to infinite concern for something that defies rational grounding. One is reduced, in short, to a leap of faith.

Kierkegaard’s argument for making the leap of faith runs something like this: the task of the individual, as determined by his essential nature as a human being, is that of intensifying and purifying his subjectivity. He must attain a spiritual state of ‘infinite passion’ to accomplish this task. Faith represents the highest degree of passion in the dimension of human subjectivity. And since Kierkegaard further held that without risk there is no faith, and that the possibility of faith is directly proportional to objective uncertainty, it follows that the greater the objective uncertainty of that which one believes, the greater the faith the believer must have. The greatest degree of objective uncertainty lies with the paradoxical. Passion helps the individual deliberately affirm the paradoxical. The greatest conceivable paradox thus would provide the greatest possible stimulus to passion. But, Kierkegaard contended, the greatest conceivable paradox is the central thesis of Christianity, namely the Incarnation. Christianity therefore, is best suited to the intensification of subjectivity. It follows, said Kierkegaard, that if one can achieve the infinite passion necessary to affirm this central thesis, thereby making the leap of faith, one would have effected the greatest possible intensification of one’s subjectivity, and so will have accomplished one’s essential task. For this reason Kierkegaard said that subjectivity leads to passion, Christianity is the Absolute Paradox, paradox and passion are ‘a mutual fit’. The paradox is thus necessary for the intensification of subjectivity and for the attainment of an eternal happiness.

As the culmination of his analysis of human existence, the leap of faith is an affirmation that God has existed in human form. Many philosophers have resisted it because the leap essentially involves the affirmation of a proposition, the Absolute Paradox, which is radically resistant to rational understanding. Kierkegaard instead insisted upon the non-rational nature of this proposition, and acknowledged that its affirmation entails the suspension of rational thought. We must note however that Kierkegaard is not to be construed as meaning rational thought as something to be lightly abandoned. To summarise, Kierkegaard defended the leap of faith by saying that Man has a most profound desire for what he calls an infinite or eternal happiness; one that is in no way contingent on external circumstances and which therefore cannot be affected by
the loss of anything finite. But Man is also a being the truth of whose nature is subjectivity. It is only through the leap of faith that a being whose truth is subjectivity can attain eternal happiness. Having already touched on the notions of subjectivity, the leap of faith and eternal happiness and the connection between them, one can further add that eternal happiness is possible for Man only if it is possible for him to relate himself to God. Man, however, is a being who exists in time and it would be downright impossible for him to enter into a God relationship if God had not also at some point existed in time.

Kierkegaard argued that by means of passion and subjectivity, one can enter into a God relationship and thereby achieve the eternal happiness which the God relationship alone renders possible. The intensification of passion which a leap of faith requires is what assigns it its importance. The importance of the leap of faith also lies in the deepened subjectivity to which it gives birth to. For Kierkegaard, the more intensely subjective the individual is, the more profound and complete this person is. Kierkegaard also said that correspondingly, an eternal happiness exists only for those who are subjective, or emerges for the individual who becomes subjective. This seems to suggest that the eternal happiness man seeks is attained once his essential subjectivity is realised completely, and is a function of the attainment of a state of radical subjectivity as such. (Carlisle, 2006:85)

In the Kierkegaardian sense of existence, God’s existence means the truth about Christ, and this, I agree, is a matter of faith, rather than of demonstration. Like Kierkegaard, my view is that God’s existence can be grasped only by being believed. His existence is assured to me only when I relinquish the need for proof. For me, the persuasiveness of Kierkegaard’s argument rests upon his view that ultimately, the matter of believing must emanate from a spiritual need with the knowledge that one is taking a calculated risk which might result in corroboration of another sort, that is, the grace of faith (Hannay, 1982:65). Kierkegaard is not attempting an argument that would persuade atheists, agnostics, or those of another faith. What he is pointing out is that the remedy at hand for nominal Christians is a faith that they understand and appreciate, but which they are not authentically submitting. The life of faith, for Kierkegaard, is the resolution to endure and overcome the despair and dread. Thus the option of faith is not merely one in which faith in
God is presented as a reckless gamble but a well-calculated risk, one with its own ultimate reward. Kierkegaard understood that the option of faith, even though a risk, on pragmatic grounds alone it is nevertheless a risk worth taking, because in taking the leap of faith, the individual is rescued from the madness and disintegration (brought on by existential dread) by his subjective inwardness being related to God. (Strathern, 1997:59)

In closing, I shall highlight the key points of this chapter. For the radical fideist, believing is outside of reason’s limits, and what is believed is neither established nor disestablished by what is known. The realm of faith is different from that of reason, and there is no overlap between them. For the unbeliever, the content of faith may seem nonsensical, but faith for the radical fideist is never a matter of objective certainty to begin with – there are no probabilities to be contemplated, and no doctrine beckoning intellectual acceptance. Because faith involves a submission of the intellect, both beyond and counter to reason, it is an expression understood only in terms of the absurd. In a leap of faith, as mentioned earlier, I believe it because I want to believe it. Kierkegaard is thus best viewed as standing at the heart of the Christian tradition, ‘deeply informed by the Church’s thought and its spirituality… (and he was) a theologian in the classical, Catholic and orthodox sense, not on the model of the academic theologian, but rather one whose work was not merely to describe or analyse doctrine but rather to proclaim God’s relationship with us and point out the way of following Christ, of imitation as the pattern of the baptized life.’ (Gouwens, 1996:22) Kierkegaard’s immediate task as a religious and Christian writer was that of ‘communicating religious and Christian capabilities to persons surfeited with ‘knowledge about’ religious and Christian matters, but who nonetheless lived in ‘aesthetic’ categories (living for pleasure), committing the intellectualist error of confusing their ‘knowledge about’ Christianity with faith’. (Ibid, p.16) Hence he saw the need for more persons learning to hear religiously and Christianly rather than the need for more knowledge about Christianity. His approach stressed a significant feature of religious experience, namely that it involves a relationship between the thing experienced and the experiencing subject. This relationship stops being ‘religious’ if the object is analysed. (Thompson, 2007:103) As a religious poet, Kierkegaard’s writings are dramatic, ironic, passionate and existential, ‘seeking to bring about an existential change in the hearts and minds of his readers’. (McEnHill & Newlands, 2004:170) His staunchly
held the view of the individual having to make profound decisions that will shape his life, rather than of an integrated philosophical or theological system where the individual is insignificant.

Kierkegaard saw Christianity as a way of existence, an answer to the question of how to live the human life. To the enigma posed by human existence, Christianity may be seen as offering a practical and not a theoretical answer. Christianity also influences the way an individual thinks about himself and the world. Hence, Kierkegaard’s project of reintroducing Christianity into Christendom called for his deep reflections on the nature and state of human existence. His stand on these subjects has influenced even those who do not share his view of the Christian faith. He focused on the meaning of human life and the different avenues by which people could try to structure their lives so as to achieve a personally meaningful existence. ‘Being’ (existence) precedes knowledge (rationality), and the postulate of God’s existence is a life-necessity, not something arbitrary. Life is contingent on paradox, on the absurd, and it is only in the realisation that we are always in sin, is faith then possible. (ibid, p173) Through the use of the concept of ‘virtue of the absurd’ in many of his works, Kierkegaard illustrated the paradoxical notion that only the absurd is the defensible option, since when it comes to faith, there are the twin entailments of the suspension of reason and embracing of subjective passion. Through writing at length about the paradoxical nature of faith, dread, despair and subjectivity, Kierkegaard tried to lead individuals to an awareness of their spiritual poverty. His justification for faith in God rests on two possible choices for the individual – one either possibly reaches a state of authentic selfhood through the leap of faith, or one continues to languish in an inauthentic state of being.

In Kierkegaard’s work we note also that intuition and risk often ‘provide a starting point for what develops into a serious commitment and new understanding of life’. (ibid, p.12) He was not satisfied with convincing his readers merely on an intellectual level, and wanted to show them a form of life that they can actualise in their own existence. Many religious people are drawn to Kierkegaard’s idea of faith, perhaps because it resonates with their own experience and concept of faith than the logical approach advocated by strong rationalism. The idea that faith involves commitment and risk-taking finds ready acceptance by many believers. Although his radical fideism means the believer no longer has to worry about contradictions, I agree with Kierkegaard
that saying religion is non-rational makes believing in God less comfortable for some people than they would probably like. But Kierkegaard would say it is entirely our choice whether we want to believe in God or not. If more people reject religion because they simply want to cling on to the merits of reason, Kierkegaard would deem that acceptable, since that would be far better than having the majority of people think they are religious when in fact they are not. And as Evans (2006) points out, Kierkegaard's concern was not to defend the 'reasonableness' or unreasonableness of Christianity but rather 'to argue the impossibility of neutrality. When reason encounters the paradox, faith and offense are both possible; what is not possible is indifference'. (p.131)
Chapter Four: Is Kierkegaard's Radical Fideism a Defensible Justification for Religious Belief?

In the earlier chapters we discussed why fideism appeals to many religious persons. Whereas evidentialists are unable to accept a belief in God in the absence of evidence, the fideists, in contrast, readily accept the truth of Christianity on faith alone. For a fideist like Kierkegaard, God is, in the plain face of reason, the Unknown and reason’s efforts cannot make the unknown known. Philosophers like Kant tend to adopt the modest response of declaring reason’s limit as an unknown, but Man would always try to project the known onto the unknown to overcome this limitation. Kierkegaard’s fideistic views, however greatly disputed in his time, have withstood criticism and are now representative of those in the Christian faith who do not demand philosophical tenet, evidence of the Trinity or the existence of God in order to have a lasting, personal faith.

It is through an appeal to faith that the fideist accords knowledge status to beliefs that have not fulfilled the minimum (or evidential) requirements of objective knowledge. And for some people, it seems contradictory that something could be labelled as ‘knowledge’ when it has not been rationally demonstrated. However, the essence of faith is precisely to deem an idea as having a referent in reality while at the same time casting aside the process by which reality can come to be known by Man. Fideism thus points to the acceptance not only of the paradoxes, but by virtue of the paradoxes present in Christianity, and for Kierkegaard, the Christian faith is rendered more true given its outright defiance of rational explanation and demonstration.

Theologians and philosophers of religion often claim they encounter a major problem in terms of justifying belief in God. Belief in God is ‘a religious experience we encounter in an ultimate way, challenging the very significance and meaning of our lives. It is a matter of our ‘ultimate concern’, in the words of Paul Tillich. (Thompson, 2007:15) Beliefs about God ‘are not subject to the normal rational checks that we can apply to other beliefs’. (Hill, 2007:81) Deeply religious people often claim that they ‘already live in a dynamic relationship with God and that rational argument and other intellectual exercises are patently beside the point’. (Peterson et al,
Our knowledge of God, whether seen as a direct encounter or as a conclusion derived through logical inference from evidence, is unique because our gaining this knowledge presupposes our having to cross the boundary that divides the natural from that which lies beyond. And as humans in a world in space and time trying to reach out to grasp a Being infinitely superior to us and nature, we cannot envisage the kind of encounter which communion with such a Being could be. Suppose we try too hard to conceptualise it, then we might just risk destroying theism through removing the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. It is also immensely difficult to expect an argument whose premises all refer to what is within nature to yield a conclusion lying beyond it. In any case, we need to be mindful that the concept of faith becomes inapplicable if ever the theist claims that the articles of faith can also meet the requirements of reason, for faith is only possible in beliefs that defy rational demonstration or guidelines.

Scientists can scrutinise and weigh the evidence for hypotheses and not accept them purely ‘on faith’. When one believes in God, one believes on faith and transcends the evidence. Believers will consider proving (or disproving) God’s existence as missing the point; their justification being that faith involves personal trust and commitment. This trust and commitment is not the same as a list of the things that one claims to believe. Although it includes them, it further describes the way in which one relates to them. For example, as Thompson (2007) says, one can have faith in his doctor, but need not have an understanding of medicine. (p.37) We can see it expressed as the difference between believing that something is true and believing in something. When one believes in something, there is the presupposition of commitment and trust. Believing that something is true simply means that one thinks the statement is correct, whether or not it is of any personal interest to him. The statement, ‘I believe that God exists’ may be the logical conclusion of an argument, but does not mean the person is in any way influenced by that belief, whereas ‘I believe in God’ suggests one’s having a ‘personal relationship with God, or at least believes that God in some way matters’. (ibid, p.38)

This chapter considers the objections to Kierkegaard’s fideistic position, seeking to defend his type of radical fideism as a good justification for religious belief. We will discuss
whether philosophical interest in religion misses the essence of religious faith, and whether religious faith can ever be subject in any way to rational investigation. The idea of faith as non-rational belief contrary to the sum of evidence for that belief will be examined in the context of showing that belief in God is not a matter of defending certain arguments. In fact, I advocate the view that nobody comes to believe in God because of arguments. Religious faith permeates our being deeply, encompassing our feelings, commitment and passion more than our reason, and offers us hope and meaning in life. For the believer, God provides some guarantee to his concept of the meaning of life; and even if one does not believe in God, no less significant would be the absence of those same guarantees. If God does not exist, Man descends into a life of meaningless existence. In an age where life has too often been described as meaningless and absurd by existentialist philosophers, a belief in God gives us purpose and direction to life. We can say that too many people are uncertain about the purpose of life in general and about their own lives. (Little, 2000:166) Undoubtedly, a non-Christian has such purposes as family, career and money that yield temporal or limited satisfaction. God in Christ offers a cosmic purpose to the believer’s life, ‘tying him in with His purpose for history and eternity’. (Ibid) We also see the transformation of routine as we live our lives in God’s purpose and heed the admonition ‘Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God’. (1 Corinthians 10:31) This eternal purpose comes to pervade every aspect of the believer’s life. Hence when it comes to one’s having to decide between despair and belief in God, I feel that a Kierkegaardian leap into the non-rational realm ought to be one’s choice. It is only through a leap of faith grounded in infinite passion and the absurd that one enters into a relationship with God and consequently achieves eternal happiness.

The rationality of faith has encountered criticism from the evidentialist challenge since the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. One of the first to issue the challenge was John Locke. Others turned to W K Clifford as spokesperson for the evidential challenge. In his essay ‘The Ethics of Belief’, Clifford said that ‘It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence’. Theists can adopt two approaches in responding to the evidential challenge, and I shall argue that fideism as one of the approaches is the more promising one. Indeed, fideistic philosophers who emphasise faith above reasons in religious
matters usually concede that it is impossible to meet the evidentialist challenge. More than merely arguing that there is insufficient evidence for religious beliefs, they emphasise faith instead as a proper attitude for adhering to a belief in God. While the evidentialist may be right in insisting that the rationality of religious commitment requires evidence, faith would not be possible if any evidence exists that could eliminate reasonable doubt that God exists. The fideist sees the evidential challenge as mistaken in that it requires evidence which, while appropriate for some things, is not appropriate for faith. And faith cannot be said to be irrational merely because it does not fulfill the requirements needed to make belief rational. Is the fideist position better than the other approaches in its response to the evidentialist challenge? We now examine the objections to fideism.

Critics of fideism maintain that there are grounds for them to be uncomfortable with it. Firstly, fideism seems self-validating in that people who state that faith supersedes reason must by definition also claim no argument has any bearing on the truth of a faith statement. The world is thus naturally divided into groups of people who hold differing positions, and these groups are merely able to inform other groups about their faith. Not much point exists in discussing these differing positions, since all discussion aimed at understanding must start with the premise that one's position might change given new information or more convincing arguments, in other words, in the light of reason.

A second objection concerns the assertion that faith is a valid way of asserting a truth. The argument goes that this is itself a rational statement as it can either be true or false, and it is only through rational examination that we can establish the truth or falsity of any proposition. Examination of anything through the use of reason may not provide 'proof' in the sense that an absolute truth is stated by a proposition. Therefore, it seems that the fideist demand is contingent on a presupposition about the nature of reality and of truth in particular, and this is non-viable.

Thirdly, faith seems to be about blindly accepting beliefs in certain propositions that are not rationally provable. Belief in this sense seems to be the assertion of propositions about which
we have cause for doubt. Similarly, when religious people use the term 'believe', they usually mean that they have chosen to regard something as true and worthy of their assent despite grounds for doubt. What seems problematic with this position is that it is difficult to demonstrate that Christianity is essentially a faith in the sense that it is a system of belief. Belief may be a requirement of the Church, but Christianity is a way of life. Put simply, faith lies in a continuum that involves choice of certain attitudes, priorities and actions, and if we separate any one part of that continuum at the expense of the others, we can no longer be said to be talking about faith.

A fourth objection goes that radical fideism, despite all its insistence on faith's spiritual purity, may actually be a form of false consciousness or 'bad faith', in Sartrean parlance. For a start, between the theists and atheists, there appears to be no possibility of any meaningful dialogue. Far worse than this, the fideistic position might even seem to entail that the believer is compelled to concede that his belief in God is irrational and unreasonable. Further, the philosopher will find it difficult to respond to radical fideism, since the radical fideist seems to reject all the rules to which the philosopher can appeal. On the surface, the fideist seems to have chosen to accept the claims of one authority (faith) and disregard the opposition of another (reason). While no logical difficulty exists with one's holding with a lot of passion some self-contradictory doctrine, and yet not realise it, it is quite another matter to consciously live in inconsistency. If one thinks that there is something truly paradoxical about what he believes, then although he has come to believe it from a certain cause, he also comes to believe in its falsity because he will encounter a conflict of beliefs. With Kierkegaard's recommendation that one embraces a paradox with wholeheartedness, he is saying that one does not have the belief in its falsity with which the belief in its truth is contending in his psyche. In this respect, it seems that the radical fideist is maintaining verbally that the inner conflict is resolved when it is not, because as one cannot resolve this conflict by denying its presence, even though over time the demands of reason can gradually be removed. Yet when that happens, it would mean one no longer judges the faith-commitment to be paradoxical. To say before that happens that faith is chosen over reason is hence to deny the inner conflict and deceive the self, which is tantamount to a kind of bad faith.
Fifthly, some philosophers question if there are good grounds at all for applying less rigorous criteria for judging statements on religious matters than we do for other statements. These critics question religious faith as a proper method in our efforts to arrive at truthful propositions, insisting that reason and argumentative thinking are credible as proper methods for seeking truth precisely because reason has helped us devise solutions to problems on a daily basis. In science, for instance, reason has led to progressive knowledge increase. In contrast, it seems that in circumstances where our reason is deemed insufficient for helping us arrive at the truth, faith gives us no grounds for saying that it serves us in our daily attempts at seeking truth, and this is exactly where fideism fails. Peterson et al (2003) echo this view:

‘All important issues in human life must be subjected to responsible, reflective reason. This holds for beliefs associated with a particular theistic religion, beliefs drawn from theistic religions generally, or beliefs maintained by non theistic religions. If religious beliefs are not subject to earnest, objective approach of reason, then prospects for the human venture are bleak indeed’.

(p.312)

There is also the likelihood that sometimes people end up accepting ideas that are strange or dangerous when they adopt religious belief systems without any consideration for the reasonability or truth of the beliefs concerned.

A final objection to fideism goes that even God’s authority cannot be the ultimate criterion of certitude. Here the critic’s stand is that an act of faith simply cannot be the primary form of human knowledge. For this authority to be a motive of assent, there must be previous acknowledgement of its being certainly valid. In other words, we must first have absolute knowledge of God’s existence before there can be belief in a proposition as revealed by God. We must know a given proposition is revealed by God, and that His teaching is worthy of assent, all of which must be ultimately decided by an act of intellectual assent hinging on objective evidence. Hence it seems fideism fails on two fronts - firstly, it denies intellectual knowledge and secondly, it logically ruins faith itself.
Given the above criticisms, how does the fideist respond? The fideist could probably begin by saying that philosophically speaking there are no ironclad arguments for God’s existence. God is not the conclusion of a logical chain of arguments. He does not exist at the end of any objective mathematical equation or calculation, nor is He an observable through the use of the most powerful of telescopes. As Kierkegaard says, to exist has nothing to do with objective principles. What matters when we say we ‘exist’ is instead a subjective awareness of our unique individuality. (Carlisle, 2006:25) For the believer, a stark problem with arguing about God through logical arguments is that one stands to derive no spiritual or emotional comfort from this rational process. Kierkegaard, through the biblical story of Abraham in Genesis 22, illustrated his belief that science and mathematics have little to do with eternal happiness. (Carlisle, 2006:116) He pointed out that science and mathematics could not help Abraham decide whether to obey God and sacrifice his son, Isaac. And like Abraham, we all encounter situations that compel us to come to awareness of ourselves. The all important truths are simply personal, and truth is subjectivity, ‘the tension of the subjective inwardness’. Kierkegaard defined ‘truth’ in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript as:

‘An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness…The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.’ (p.203)

As Thompson (2007) says, given that God is infinite, He cannot be expected to exist in the same way that finite things do. The matter of His existence (or otherwise) cannot be debated in the way that we do when we define or draw up parameters for ordinary things. The believer simply cannot point to something and say, ‘Go to that corner and you will see God standing there.’ We can seek evidence to ascertain if ordinary, limited things might or might not exist, but by definition, God is not such a straightforwardly ascertainable ‘thing’, and for us to say that God ‘exists’ in the literal sense is therefore to deny Him. (p.41) The critic can then ask if it makes any sense to say God exists at all if He does not even exist in the same sense that finite things do. To this, I feel the fideist can respond by asking about the existence of such items as ‘space’, ‘reality’ or ‘time’, all of which are not items we can point to or readily set boundaries, yet collectively
these form a sort of framework within which things are experienced. In like fashion, ‘God’ could be seen as a framework for articulating religious experiences. (ibid) Another clear example of something that may be described as existing, but which has no separate existence on its own would be ‘love’, as mentioned in one of the earlier chapters. A description of the ‘love’ may encompass many things like social bonding, acts of kindness, sexuality, and fellowship, yet love does not exist on its own as a separate entity. The point here is that for us to speak of God as having a literal existence in a particular place, a Being either within or external to our world, is for us to actually limit Him, and a Being that we so limit cannot be God. Thompson (2007) adds:

‘If something is absurd, one cannot accept it rationally. To believe it takes an act of commitment. Commitment to what is beyond rational proof is a common phenomenon; totally rational people would never fall in love or make war; shopping for the latest fashion would be suspect, rock climbing, bungee jumping, and stamp collecting would cease! Many religious experiences are actually of quite mundane things – what makes them religious is the way in which they are interpreted, the impact they have on the people experiencing them, and the depth or quality of the experience. A superficial religious experience is almost a contradiction in terms.’ (p.12-13)

The fideist can further strengthen his position by pointing to the impossibility of comprehending something that is incomprehensible by definition. Philosophers grant that if there is indeed a reality called God as known in religion, this can only be established by a logical procedure that would develop a coherent concept of God and then demonstrate that this concept has a referent. In Pascal we see the shift from the rational argumentative to the experiential type of philosophy of religion. Pascal has in mind Descartes in his criticisms, and in the latter, the existence of God is established by the most rational of all the traditional arguments, the Ontological argument, and in Cartesian philosophy the function of God seems to be chiefly that of guaranteeing the veracity of our knowledge of the external world. It is in this context that Pascal said, famously, ‘God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars’ and ‘If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having
neither parts or limits, He has no affinity with us. We are incapable, therefore, of knowing either what He is or if He is’. (Flew, 1984:62) The existence of God simply cannot be established by empirical investigation or philosophical demonstration.

Where the essential qualities of God are concerned, such as eternity, infinity and omniscience, we must acknowledge that we have limited understanding of the Divine Being. Throughout the Judaeo-Christian tradition God’s incomprehensibility is affirmed, and in the Book of Isaiah, we read: ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord’. (Isaiah 55:8). Similarly, Thomas Aquinas writes in *Summa Theologiae* that ‘Though in Himself supremely knowable, God surpasses the power of a limited intelligence by very excess of truth’, and ‘to realise that God is far beyond anything we think, that is the mind’s achievement’. Kierkegaard likewise insisted (in direct opposition to Hegel’s claim that human intellect can adequately know the Absolute) that God is wholly unknowable. The critic can object by saying that if the fideist assertion is right that the Christian God is an incomprehensible one, then it seems we are too often making seemingly positive affirmations concerning His character, and hence saying a lot about God. Kierkegaard did not address this antinomy, but to escape the charge of irrationalism, it is important that the fideist make some attempt to address it. It would appear that either we must assert God’s incomprehensibility and not utter a word about His nature, or we must justify the description of God by acknowledging that we can to a certain extent understand His nature. Apophatic theology, while asserting that God’s nature is unknowable, does not assert that one cannot know this about God.

Owen (1971) postulates one solution to the above. He suggests that we can postulate a real analogy between finite symbols and their divine object in the attempt to validate their use. Positive language referring to a transcendent God can be justified by the doctrine of analogy of being (*analogia entis*) (p.103). According to the analogy of being there is both a likeness and unlikeness between God and Man. To the extent that they are both existent and exhibit those forms of spirituality that distinguish man from sub-human creatures, they are alike. God differs in kind from us insofar as only He is self-existent, which means His existence is not dependent either on our existence or the existence of anything else. Our existence, however, is dependent
on God's will as we are part of God's creation. Also, only God expresses spirituality in an infinite form. The likeness between God and His creatures entitles us to attribute spiritual properties (such as wisdom, goodness and power) to God in a way that is appropriate to His self-existence, even if our positive knowledge of these properties is limited to their finite modes.

There are at least three reasons that justify the assumption of the above form of analogy. Firstly, the very idea of creation presupposes a Creator, and only a spiritual act of will can bring the world into being ex nihilo. If love is the only conceivable motive for God's act of creation, then we cannot even begin to speak meaningfully of creation without implying the analogy of a loving personal Creator. Secondly, this analysis of 'creation' is confirmed by the Scriptural affirmation that God created man 'in His own image'. The Book of Genesis writes: 'Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness…' So God created man in His own image.' (Genesis 1:26) Thirdly, the concept of analogia entis is an essential part of Biblical revelation. If God wishes for us to conform to His will and nature, then some limited similarities must exist between God and Man. From the standpoint of a believer, I believe that God as He is in Himself can never be known. One can only attempt to highlight His mystery through limiting concepts that, in substance or form, are wholly negative, and to employ positive analogies for which we can give positive meaning only from our own experience. (Owen, 1971:106) The point is that for all God's attributes, we must remember God's incomprehensibility. Even if we grant that we can conceptualise God, this does not mean we can prove that God exists, which would be why we need faith. Faith would not be needed if we could offer airtight proof of His existence.

The rational process is 'one in which conclusions are drawn from premises by a sequence of mental steps which can be followed, verified and which others would accept as being true – and true for everyone, not just for that particular individual'. (Thompson, 2007:40) I feel the rationalist approach to the philosophy of religion often inadequately addresses the experiential dimension of religious faith, and (mistakenly) conceives of God as an inferred entity. The understanding of a religious experience cannot be through rationalist or empirical approaches, or else it would merely be a scientific description of what is seen or heard, with nothing that qualifies it as distinctively religious or eternally significant. (Ibid) In this connection, a
scientific observer will never be fully satisfied with an explanation of religion. Nor can any scientific or rationalist interpretation of the evidence ever be exhaustive. What will always elude description is that bit of 'extra' that does not necessarily go counter to reason (making it irrational) but rather transcends it, involving a step not demonstrable by logic or evidence, but which one feels the compulsion to take.

More than the mere acceptance of a theistic hypothesis, religious faith is a commitment different from the tentative kind of commitment involved when we accept a hypothesis. Faith is not a passive, intellectual assent to doctrines. For the fideist, faith means being in a state of trust and commitment, with the object being God Himself and not propositions about God. In science, it is appropriate that reason should demand objectivity and detachment. Where the matter is of one's salvation, this is where passionate involvement is required. Few people become religious as a direct result of arguments and most would agree that there is an experiential dimension to religious faith. A person can never arrive at it by sifting through evidence. And certainly, faith is not formulated when we sit down to prove a theorem. While the knowledge of the existence and unity of God is a necessary condition to matters of faith, it is not necessary that these be established by demonstration, but those who do not hold them by demonstration must at least posit them by faith. Faith is not logically dependent on a prior demonstration of the existence of God. It is personal, involving the inner person, and believers also see faith as a gift of God, with an essentially supernatural quality. As Thompson (2007) says, attempting to use rational means alone to grasp religion is much like trying to find a mate through a dating agency. Although the agency can work out the necessary details, 'unless you find in your computer-selected partner some spark of emotion, some willingness to take a risk, a leap beyond what is reasonable, you are hardly likely to embark on the most passionate relationship of your life!' (p.40)

In modern times, religion continues to be one of our ultimate concerns because here we are dealing not with abstract and theoretical questions, but with the eternal dimension of life as well as with choosing our commitments, hopes, and direction in life. As Kierkegaard says, for the religious person, the leap of faith is the necessary step towards bridging the gulf between the finite and infinite, Man and God. Given the significance of such a leap, which comes about not
from haphazardness, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that it is an irrational move on the religious believer’s part, if by ‘irrational’ here we mean to suggest a believer’s delusion or even depravity. I agree with Kierkegaard that true religiousness hinges on inwardness and incomprehensibility, and by absurd, Kierkegaard does not mean foolish, but incomprehensible, because mere thought cannot resolve it. The leap of faith is not one of blindness, lunacy or speculation:

‘Consequently the believing Christian both has and uses his understanding, respects the universally human, does not explain someone’s not becoming a Christian as a lack of understanding, but believes Christianity against the understanding and here uses the understanding—in order to see to it that he believes against the understanding. Therefore he cannot believe nonsense against the understanding, which one might fear, because the understanding will penetratingly perceive that it is nonsense and hinder him in believing it, but he uses the understanding so much that through it he becomes aware of the incomprehensibility, and now, believing, he relates himself to it against the understanding.’ (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.568)

For the religious believer, his leap of faith, even though it falls outside of the whole enterprise of providing justification, is passionately real, calling for an act of will, commitment and preparedness. And insofar as religious belief is an expression of a certain passion and is not a matter of cognition, I maintain that it may not even be a matter of rationality. ‘It is the experience of meeting God’, Evans (2006) writes, ‘which produces the passion of faith...Such an encounter may properly be said to be the ground of faith without constituting evidence for faith’. (p.128). The Kierkegaardian leap of faith is no leap of blindness or ignorance at all because the believer knows what he is leaping to, and why he is leaping. This leap is necessary firstly because speculation affords us at best a mere ‘approximation’, and secondly, an objective fact is unhelpful until there is subjective appropriation of it on our part. In the stark absence of subjectivity, the theist and the atheist relate to God in the same way.
Martin Gardner (1996), one of the founders of the modern skeptical movement, grants that the existence of God is unprovable. A fideist, he argues that one has the right to make a leap of faith if this provides 'sufficient satisfaction'. Gardner believes in God for personal or pragmatic reasons. Granting that the atheists have more persuasive arguments, his position is best encapsulated by the phrase, *Credo consolans*, - I believe because it is consoling. (Shermer, 2000:302) Gardner points out that any evidence for another life would eradicate faith. If we had knowledge that following our death, there is a Heaven that awaits, and we know this with the kind of certainty that we do concerning, say, the existence of Tokyo or Paris, our lives would be downright governed by our impatience or anxiousness to get there. To travel a road to reach the end of it is one thing, and jumping off the roof is quite another. As Gardner says rightly, the hiddenness of Heaven is what makes faith the un compelled leap that it is. There is merit to this line of thought for the faith believer, as I shall point out in the following paragraphs.

From a fideistic standpoint, abstract analysis of religious concepts and the logical examination of theological beliefs may be said to miss the heart and intent of true religion. For sure, these approaches do not deepen the believer’s appreciation of the intimate, personal involvement of religious faith. Since the God of philosophers is not the God of faith, the fideist can argue that rigorous intellectual investigation does not help deepen faith or passionate religious commitment. For a sincere religious believer, faith itself is the foundation of one’s life, and this being so, the idea of testing one’s faith by some external, rational standard seems to be reflective of a lack of true faith. Thus it is sometimes said that ‘if we test God’s word by science or logic, we are really worshipping science or logic rather than God’. (Peterson et al, 2003:45) It is also open to the fideist to maintain that a God relegated to our level (as to be clearly imaginable) would not be God. Whatever God is, we can expect He could not possibly be conceived of by such a corporeal, time-bound, three-dimensional, non-omniscient, non-omnipotent, non-omnipresent being as Man. To me, there is cosmic significance in the idea of God’s transcendence and His being beyond human comprehension. Just as the two-dimensional creature cannot possibly grasp the nature of three-dimensionality despite being armed with logic and reasoning, we cannot by human terms understand God’s existence or otherwise. By that token, what cannot be understood or proved remains insoluble.
Critics of fideism might still insist that fideists have not thoroughly weighed the consequences of severing religious belief from reason completely. There is a need for one to seek reasons or evidence if one wants to hold that his beliefs are in some sense true. In response, the fideist can say that we must refrain from being professionally committed to relying too much on arguments and too little on personal experience, feelings and passion. Faith is not a matter of scientific thinking. Just as science shows how this world can be known, faith allows the believer to know God. Norms of rational belief formation need not be adhered to when it comes to faith. Most important things in life are not undertaken on the basis of rational assessment alone. Belief in God is one of those beliefs one cannot rationalise, as it is not just a matter of defending certain arguments. Hopes, fears, emotional attachments, memories and the longing to share activities with those we love and admire, all have their part to play. Christianity, as Kierkegaard pointed out, is not about intellectualizing - nobody comes to believe in God because of logical proofs and mathematical reasoning. Faith helps us become involved in a whole way of life. The faith believer is able to find within his heart intimations of Divinity, and he sees God’s existence as a revealed truth. Emotion may be warm whereas reason can often be seen as detached or cold. (Thompson, 2007:8) How could a human being ever hope to conceive of or prove the existence of an Infinite Being? Faith must step in. It is also God who provides some guarantee to our conception of the meaning of life. If we want to believe that life ought to be fair, for example, then it is truly important for us to believe that some powerful Being exists who will effect things in some fair way, either in this life, or in another.

The critic of fideism will argue further that the concept of the infinite is employed in other areas of human thinking, for example, mathematics, so surely one is not claiming that it is in principle impossible for a finite being to reason about the notion of the infinite. Besides, since the Being in question is conceived of in a certain way, this Being must be intelligible or definable to the degree that our conception can make some sense. After all, it is supposedly ‘mere’ human thought that gives firstly, meaning to the concept of God and secondly, some content to the supposed object of worship. If the infinite is wholly unintelligible to the finite mind, can one even speak of God as a religious object?
The response to the above criticism can go something like this: People usually conceive of Christian God as a Being with an infinitely perfect set of characteristics. He is supposedly immaterial, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, and unchanging. To the extent that we understand what it means for us to know, have power, and be loving or morally good, we do at least have some conception about God’s nature, since a Being infinite in power, knowledge and goodness would have to be at least as powerful, knowledgeable and good as we are. Hence to have a conception of this kind of God as an object of faith is to admit that to an extent, God is intelligible, definable and can be thought about by a finite mind. Also, I see nothing to keep us from asking if there are grounds to think that such a Being, so conceived, actually exists. To explain certain phenomena in our world and our experience, people do talk as if they know something about God’s nature. God is said to have a purpose, to love us, to do certain things and so on. Such talk makes sense only if one admits that a finite mind can think somewhat adequately about God, for otherwise religion would not be possible, particularly if God cannot be conceived of, talked about or defined in some way. This, as was mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter, is not to say that we can fully understand God, if He exists. It only means we can understand something about God for otherwise there would be no sense at all in the religious talk we do engage in.

To the religious, the affirmations of faith have a more encompassing, more fundamental and more imperative quality than others. The merit of faith is seen as diminished if a person believes only in the light of human reasons. Even though one may have reasons confidently based on the demonstrations of the existence of God, he should be willing to believe solely on the authority of God. It may not be totally possible to convince a skeptic that the universe must have been created by God, or that the existence of laws of nature points to a Universal Lawgiver, but these are still roles that Christians traditionally assign to God. Christians also claim they exist in a special relationship with God, and ‘see’ Him working in the world around them, for example, even if they cannot prove this to others. The arguments may be criticised, but the doctrines that they express have always been at the core of the Christian faith. (Hill, 2007:57)
Kierkegaard’s philosophy, as we have seen, rests on the theory that the real truth is an individual’s experience, not objective logic and reason. Kierkegaard accurately observed that no formula (no certainty) will ever guarantee eternal happiness. Philosophy, in Kierkegaard’s view, is not a substitute for faith, and cannot help one to achieve essential humanity as well as a sufficient understanding of and a deep relationship with God. I agree with this observation, because suppose by means of science and mathematics we do succeed in proving everything about the Scriptures, how does this impact one bit the person who does not have faith to begin with? There is scarcely any impact simply because religious faith does not lie at the end of a scientific inquiry. In fact, the result of successfully proving the truth of the Scriptures might lead to the very opposite of what is intended, in that objectivity ends up eliminating the infinite interest which is the condition of faith. For the one who already has faith, his faith is not made stronger through his now having facts to support his belief. And if passion is eliminated, faith no longer exists. I am in agreement with Kierkegaard that for the believer, when faith desires proof and ceases to be passionate, it is like a young woman whose love for her lover has started to diminish and she earnestly seeks reasons why she should admire the lover she no longer has any affection for:

‘But when faith begins to feel embarrassed and ashamed, like a young woman for whom her love is no longer sufficient, but who secretly feels ashamed of her lover and must therefore have it established that there is something remarkable about him – when faith begins to lose its passion, when faith begins to cease to be faith, then a proof becomes necessary so as to command respect from the side of unbelief.’ (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.31)

Though Kierkegaard was highly critical of the system of rational knowledge as an answer to life’s problems, he grants that it is legitimate to employ the methods of mathematics and science when these are used properly. However, Kierkegaard is right in his observation that such are not items in the believer’s daily prayers. Nor do they cause us to lie awake at night pondering over them. The objective truths found in mathematics and science are simply too detached to essentially permeate the human experience. He also rejected the ideas propounded by systematic philosophers that rational systems could assist the believer in the understanding of human nature.
For instance, Plato believed that if we know the Universal Forms, especially the Form of Good, then we will do the good. Kierkegaard opined that such thinking made light of our actual human dilemma; individual decisions have to be made whether we know the good or not. He illustrated his belief that science and mathematics have little to do with daily life or eternal happiness by alluding to the biblical story of Abraham in Genesis 22. This story was used to demonstrate that there is a goal higher than that of ethics (which counters the Hegelian claim that performing one’s ethical duty is the highest task for a human being) and that Hegelian ethics cannot explain faith (which counters Hegel’s claim that there is a rational philosophical explanation for Christianity). Like Abraham, we all face situations that compel us to be aware of ourselves. Kierkegaard asked if science and mathematics can help Abraham decide whether to obey God and sacrifice his son, Isaac. The answer, to him, was obviously not.

Religious faith involves personal trust in God, and this trust is usually based on a number of beliefs about what God is like and how an individual relates to Him. It is also true that to have faith in God and for one to live in ways that reflect that attitude amounts to more than just intellectually adopting beliefs such as ‘God exists’ and ‘God is perfect in power, knowledge and goodness’. As Thompson (2007) rightly says, if we apply logical analysis to religion in the way we do with science, politics or language, we will either fail to reach logically coherent conclusions or fail to convince those who practise religion to accept these conclusions. (p.260) This is entirely within expectations because an individual’s personal hopes and fears are simply not confined within the boundaries of rational thought alone. Religious intuitions (along with love, hate, fear and other powerful emotions) come about when we are engaged in the ‘now’ of experience. (ibid, p.261) It is futile for the atheist to show that religious beliefs are irrational, or that satisfactory evidence for the existence of God is lacking or inadequate, as doing so is unlikely to change anyone’s views. This is because such beliefs rarely depend on reason or evidence, but on intuition and the interpretation of personal experience. Unique to religious experience is ‘a sense of wonder, new insight and values, holiness and profundity’. (Thompson, 2007:6) Such experience involves the whole person, his mind, emotions, values and relationships, and encompasses the most fundamental sense of being oneself. I agree with Kierkegaard that if one adopts the superficial approach to religion and religious commitment, through participating in religious
ceremonies but without either engaging emotionally or intellectually in the beliefs of that religion, there would not be any significant or lasting contribution to his life or prospect of entering a meaningful relationship with God.

Earlier on I mentioned that there is a strong presumption by some that one should believe Christian doctrines only on epistemic reasons. The evidentialist insists that one ought not to believe what was not supported by evidence means that if the evidence does not seem to support Christianity, one ought not to believe it. On the surface, there seems to be good utilitarian arguments for believing them only when there is good evidence for them. Mathematician William Clifford, in an article entitled ‘The Ethics of Belief’ (1877), paved the way for modern skepticism towards religious faith. In it he pointed to the moral failing of those who believe on insufficient evidence. (Hill, 2007:84) Clifford argued that belief is impractical and immoral if it is not grounded in specific evidence. He wrote:

‘Every time we let ourselves believe for unworthy reasons, we weaken our powers of self-control, of doubting, of judicially and fairly weighing evidence. We will suffer severely enough from the maintenance and support of false beliefs and the fatally wrong actions which they lead to, and the evil born when one such belief is entertained is great and wide. But a greater and wider evil arises when the credulous character is maintained and supported, when a habit of believing for unworthy reasons is fostered and made permanent.’ (Peterson et al, 2001, p.84.)

Clifford’s case was built on the insistence that every belief has an impact on other people, regardless of who holds it. Just as it is obviously a serious matter if a political leader is mistaken about something, it is just as serious if an ordinary person is mistaken about his beliefs, for superstitions or false beliefs are detrimental to others, including the generations to come. Clifford even suggested that every belief will leave its mark upon our character for all time, and consequently, false beliefs will inevitably result in immoral character. He concluded that it is of ethical importance that we form our beliefs rightly. Clifford also argued that belief is not just an
individual matter; any instance of believing for insufficient reasons could possibly corrupt the system of belief norms which we depend on. He warned that we will degenerate into savagery if individuals got away with either believing wrong things, doing away with testing or inquiring their notions. For him, there is a universal ethics for Mankind and one must not allow his own gullibility to guide him, or else he lets everyone down. How can others be expected to respect our positions, Clifford argued, if we are careless about the truth and believe things simply because they are ‘comforting and pleasant’? (Hill, 2007:85) In summary, Clifford said that it is wrong under any circumstance to believe in something without adequate evidence. To him, religious claims can never satisfy the burden of evidence. He pointed out the fact that there are many conflicting religious claims, saying that no one has the right to say, for example, that Buddha is right and Muhammad wrong. Also, many religious claims appear to be at odds against scientific claims. Just as Hume had argued that believing in miracles is never justifiable, given the improbability of miracles in contrast to other more plausible explanations, Clifford concluded that one can never be justified in having religious faith and it is actually even immoral to be religious. (ibid)

The religious believer will undoubtedly view Clifford’s arguments as too exaggerated to consider seriously, especially his insistence that immoral behaviour is the inevitable result of every false belief. However, Clifford was speaking primarily about believing something on insufficient evidence, not about believing something that is contrary to the evidence. Some Christians have accepted Clifford’s challenge and tried to demonstrate how Christian belief can, in fact, be shown to be correct. CS Lewis’ Mere Christianity, first published in three parts in the 1940s, was one of the most famous attempt at arguing for more distinctive Christian doctrines in modern times. (Hill, 2007:85) Lewis tried to firstly describe what all Christians, regardless of denomination, believe and secondly, convince skeptics that these beliefs were true. The doctrines of the Incarnation, atonement and so on were examined by Lewis in the same manner. Similar strategies were attempted by Presbyterian theologian Francis Schaeffer and Orthodox philosopher Richard Swinburne.
To believe on epistemic reasons means believing based on reasons that make doctrines likely. To believe on beneficial reasons is to believe on reasons that benefit the believer and others. Some Christians have argued that Clifford missed an important point. Clifford’s argument for basing belief only on epistemic reasons was itself a moral one. (Martin, 1991:19) Hence, in an ironic way, his reason for not using beneficial reasons in justifying belief was apparently based on one type of beneficial reason - namely the undesirable moral consequences of doing so. In addition, Clifford should have argued that there is an independent epistemological duty to base one’s beliefs on purely epistemic reasons. One is being epistemologically irresponsible if he does not so base them. Under some circumstances this epistemological duty may have to yield to moral considerations. (ibid) But this in no way means there is no epistemological duty that must be outweighed by moral considerations. Although Clifford offers strong moral grounds why in general this suspension is impermissible, he does not take into consideration the initial epistemological duty that these reasons must outweigh. (p.19)

Others have objected to Clifford’s views on the grounds that very few people are converts of Christianity by virtue of their being persuaded by evidence of any kind. While attempting to present Christian doctrines rationally gives the Christian the reassurance that he does not believe something foolish, those who are not already committed to the truth of these doctrines being defended will hardly allow themselves to be convinced by such arguments in their defense. (Hill, 2007:87) If God really exists, why is the evidence not more plain and simple? The faith believer has recourse to saying that any evidence at all can probably be rationalised or explained away anyway as long as a person objects to any possibility of there being a God. All the evidence of Martians existing, for example, would convince no one if people already conclude that Martians cannot possibly exist. The tendency on the part of some of us is to demand more evidence even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Would the performance of an undeniable miracle in the skeptic’s presence be enough? How clear then, we ask, does the evidence have to be before people would universally recognise the existence of the God of the Bible? The radical fideist can thus say that even if he should grant that we need evidence that proves God’s existence, no matter how clear the evidence is made by God, it will never be sufficient for some. More evidence by itself will not adequately convince those who hold steadfastly to an opposing
view. Finally, genuinely religious people do not believe that statements such as ‘there is a God’ are true in the same manner that they believe that such statements as ‘The earth goes around the sun’ are true. (ibid) A genuine understanding of faith is one that really gets to the heart of what it is like to have faith. Faith is not simply intellectual assent; it involves much more than that – it involves an attitude of the whole person, not merely the mind.

I think Clifford missed the mark when he considered faith as ‘a bright mirage’. Reason explains and justifies what we already believe, but to me it seems wrong to say that one should never believe in something that is not proven. Not every given that we live our lives by can be proven. It is entirely within expectations that some people should be uncomfortable with the idea of what they deem as blind faith; it is immensely difficult for them to believe in that which they feel they cannot prove. However, as Kierkegaard says, everyone already has faith, and this need not be religious in nature. Faith empowers a person, and those with an authentic faith in the rewards of God are likely to be willing and eager to live their lives accordingly. Because faith is much more fundamental and instinctive, in this sense it may be said to be empowering. The level of fulfilment in one’s life then becomes dependent on the way he chooses to align his actions with his faith. Any faith based on ‘shoulds’ and which is devoid of personal passion is, in my view, unauthentic and unfulfilling. The important point here is that faith is what gives the believer a reason or purpose to live and act as he does. Reasoning will not lead to eternal happiness, and even if the believer should grant that his faith is not in the Christian God, spirit, or immortality, but faith in science, human greatness or nature’s beauty, the fact that we are where we are remains absurd and inexplicable. Hence while here we do well to set our hearts and sights on that which empowers and fulfils us.

While Clifford argued that it is unethical to believe in that which one cannot prove with evidence, William James argued that we can rely on faith even when there is no proof available. James argued that it is psychologically impossible to hold oneself back from believing things that he cannot prove. In particular, religious claims demand a response one way or the other. James’ ‘The Will to Believe’ was in many ways a response to Clifford’s essay and he sets out to make a philosophical justification for faith. (Flew, 1984:39) James offered a few definitions. Firstly, a
hypothesis is anything that might be offered for us to believe, for example, that it will rain on Tuesday, or that little green nymphs rule the earth. Secondly, a live hypothesis is one that we have at least some slight tendency to believe. The hypothesis that next Tuesday it will rain is live probably because it has some plausibility for you. The hypothesis that little green nymphs rule the earth is most likely one that you would rule out, and so therefore it is a dead hypothesis. Thirdly, an option is a choice between two hypotheses. Fourthly, a living option is one in which both hypothesis are live. Fifthly, a forced option is one in which we have no other live options - where the choice between two options is unavoidable if we are to choose at all. Finally, an option is momentous if the opportunity is unique, or the stakes are significant or the decision irreversible.

A momentous choice would include going on a ‘one time only’ outing with one’s dream date. The choice between watching one television programme or another would be trivial. Two objectives typically motivate one’s forming a belief - one is to find the truth and the other is to avoid error, and these are separable. One can avoid error by never making up one’s mind, but in doing so one will never believe the truth, because one will always believe in nothing. James argued against Clifford’s reasoning that we should believe nothing where there is a chance we will believe in error. He claimed there are worse things than being deceived, namely, going through life with an ‘excessive nervousness’, always searching for proofs. This would be a life based on avoidance that runs counter to our passionate nature. (King, 2004:131)

James pointed out that in order for a hypothesis to be ‘live’ for us, the will and passion do and must play a part. Our beliefs are usually based on ‘faith in someone else’s faith’, so logic and rational proof have little influence on what we believe. Even scientists, James contended, are often passionate about their favourite hypotheses. James wanted to address how we should form our beliefs, and arguing that it is acceptable to let passion influence belief when we are faced with a living option that cannot be resolved on rational grounds alone (for example the belief in a higher power or a belief in the inherent goodness of Man). In these cases, one has a right to believe in that which would empower him. (ibid) Logic or proof cannot always offer answers to moral questions; such questions begin and end with one’s will and passions. In other words,
where evidence is unclear or unavailable, people have the right to believe the better story rather than the worse:

‘...(T)his command that we shall put a stopper on our heart, instincts, and courage, and wait - acting of course meanwhile more or less as if religion were not true - till doomsday, or till such time as our intellect and senses working together may have raked in evidence enough, - this command, I say, seems to me the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave. To this I add, why wait for evidence to will our own experience of fulfilment if that evidence will never come?’ (http://falcon.jmu.edu/~omearawm/ph101willtobelieve.html)

General beneficial arguments like those offered by William James for the existence of God offer no unique reason for accepting the Christian God over other supernatural beings. (Martin, 1991:21) In addition, whether someone would be better off believing in Christianity’s truths instead of those of Islam or Judaism really is ‘an individual matter that must be decided with respect to the particular person’s background’. (ibid) Kierkegaard, as opposed to Clifford and James, argued that great merit lies with Christian belief that not only goes beyond the evidence but even against it. He rejected any appeal to the traditional arguments for the existence of God and any recourse to historical evidence to substantiate the claims of Scripture, seeing these as irrelevant to Christian faith. (p.24) He also championed faith as the passion which is our basic guide in living. Maintaining that religious faith was more important than reason in achieving happiness, and interpreting religious faith as a total and passionate commitment to God, he argued that people with this faith completely disregard any doubts that they may have. (Martin, 1991:22) Kierkegaard argued that even when the Christian God seems paradoxical and absurd, total and passionate commitment to God without adequate evidence for such commitment is ultimately necessary for human salvation and happiness.

As mentioned in chapter three, Kierkegaard’s discussed ‘truth’ and ‘subjectivity’ in great detail in Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Some philosophers unfairly dismiss his argument as unworthy of serious attention. This is due largely to a misinterpretation of the pivotal claim,
'truth is subjectivity', around which nearly the entire work revolves. God Himself is a subject and that is central to Kierkegaard's view of a human's relation to God. Kierkegaard argued from a fideist standpoint that it is not very useful to prove our faith. Instead, as we have seen in chapters two and three, he believed the important test for a person is his commitment to faith in spite of the absurdity of that faith. One does not require objective reasoning to rationalise passionate faith - it is the leap that makes faith worthwhile. Even if through logical analysis it emerges that it seems unreasonable that one would believe in God, the passion with which one holds the belief leads to greater fulfilment in an his life than any amount of objective evidence could. To Kierkegaard, faith is the highest virtue; above reason, improvable with reason, and faith in something makes it true - there is no truth beyond that. I share Kierkegaard's standpoint that believing in God is not a subject for intellectual debate, and we cannot empirically know God or investigate His existence objectively. Christianity is about knowing God, in terms of being in a relationship with Him; it is not about objective knowledge in terms of knowing about God. The urgency of one's decision hence cannot be underestimated, as subjective knowledge considers every delay perilous. If one is simply looking for truth a kind of objective fact, then as Kierkegaard rightly said, it will be there when one gets to it, but without being impelled by the urge of passion, one is merely 'rambling on the long road of approximation'.

Martin (1991) says that there are many problems with Kierkegaard's theory of faith. For one, religious faith as Kierkegaard conceives of it can be condemned on ethical grounds. (p.24) To allow oneself to be guided by blind, passionate faith is dangerous, yet this is precisely what Kierkegaard seems to be advocating. It also appears that Abraham, Kierkegaard's model of a knight of faith, is a fanatic who was even willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. History has shown that fanaticism can and does lead to unimaginable harm, and it was Walter Kaufmann who called fanaticism 'one of the scourges of humanity'. (ibid) Faith, as Kierkegaard conceived of it, is in that case a vice and not a virtue as soon as one contemplates the unspeakable destruction stemming from the many wars waged by opposing sides that cleave blindly to the rightness of their cause. With such great social harm that can and has stemmed from blind faith that culminates in fanaticism, Martin argues, Kierkegaard is definitely mistaken in his view of religious faith. (ibid) Another related problem with Kierkegaard's view of faith would be the impossibility of our
reconciling it with the view of a benevolent God. It seems inconceivable that an all-good and all-loving God would demand that his creatures ‘have blind faith in Him despite adequate evidence let alone with negative evidence’. (ibid) Equally inconceivable would be the idea of an all-good God who wants his creatures to be fanatics particularly when there is good reason (and evidence) for our supposing that the result of fanaticism is human suffering of massive proportions. Hence it would seem that Kierkegaard’s model of faith is not someone that an all-good God would desire or reward. Martin further argues that there are also other grounds for thinking that God would not want his creatures to have faith in Kierkegaard’s sense. According to Kierkegaard, given that Christianity is absurd and paradoxical, and that one should have faith in improbabilities and absurdities, one should have faith in the Christian God. But there may well be other religious beliefs that are even more absurd and improbable in comparison with Christianity. (ibid, p.24)

Suppose the critic concedes that Kierkegaard is right in suggesting that some sort of subjectivity is possible only through the heightening of passion, that ‘paradox and passion are a mutual fit’, and that the greater the paradox one can summon the passion to affirm, the more complete one’s subjectivity of this sort will be. Nevertheless, there are clear grounds for questioning his view that this is a desirable sort of subjectivity that constitutes the fullest possible realisation of Man’s essential nature. And even if Kierkegaard is right that for an existing human being, the attainment of complete objectivity and rationality is neither possible nor desirable, it seems we can accept this point without swinging totally in the opposite direction. And suppose, the critic adds, we grant that it is impossible for an existing human being to achieve an eternal happiness unless he takes a leap of faith and accepts that the Absolute Paradox is true. But what this merely implies is the necessity of affirming a particular paradoxical proposition for the purpose of achieving this end, and not the desirability of affirming the greatest paradox imaginable, simply because it is the greatest paradox possible. In his preoccupation with the paradoxical, Kierkegaard seems to have overlooked what it means to exist as truly human, doing the very thing he accuses Hegel of doing. It may be possible to not accord such prominence to ‘passion’ and ‘paradox’ in the process of becoming subjective, but the fact they do have such a position in
Kierkegaard’s discussion points to a very evidently one-sided view of Man’s nature that could potentially be more subversive than Hegel’s.

In response to the above objections, even if we concede that Kierkegaard has a highly specific notion of what it means to truly exist as a human being, he understood firstly the possibility of living other than along these lines and secondly, the alternative ways in which people may live their lives. He readily acknowledged that most people definitely do not achieve the specific sort of existence he advocated, and examined what he deemed to be the most common modes of existence which they can adopt. Indeed, he not only described these modes, but also further subjected them to scrutiny both in their ‘existential tenability and in their essential adequacy’ (Hall, 1993:57). Also, he presented these modes not merely as different and isolated alternatives, but as a clear but not rigidly ordered developmental sequence. As Carlisle (2006) says, Kierkegaard believed it can be demonstrated philosophically that the ultimate in subjectivity is attainable only through belief in the paradox of the Incarnation. (p.68) Genuine individuality and a truly lasting happiness are attainable by an existing human being only if he succeeds in relating himself to God. He acknowledged, however, that to understand this philosophically is a different thing from actually taking the leap of faith into a God-relationship. Since the reality of God and the Incarnation are matters that cannot be rationally argued for, it seems that while Kierkegaard has highlighted three different modes of religious existence, he has not shown that the God relationship on which they depend is actually possible, because to do so, he would have had to establish the reality of God. Consequently, he has also not demonstrated the actual possibility of the sort of individuality and true enduring happiness that presuppose the attainment of a God-relationship.

To the above criticisms, we can nevertheless maintain that Kierkegaard has successfully shown and awakened us to the fact that human life must eventually culminate in despair in the absence of the attainment of an adequate God-relationship, even if he has not argued that despair can actually be eliminated through this relationship, since its central presupposition that God exists, cannot, and need not be proven. (ibid) A popular myth concerning Kierkegaard’s work is that he was advocating irrational thinking and discounting the importance of clear and honest
thinking. While Kierkegaard did deny the power of reason to yield universal and objective truth in matters of value, one must study his entire philosophical framework before jumping to the conclusion that he is an irrationalist *par excellence*. For Kierkegaard, the life of faith is simply one in which the individual makes the decision to bear with and overcome dread and despair. Faith requires acceptance of the paradoxical nature of religion. Because God is subjectivity and we do not know what to expect or what is expected of us, we take the leap of faith with fear and trembling. There is no certainty on our part that whether Christ is God, or that there is a God who looks after us as a perfect Father would. It is in this respect that through an act of faith we accept the absurd claims of Christianity as actualities (and not mere possibilities) that will guide our lives and give us hope. Seen in this way, there would be nothing irrational with Kierkegaard's philosophy.

The critic can ask, 'What about the person who believes wrongly, even if passionately?' Kierkegaard would answer that as long as there is true passion, a person will ultimately be led to the truth. He claims that 'he who with quiet introspection is honest before God and concerned for himself, the Deity saves from being in error...him the Deity leads by the suffering of inwardness to the truth.' (O'Hara, 2004:73) Kierkegaard acknowledged that 'to exist in truth, so that our existence becomes saturated with consciousness — to be eternal, as if far beyond existence, at the same time as being in it yet in the process of becoming — that really is difficult.' (ibid, p.74) But he deemed the struggle worthwhile: 'Nature, the totality of created things, is the work of God. And yet God is not there; but within the individual man there is a potentiality (Man is potentially spirit) which is awakened in inwardness to become a God-relationship, and then it becomes possible to see God everywhere.' (O'Hara, 2004:73) For Kierkegaard, such attempts at rational justification fail simply because the gulf between the finite man and infinite God renders any rational bridge between the two pointless. Man cannot reason his way into the presence of God, any more than a mathematician could calculate his way to infinity. For Kierkegaard, what is important therefore is not our conception of God but the passion with which we believe in Him.

Kierkegaard presented an analysis of possible modes of religious existence, all of which involve God relationships of some sort, and said these modes are possible. He asked us to
consider the consequences for human self-realisation and happiness, on the assumption that they are possible, and the consequences if one does not achieve them. For Kierkegaard, the leap cannot be made with confidence but rather only in fear and trembling as it involves risking everything on that which is uncertain, improbable and even absurd, in the case of Christianity. Hence Kierkegaard’s title for the book in which he presents his analysis of the person with faith, ‘the knight of faith’, is Fear and Trembling. The knight of faith is conscious of the possibility of error in such a commitment but there is no anxiety due to this possibility. The knight keeps well in mind that according to objective reasoning, that is, reasoning that would be accepted by all (or almost all) intelligent, fair-minded and sufficiently informed persons to have established its conclusion as true or probably true, belief in God is not justified. (Martin, 1991:23) Nevertheless, it is precisely because it is not based on objective reasoning that faith is the highest virtue. Objective certainty leads to spiritual stagnation or a lack of personal growth. With faith, there is risk, ‘danger’ and adventure, all crucial for spiritual growth and transcendence. He invited us to take the leap of faith ourselves, maintaining that nothing short of this leap will make us both truly human and truly happy. Kierkegaard also added that faith is an individual choice. Contemporaries of Jesus encountered the same difficulties as Kierkegaard’s contemporaries faced (and we face today). What happened before is of no consequence, and we all must now make a choice. (O’Hara, 2004:51) I feel that insofar as there is no element of compulsion in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, and every individual is given the choice, Kierkegaard’s philosophy is acceptable. And Kierkegaard is certainly clear that if there is no God, this leap is ridiculous, and the result is a life of despair and untruth. We do not know whether God exists. This is why we must question whether or not we believe. If there were proof, what need would we have for faith? Would a God whose existence was demonstrable still be God? (Comte-Sponville, 2000:70) Even if the proofs of God’s existence point to the existence of something necessary, absolute, eternal, infinite and so on, they fail to prove that this something is a God in the sense in which most religions use the word: ‘not simply a being but a person, not a reality but a cause, not a something but someone, not only a Principle but a Father’. (Ibid, p.79)

The opposite of despair is faith, said Kierkegaard. God is the only possible Being who can completely satisfy the believer’s hope. Summarily, to believe in God presupposes some
knowledge of Him, and this is possible only through reason, revelation or grace. But as Comte-Sponville (2000) says, ‘the philosopher’s God matters less to most of us than the God of the prophets, the mystics or believers’. (ibid) Reason is becoming increasingly ineffectual in matters concerning religious belief. Kierkegaard goes to the essential point more effectively than Descartes or Leibniz: God is an object of faith rather than of cognition, or rather, a subject, giving Himself only through revelation and love. God is ‘more mystery than concept, more question than fact, more a wager than an experience, and more a hope than a thought’. (ibid, p.80) God as a postulate helps us overcome despair and it is why hope, like faith, is a theological virtue, since it postulates God as its object. Of what use, says the fideist, are arguments that leave no room for hope? To overcome existential dread and despair, Kierkegaard saw hope as being offered by the Christian promise of eternal life.

The critic might object that God is not so much a truth (the object of knowledge) as a value (the object of a desire). But for the fideist, to believe in Him is to believe that this supreme love is also the supreme truth (God) that cannot be proven or refuted, but which can be thought, hoped and believed. God is the combination of truth and goodness, and in this sense the standard for all truths. At this highest level, what is desirable equates with what is intelligible and it is this identity, if it exists, which is God. There appears no better explanation that God alone can fulfill or console us absolutely. Even Heidegger admits, in an extremely puzzling statement in an interview late in his life: ‘Only a God could save us’. We must therefore believe, says the fideist – or renounce salvation. We should note that this is why belief in God has meaning and offers meaning: firstly, without Him ‘all meaning falters on the madness of death, and secondly, there can be meaning only for a subject and absolute meaning only for an absolute subject. God is the meaning of meaning, and in that sense, the opposite of despair’. (ibid, p.82)

There are those who consciously or unconsciously hold the assumption that if a statement cannot be proved in a laboratory by the scientific method, it is untrustworthy, unreliable and hence unacceptable. Such individuals always look upon statements that must be accepted by faith as highly suspect. Biologist E.O. Wilson illustrates this position when in his book, On Human Nature, he writes, ‘The final decisive edge enjoyed by scientific naturalism will
come from its capacity to explain traditional religion, its chief competitor, as a wholly material phenomenon’. (Little, 2000:114) The fideist can reply by saying that surely there are means other than the laboratory for the attainment of real knowledge. The process of falling in love, for example, does not stem from a laboratory with a battery of instruments, yet anyone who has ever experienced it would be the very last to concede that their knowledge of love is uncertain or unreal. (ibid) The point is that true, rationally justified beliefs can be located in many fields outside of science, and the method of science has validity only for those realities measurable in physical terms. (ibid, p.115) God, in contrast, is a different kind of reality from the world of nature examined by science. While God is a personal Being revealed in history who can be known personally, insofar as God is also, paradoxically, a Spiritual Being existing outside of time and space, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that His existence can be proven through the scientist's empirical investigations.

As Little (2000) further points out, many have come to recognise that science cannot make value judgments about the things it measures. (p.116) Many who are in the forefront of scientific work are increasingly noting that there is nothing inherent in science that guides them in the ‘application of the discoveries they make’. (ibid) Also, it appears that science can reveal how something works but not why it works in a particular way. Science holds no answer, for example, to the question of whether there is any purpose in the universe. We are dependent on revelation, eventually, for many kinds of information, without which we will not arrive at a complete picture. Carl Sagan once made the religious pronouncement that ‘the cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be…Whatever significance we humans have is that which we make ourselves…and if we must worship a power greater than ourselves, does it not make sense to worship the sun and the stars?’ To this, we can readily ask why we would ever worship nature if, as Sagan himself states, it is ‘the result of blind chance and part of a pointless process’. (ibid, p.114)

God does not ask us to understand but just to trust Him in the same way a child is asked to trust his parents’ love and care when they bring him to the doctor. There is comfort once we recognise that in this life we do not have the full picture, although we do have enough
to show us 'the edges will be great'. (ibid, p.142) Carl Jung once said, 'The central neurosis of our time is emptiness.' For the believer, God in Christ gives his life cosmic purpose, binding him with His purpose for eternity. Even routine is transformed as we live the whole of our lives in God's purpose. This eternal purpose then permeates every aspect of life. (ibid, p.167) There is much power in this hope for an age where life has frequently been described as meaningless, and I agree with Kierkegaard that fulfilment for the believer comes only in God. The Christian experience offers this fulfilment in a personal relationship to Christ, for the one who experiences Christ arrives at inner contentment, joy and spiritual refreshment that enable him to transcend all circumstances. It is also this supernatural reality that helps the believer to find cause for rejoicing in the midst of adversity.

Faith remains the most important task to be achieved by the believer today, and on the grounds of faith alone does the believer realise his true self, the very self that God judges for eternity. The subjective approach to justifying Christian belief accentuates the uniqueness of the Christian experience. For advocates of this approach, the religious experience is self-validating, with the experience itself able to stand as its own proof, and the believer's faith can already be deemed tangible proof of God. Kierkegaard is right that true faith demands passionate commitment in the face of objective uncertainty, and that if this very faith were to lose its passion, then as he said in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 'proof becomes necessary in order to command respect from unbelief'. (p.31) For the religious believer, the leap of faith cannot be half-hearted, because it lies at the heart of all life.

Diametrically opposed to the strong rationalist who holds that no religious belief is justified without conclusive logical or scientific proof that the belief in question is factually true, Kierkegaard saw religious beliefs as beyond the reach of analytical methods such as logic and science, and that such beliefs therefore cannot and should not be challenged by them. As Walsh (2005) notes:

'As Kierkegaard / Anti-Climacus sees it...the possibility of offense is precisely what defends Christianity against speculation. Ironically, the speculative philosophers
think they are defending Christianity by removing the possibility of offense and making Christianity commensurable with human conceptions and expectations. Substituting doubt in place of offense, they convert the problem of entry into faith into a matter of overcoming one's intellectual reservations about Christianity rather than offense at its incommensurability. Then they propose to do away with this supposed obstacle to faith by showing the reasonableness of Christianity and providing proofs of its truth. In Kierkegaard's view, however, this procedure compromises and abrogates Christianity. The more one tries to defend Christianity by making it reasonable, mundane and worldly, the more one distorts and finally abolishes it.' (p.53)

I agree with Walsh that when the speculative philosophers remove the element of offense from Christianity, they inevitably also eliminate what they set out to defend and preserve, which is Christianity itself. In Kierkegaard's estimation, whatever leads one to reject Christianity is 'precisely what preserves its qualitative peculiarity, and the factors in Christianity that raise the possibility of offense are in turn preserved by it.' (Ibid) For Kierkegaard, then, complete freedom and selfhood are realisable in Christ. Even though one could not know God, he has to act as if he is absolutely certain of his existence, in an intimately personal relationship. One has to believe that God is totally familiar and immediately present. On the last page of Either/Or, Kierkegaard wrote that 'only the truth that builds up is the truth for thee'. In the final analysis, even if the fideist is unable to specify what counts as his justification for saying he believes because he wants to believe, this should not be perceived as meaning he is irrational. I have pointed out amply that few come to embrace the Christian faith through a process of logical proof. We may believe very sincerely that God exists, but producing proof is quite another matter. The believer's faith is different from his scientific beliefs about the world. The believer's faith allows him to make sense of the world he lives in and gives meaning to his life. I feel the Kierkegaardian view that genuine religious knowledge is grounded in faith beyond reason is defensible. Christian faith is not and has never been about articulating church dogma. Nor is it simply a set of ideas to be logically constructed and evaluated. Its truth is not contingent on human reason, even though it is through
our minds that we recognise its truth. It is the highest virtue one can reach, a matter of subjectivity and individual passion that is unmediated by the clergy or human artifacts.

To conclude, in this chapter we have considered at length the justifications for the fideistic standpoint. Those who do not see the significance, as Kierkegaard does, of the intensification of subjectivity, the achievement of radical individuality and the attainment of an enduring happiness, will remain unconvinced by his evaluation of the different modes of existence in his phenomenology of spiritual development. Given how his examination of these modes in terms of these factors is crucial to his arranging them in order, rejecting his criteria of evaluation would also mean not seeing them as ordered stages of spiritual development, and the whole pattern of spiritual development as Kierkegaard envisages it. Even if Kierkegaard's criteria of evaluation are rejected, it seems to me that his discussion of the various modes of existence is still significant, as there are many insights to be drawn concerning arranging our lives in coherent ways. For this reason, his writings have exerted such great influence upon subsequent existentialist philosophers, although few have embraced his particular form of Christianity. In closing, it is worthwhile pointing out that in any attempt to justify one's religious belief, we can only be assured of partial success. It may well be that radical fideism remains unable to stand up to deeper scrutiny; but absolute success is never a guarantee when the issue concerns the realms of the fundamentally mysterious.
Chapter Five: How One Believes is as Important as What One Believes

There are those who find the idea of accepting religious faith without any proof or evidence intimidating or at least uncomfortable, but for a true fideist there is no problem with the absence of proof, and he may well revel in this fact. The important point worth noting is that for a sincere religious believer, the most fundamental assumptions are found in the religious belief-system itself. Religious faith itself is the foundation of one's life, and, in Paul Tillich's words, one's 'ultimate concern'. (Peterson et al, 2003:45) This being the case, it comes across to the believer as a terrible mistake that we should be testing or evaluating our faith by means of an external, rational standard. For the believer, evaluating the Word of God by logic or science amounts not only to the absence of true faith, it also reflects that it is essentially science or logic we are worshipping instead of God. Rather than turning to arguments and evidence that support a belief in God, the answer to how one can come to have faith is through committing oneself, taking the leap of faith and believing without having or wanting any reasons (or evidence) for demonstrating the truth of one's belief. (ibid) As pointed out in the previous chapter, it is important to note that although Kierkegaard insists that philosophical concepts are unable to do justice to the meaning of Christianity, this does not lead him to altogether dismiss philosophy, but rather, to expand it. (Carlisle, 2006:153)

There will always be those who claim that because the matter of faith is tinged with sacredness, critical inquiry into it stirs undesirable doubt and almost seems disrespectful. Certainly, the decision to believe or disbelieve in God is of deep personal significance and in fact, I began this thesis by saying that one of the traditional philosophical questions has been whether it is reasonable to believe that God exists; what exactly does it mean for us to believe or not to believe in God? I have also pointed out that from the scientific perspective, such penetrating questions about God's existence afford no ready answer, and are plainly not answerable. Religion does not pose us problems analysable (or solvable) with the instruments of observation and logic, because these questions are simply too subjective and personal for us to reach a collective agreement. Nor do rational argument and other intellectual exercises help us get a step closer
towards appreciating the importance of such issues as being in a dynamic relationship with God, something argued for at length by Kierkegaard.

For thousands of years, great thinkers of every generation have advanced both proofs of the existence of God and valid refutations of these proofs. We discussed earlier that if God does exist, a momentous set of consequences ensues, particularly if we do enter another life once this one ceases. Given that this life becomes a mere preparation for Eternity, we must then aim to live our lives throughout with this future in view. In this concluding chapter, we consider a few final arguments against fideism to see if some sort of defense could be mounted against them. Throughout this thesis, I have maintained that God is beyond human comprehension and that between what we think and say about God and what He is in Himself, there will always be a clear disproportion. In these final paragraphs, I remain mindful aware of this disproportion. I feel that in any attempt to justify the believer’s faith and God’s ways to Man, the greatness of the Divine Being will not be able to be fully grasped by finite human minds. It may also well be the case that even after we are done with our utmost thinking, God’s thoughts still remain higher than ours.

Antony Flew (1984) once asked if there are events that would qualify as sufficient evidence against the existence of God to compel the believer to stop believing. Flew opines that for believers, nothing would, and that believers will continue to believe in God regardless of how circumstances on Earth unfold. (p.72) Whatever arguments advanced against theistic belief, believers will persist in believing just as before; God will still be viewed as a loving Father even if a believer were to witness, say, a plane crashing into a skyscraper and killing thousands. Flew is right in the observation that adverse circumstances or outright evil will not be viewed by the Christian theist as falsifying faith. This is so because there is a non-evidentialist sense in the way he believes that God exists. As Thompson (2007) says, the believer is ‘not necessarily being difficult or illogical, it is just that the basic belief lies below the level of logical argument and touches an experience that is independent of subsequent interpretation’. (p.67) It is also likely that Christians will cite a personal answer when called upon to justify their faith in an Entity that defies logical justification. They will declare independent grounds for belief in God’s goodness, saying that in moments of heartache and sorrow they have turned to God in prayer and derived
comfort, experienced a lifting of their burdens, and felt an enduring, sustaining presence. In fact, to the question of why believe that there is a God at all, the fideist response seems likely to be that presupposing God exists offers an explanation of the purpose behind our world; why there is the opportunity to shape our character and the environment in which we live; why a well-authenticated account of Christ's life, death and resurrection exists; why laws of science exist; why throughout the ages men have had the apparent experience of God's guidance and so on. (ibid) Hence it is the case that the hypothesis of God's existence helps the believer make sense of his whole experience more effectively than any other explanation that can be propounded, and for him this alone is sufficient justification for believing it to be true.

Empiricism says that properly inferred or deduced knowledge must ultimately be derived from one's sense-based experience. Hence it does not hold that we automatically have empirical knowledge. For those who advocate that there is no God, this belief that our physical senses can experience all that is knowable, is a very 'scientific' and liberating philosophy. For the religious, faith's affirmations are seen as more encompassing, more fundamental and self-grounding than others and do not need validation by rational insight or argument. For the faith believer, even though we do not experience God through any of our five physical senses, his assurance is derived from knowing, believing, and following a God who is true, not from assiduously working out logical arguments. In that respect, religion is to be understood in a non-cognitive way. Indeed, the merit of faith is seen as diminished if belief steps in only if reasons are offered. The fideist's quest for God calls for passion and inwardness, and in turning to faith, he concedes the non-rationality of his belief, and further to this, faith would be unnecessary if he had evidence strong enough to eradicate reasonable doubt of God's existence. The assurance of the believer also stems from the awareness and conclusion that a loving God does exist who can be known in an intimate, personal way. Thus faith affirms a living God's presence and accessibility to the believer by means of direct prayer, demanding no proof that can establish that He cannot be conceived of as such. The fideist would also say that even if we grant that one may have reasons based stoutly on the demonstrations of God's existence, he should be willing to believe on God's authority alone.
Fideistic approaches to religion give the believer a justification for viewing philosophical analysis and metaphysical ambiguities as mere intellectual endeavours that do not cultivate or deepen a belief in or relationship with God. The fideist’s belief in God is a choice, and his faith in God is an active trust firstly in life’s underlying goodness and secondly in the fact that God stays with the believers even if empirical evidence points to the contrary. Christian belief is hence based on hope and love because this is the example lived supremely by Christ. It is worth noting too that there is equal validity in the choice of unbelief, and refusing the choice also constitutes unbelief. Atheism and nihilism are in that respect also real choices. Since faith entails belief in the absence of rational demonstration, all propositions of faith, regardless of their specific content, are, as mentioned previously, non-rational. It is also true that the more we come to know God, the less we are able to ‘grasp’ Him with our reason. The critic can object by saying that if God is a caring, faithful Father who reveals Himself to humanity, it seems almost a paradox that God is present while at the same time seems not to be. His hiddenness can be seen as baffling. In fact, Christians are sometimes ridiculed for believing in a Being they have never seen, and atheists often liken faith in God to believing in Santa Claus, a belief that is acceptable in the case of children, but surely not in the case of mature, rational adults.

In *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955), Anthony Flew presented a story (originally devised by John Wisdom) to examine ‘the limits to which one could go in qualifying a statement whilst claiming that it was true’. (Thompson, 2007:45) In this story, two explorers stumble upon a jungle clearing that has a mixture of flowers and weeds. One explorer claims there is a gardener who comes to tend it, while the other says there is no such gardener. Since no gardener appears, they devise different tests to check for this invisible gardener’s presence. In the end, one explorer still thinks there is an invisible, intangible, silent gardener who is undetectable by any means. (ibid) The other, in frustration and unable to draw any distinction between such a gardener and an imaginary gardener or no gardener at all, asks, ‘Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?’ (Flew, 1984:74) Indeed, what difference does it make if your mysterious gardener exists? You have qualified him out of existence. All we can say about him is that he is unlike any gardener we have ever encountered. He has no body, uses no tools, is seen
by no one, acts without being physically present, and the like. In fact, we do not know what he is like; and you do not even have the right, without some sort of test, to claim he is a gardener or has any specific qualities at all. Therefore, you cannot use your belief in this gardener to explain anything that goes on in the garden. So why not forget about him? Hence the claim that there is a gardener ‘dies the death of a thousand qualifications’. (Thompson, 2007:45) From this parable of the Skeptic and Believer, some dominant themes and discussions have emerged. In it, we see how what begins as an assertion that something exists or that there is some analogy between certain complexes of phenomena, ‘may be reduced step by step to an altogether different status, to an expression perhaps of a picture preference’. (Flew, 1984:72) Firstly, insofar as one explorer interprets the clearing as a garden while the other does not, we can say experience involves interpretation. Facts alone do not determine how something is interpreted. Secondly, one’s interpretation leads to commitment; one explorer chooses to view the world in a particular way, and he commits to that view. This has a bearing on the manner by which subsequent evidence is assessed. The other explorer is unwilling to abandon the claim that there is a gardener because this is not just a hypothesis for him, but a matter of faith. (Thompson, 2007:45)

The above story is undoubtedly a potent objection to religious faith. If there are no possible tests for God’s existence, how does believing in God differ from, say, believing that there is an invisible creature clinging on to me at this very instant? Also, we cannot conclude if a claim is true unless and until we know what we mean by a concept contained in the claim. For instance, how can I go hunting for say, ‘wisywigs’, unless I knew what they looked like or what properties they are supposed to have? And if I cannot even describe the properties of ‘wisywigs’, then besides my not being able to find one (given that I could not recognise something as a ‘wisywig’ even if one was right before me at this instant, I would not know what it is that I am looking for. In the same vein, if we do not know what we mean by God, or what it means to be infinite and eternal, how would we know what it would be like to encounter such a Being? Kierkegaard speaks of the leap of faith in which we embrace a Being that is infinite and eternal. Yet if we do not know what these terms mean, might our leap not be tantamount to a leap in the dark?
The fideist, in reply to the above, can say something like this: The story suggests we can describe literally what is ‘real’, since, as Thompson (2007) says, the ‘gardener’ in question dies the death of becoming gradually less literally a gardener. (p.45) However, where it concerns God, many believers would readily say that a God who literally exists would certainly not be the sort of God they are referring to. For example, God could be described as ‘Being itself’ rather than as ‘a being’. Reason seeks knowledge that encompasses logical processes, intuition, insight and the psychological elements within the process of knowing. Religious faith, in contrast, is opposed to reason as an authority that is superior and independent. Even though God is beyond rational explanation, the believer’s belief in Him is what enables him to make sense of the world around him and offers meaning to the evidence of a cause, a purpose and the moral values he finds surrounding him. And this belief does seem to respond to his questions differently from other forms of belief system. The believer can also add that the personal transformation he witnesses in his own life and the lives of many others who have placed their faith in God is what eventually (and sufficiently) convinces him that his faith in God is real. This, I feel, would already be good justification for religious belief. The believer can further add that if belief in God makes a difference in the life of the person who believes in him (as Kierkegaard advocated), then this alone adequately justifies faith. Faith does not eliminate contradictions and absurdities. Rather, through faith one believes in spite of contradictions and absurdities. One’s faith in God as a believer is an active trust that God exists for him even if evidence points against that. And when one takes a leap of faith, he embraces the religious message passionately, unconditionally, absolutely, without reservation or doubt, even if this message is absurd and cannot be understood by mere human intellect. In one’s leap of faith, he is making this message his own, and starts to live as though he is eternally standing in God’s presence. The religious message is hence true for the believer not simply in the way any plain fact about the world is true.

In witnessing how this world is fraught with needless pain and suffering, at times we do feel an overwhelming sense that life is meaningless. In our despair we often question the purpose of behind this and the reason for our being here. The believer’s faith in God could be said therefore to constitute a stand against this world’s reality. It is a belief that there is a purpose to this world, that it is grounded on, bolstered by and leads us to an ultimate Reality, namely God.
Himself. This fundamental Christian belief in a deeper reality, a purpose and meaning to all life, can never be based on absolute certainty, appearances and reason, but on trust in the goodness that underlies life in the plain face of opposing evidence. As pointed out in the earlier paragraphs, it is equally based on hope and love because this is the example lived by Jesus Christ.

Opponents to the above view might still insist that since God cannot be seen or touched, and His existence can neither be proved nor disproved by scientific or philosophical study, it seems strange for the believer to put his trust in Him. One might even ask is there is indeed any point in attempting to make sense of something that is beyond sense by definition. However, from the faith believer’s perspective, it seems difficult to dispense with or dispose of God as a ‘useless’ concept, like the ether in physics. While we lack hard evidence supporting God’s existence, many have opted to have faith in Him anyway perhaps because they understand that believing in God has a positive effect on their lives. Believing in God seems to offer significance and assign value to human life, despite its fragility. It is in this sense that we note how religion has an appeal as it offers values by which to live and hence a basis for morality. This also explains why it continues to flourish despite abundant problems and criticisms. As Thompson (2007) rightly puts, religious beliefs continue not because there is some intellectual conclusion reached about their validity, but because people benefit from them. People draw comfort from it in times of difficulty and loss, and turn to it for guidance in moments of indecision. (p.150) One could say (as William James would) that ‘beliefs do not work because they are true, but that they are true because they work’. (ibid, p.31) Also, besides the changes the believer witnesses in his own life and the lives of others, the believer is open to saying that the Bible offers more spiritual guidance and ‘makes more sense’ than ignoring it would. Faith, then, can be said to be inspiring, positive and motivational. All too often we speak of faith almost as if it is about compelling ourselves either to be blind or to gnash our teeth and ‘see’ something that is not there. I feel that faith should be seen instead as the place where knowledge, action, and happiness originate. There is no need to conceive of faith as if it were our goal instead of starting point.

I argued from the fideist standpoint that if amassing arguments and evidence in favour of belief in God is a fruitless endeavour, then a person can only come to have faith through a leap of
faith. The fideist says we know from experience that applying reason to problems and challenges can be very helpful in mathematics, logic and science. Over this last century, the realisation has become more acute that there are many fundamental things that reason simply cannot do. In fact, as Geisler (1980) believes, a possible conclusion that can be drawn concerning the relation of fideism to present-day concepts of truth would be that few people think reason (including science) affords us certain (or definitive) answers to anything. Faith renders it possible for one to have religious belief, and must simply step in to plug the gaps in our intellectual and ideological life. Where religious beliefs are concerned, there are no adequate rationalistic or probabilistic grounds upon which we base them.

John Macquarrie once expressed the view that faith in God is a total attitude of the self. Indeed, I am of the view that genuine Christian faith is a matter of subjectivity and one’s individual passion. Unconditional commitment is essential to faith, and it definitely is not about blind adherence to church dogma, or logically evaluating a set of ideas. I feel the Kierkegaardian view that genuine religious knowledge is grounded in faith beyond reason is defensible. Kierkegaard is right in saying that true faith not only calls for passionate commitment but also commitment in the face of objective uncertainty. As the leap of faith lies at the core of the believer’s life, his leap therefore cannot be half-hearted, and since only on the basis of faith does the believer have a chance to become a true self, it follows that faith is the most significant task of all for the believer. God judges this self for eternity. While God is the great Unknown, the believer nevertheless has to believe that He is immediately present and completely familiar. We cannot know God, but must conduct ourselves as if we are absolutely certain of His existence, in an intimate and personal relationship (like one between a son and his father, or even between two lovers).

For the strong rationalist, religious belief is never justifiable unless there is conclusive logical or scientific proof pointing to the belief being factually true. In diametric opposition to the strong rationalist, Kierkegaard saw religious beliefs as beyond the reach of analytical methods such as logic and science. While we may believe very sincerely that God exists, offering proof is another matter altogether. Nevertheless, many people will continue to demand some form of
intellectual support in order to persist in their beliefs. To the rationalist statement that one can believe only in those things that can be scientifically proven, the faith believer can reply that there are many things in life that undeniably exist but that cannot be scientifically proven. In addition, for certain, few come to embrace the Christian faith through a process of logical proof. Where the matter concerns one's salvation, the attempt to understand God (or His actions) runs counter to believing in Him, and rationality, I feel, will only hinder faith. This thesis has maintained throughout that religious believers will claim that a belief in God is never the result of considering a heap of arguments. The religious believer's leap of faith, which falls outside of the whole enterprise of providing justification, is for him weighted and real, definitely demanding an act of will, commitment and preparedness. This passionately held faith, other than being very different from his scientific beliefs about the world around him, offers him assurance of God's presence, gives his life meaning and hope as well as helps him know God. Seen in this light, I find Kierkegaard's radical faith a defensible justification for religious belief.

For any individual, the highest virtue is the radical trust of faith, as Kierkegaard rightly put. His philosophy calls a personal response from the individual, demanding a willingness to turn inwards and uncover truths about himself, to exercise choice and most crucial of all, to become an authentic human being. (Carlisle, 2006:153) In responding to Kierkegaard one also responds to his own condition, and it is in responding to his own condition that he takes total responsibility for his life. In order to take responsibility for one's own life, one has to acknowledge his limitations, capability of making mistakes and above all, the necessity for forgiveness. In The Point of View for My Work as an Author, Kierkegaard claimed that his philosophy involves attempting to communicate the truth about Christianity, clarifying its purpose and meaning. Specifically Christian concepts hence underpin his meticulous and earnest analysis of human existence. Critics thus at times question the helpfulness of Kierkegaard's works for the person who is not even engaged in the task of becoming a Christian. Indeed, to other religious traditions, are Kierkegaard's views on faith applicable? Also, to people who have a non-religious outlook, how would his philosophy be significant or mean anything at all? I feel we can offer a defense here by saying that because Kierkegaard discussed religious questions not from the start point of dogmatic theological claims but rather from that of an existing individual, some of his ideas can
still be of relevance and significance to illuminating other forms of religious life. After all, in most religious traditions, themes such as faith, love, suffering and freedom are important and dominant as well.

In a large integrated system of philosophy or theology, the individual becomes insignificant, and Kierkegaard found this unacceptable particularly as his vision was that of an individual of responsibility who must make profound decisions that determine his life. His views on God's unconditional grace, in contrast to all ecclesiastical formalism, have come to influence many, and his work is relevant not just to Christians although he wrote from a Christian standpoint. (McEnhill & Newlands, 2004:173) For Kierkegaard, faith becomes possible only through an awareness that we are always in sin. However, he must not be taken as having an unrealistic view of what faith engenders, because he was definitely not brazenly suggesting that the Christian simply casts aside his worldly concerns upon making the leap. Rather, he was saying that the believer continues to hope for happiness in his life. The critic may say that this attitude is contradictory or absurd, but for Kierkegaard, to harbour hope in this way constitutes the clearest expression of faith and passion. It is by means of this faith that a person continues to be open to God's grace, and comes to perceive as God's gift all circumstances in life, whether adverse or otherwise. In this connection, Solomon (2001) sums it up clearly:

‘The acceptance of Christianity is in fact an acceptance of a way of life, a life of suffering, but suffering from a secular third person standpoint for no reason whatsoever. At the basis of this suffering is the doctrine of one's relationship before God, as signified by Christ. This doctrine is not something true or known, or even literally believed. It is a feeling one has of constant guilt and despair, but whose object (one's sin before God) must forever remain, not only a 'mystery', but forever incomprehensible. To be a Christian, therefore, is to embark upon this 'irrational' way of life.’ (p.75)

Further, any genuine gift from God must come to the believer as unexpected, and yet, as Carlisle (2006) rightly says, 'a certain expectation is required in order to be ready and open to
receive it'. (p.81) In the final analysis, the subjective approach to justifying Christian belief, which is the focal point of this thesis, takes as its focal point the uniqueness of the Christian experience. In the believer’s faith lies the real proof of God’s existence - he demands no further proof or evidence because his faith alone is already deemed as tangible proof of God. For those who advocate this approach, the experience of religion is self-validating to the extent that it stands as its own proof.

It is difficult to expect unanimity of opinion concerning the issue of the existence and nature of the Ultimate Reality. Thompson (2007) writes,

‘We have seen that a religious believer, faced with a logical argument about the existence of God, is going to be inclined to consider only those elements that favour the conclusion that God exists. But it is equally true that the atheist will equally come to religious arguments with the intention of dismissing any conclusion that does not fit his or her perspective. It is therefore very difficult to consider arguments in the philosophy of religion in a completely objective or unbiased way.’ (p.109)

If science is about the soluble, we can say religious faith lies outside of the soluble, because God’s existence is simply beyond our human competence to ‘solve’ as a ‘problem’. Besides, it seems that for every proof of His existence we come up with, a plausible refutation would surface. And a theist can never claim certainty over what God’s reasons are for the things He does. Likewise at the intellectual level we cannot suppose that we can ‘solve’ this issue called ‘God’. Even if historically, the Christian position has been that it is God’s Ultimate Divine Plan to restore Man to a vital personal relationship with Him, it remains patently the case that we cannot know scientifically whether there is an Ultimate Divine Plan. Therefore we are left to concede at some point that knowledge ends and faith must be allowed to step in. Religious belief simply ‘engages the whole person and not just the intellect’. (Hannay, 2003:60) However, one should not hastily draw the conclusion that theism is hence incoherent, inconsistent, or worse, a deluded or irrational belief. By the same token, even if the Kierkegaardian fideist is unable to specify what his
justifications are for saying he believes because he wants to believe, this must not be perceived as
meaning he is irrational or delusional.

In any argument, one sees the attempt to offer some support for a belief, and people can
advance arguments of all kinds when it comes to demonstrating they believe something. Also, in
ordinary life, our certainty about something usually depends on the assessment of the available
evidence. Many theologians have reasoned that Man is unable to find any ultimate answers to his
life (including his salvation) through either evidence or argument, hence the need to base his
commitment ultimately on faith alone. It is perhaps in this sense that Paul Kurtz (1986) means
when he describes fideism as a ‘transcendental temptation’. According to the fideist, the
transcendental argument of Cornelius Van Til, William Paley’s Design argument, Norman
Geisler’s Cosmological argument or for that matter, all arguments, neither inspire nor lead one
to faith. Thinkers like Martin Gardner belong to this group of philosophers who do not try to
rationally justify their belief. And when confronted with the absence of rational support for the
existence of God, religious believers are perfectly at ease with believing anyway. Kierkegaard’s
account of truth melds with his analysis of religious faith: Abraham is the Father of Faith simply
because he staunchly remained true to his love for his son. Faith is the opposite of sin, the latter
of which is seen as that which distances the believer from God, towards what Kierkegaard
termed as ‘untruth’. It is in this way that he unites ‘a philosophical notion of truth and a
theological notion of salvation’. (Carlisle, 2006:153) A philosophy of the religious life is what he
still produced even though in his works he argued that faith and philosophy fall under different
spheres of existence. This philosophy presents a possibility that becomes real for the individual
only if ‘it is accepted, committed to and lived out from moment to moment’. (ibid)

Kierkegaard argued rightly that what is of significance is one’s relationship to a religious
truth. What is believed is not as important as the way (or how) it is believed. (Thompson,
2007:157) He welcomed the paradoxical nature of some religious claims, emphasising that one
can only have the absurd as an object of faith. There is plausibility in Kierkegaard’s view that
religious truth cannot be analysed in an objective, detached way via evidence and argument. I feel
this plausibility is deepened all the more when we consider that our existence as human beings is
what is at stake. In the ‘approximation-process’ that is characteristic of objective, rational inquiry, where one inches ever closer to the ultimate answer, but remains unable to reach it as there is (lamentably) ‘always one more bit of evidence to consider, one more book or article to read and evaluate’. (Peterson et al, 2003:45) Consequently, we defer indefinitely the decision for or against believing in God, but for someone whose grave concern is with his soul ‘every moment is wasted in which he does not have God’. (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.178) In fact, our aim of coming to know God would in no way be achieved even if our inquiry were successful, because a situation where we could prove God’s existence and love for us would render it impossible for us to have faith in Him altogether. (ibid, p.46) Hence Kierkegaard is right in saying that knowledge does not, as Socrates claimed, reside in Man, waiting to be uncovered. Instead, it is beyond Man and finding the real truth requires a teacher, who can only be God.

As Strathern (1997) says, Kierkegaard’s tearing away of the layers of self-delusion shows one the way out of the aesthetic condition. (p.40) Even if one does not totally agree with his ultimate conclusion, which was inevitably Christianity, we have to note that most importantly, he was paving the way for us to emerge from the darkness of despair, into ‘a life where we take full responsibility for what we make of that life’. (ibid) And what makes his philosophy still applicable today would be the fact that the despair he described remains a condition increasingly widespread in contemporary times. His ‘delineations of this despair – the forms it takes, the psychological fallacies behind which it shelters – were highly prescient’. (ibid, p.41) His radical solution to this is for one to take full possession of one’s existence and accept responsibility for it by willing deeply and sincerely. This approach of self creation through conscious choice was advocated by Kierkegaard as the only way out of despair. We can say this was Kierkegaard’s most significant contribution, since this message remains as important today as it was in his time (and perhaps even more so) given the loss of faith in God by many, the threat to one’s existence posed by determinist psychology, ‘mass culture’, totalitarianism and the complexities of science. (ibid) As Hannay (2003) observes, it is ‘not that faith comes in where normal epistemic reasoning will no longer allay one’s anxiety; rather, wherever normal epistemic reasoning is in place, we are no longer talking about faith. What is wrong in the question of faith is to start looking at history’. (p.44) I agree with Kierkegaard that Christianity is not a set of doctrines that can be proved to be
true or made reasonable. The God-relationship is something the inner-man has to work on, and the ‘problem’ of Christianity is the relation of the individual to Christianity, the concern of the ‘infinitely interested individual’, and not the truth of Christianity. Ultimately, becoming a Christian is a matter of deep personal involvement or faith, and not the result of philosophical or scientific inquiry:

‘Faith does not result simply from scientific inquiry; it does not come directly at all. On the contrary, in that objectivity, one tends to lose that infinite personal interestness which is the condition of faith.’ (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p.30)

In the end, faith continues to remain a complex thing, one that influences a person in every aspect of his life. And Kierkegaard is right in his understanding that to have faith is to hold fast to an existential attitude - it is to exist in fear and trembling. For the radical fideist, more than merely believing in something beyond what evidence allows, faith is also (importantly) about having and giving hope. There will be those who press the point further that certain aspects of Kierkegaard’s radical fideism still do not fit snugly into their conception of what constitutes good justification for one’s belief in God. I feel this nevertheless does no injury to an apologetic that aims merely to be a satisfactory and not foolproof justification for belief in an inexplicable God.
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