

Chapter Three

Religious and Paranormal Beliefs

Every day, human beings make series of claims. These claims are made based on certain beliefs. Both the religionist and the paranormalist make certain claims. The claims of religion and the paranormal have some epistemological basis. This chapter, therefore, attempts to analyze the nature of belief, religious and paranormal beliefs, and the basis for belief in general and also the basis for religious and paranormal beliefs in particular. This analysis will help to appreciate better the Eupraxophic perspectives on religious and paranormal beliefs.

Nature of Belief

Belief is generally understood as the state of the mind to trust or have confidence in a person or in something. We use the noun 'belief' and the verb 'believe' very often. And so we hear people say: "This is my belief"; "I believe him"; "She believes in her job". The tenth edition of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines belief as a "conviction of the truth of some statement or reality of some being or phenomenon esp. when based on examination of evidence."¹ More so, the Microsoft Encarta Dictionary views belief as the "acceptance by the mind that something is true or real, often underpinned by an emotional or spiritual sense of certainty."² The above definitions presuppose that there has to be some basis for any particular belief. One does not believe for believing sake. In his work, "Knowledge, Belief and Faith: A Comparative Study of Christian and Islamic Epistemologies", Mohammad Iqbal Afaqi noted that belief "has been shown as an assent or acceptance of a proposition as true on grounds of

authority or evidence.”³ In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume gave a deeper illustration on the nature of belief. He avers that belief,

Consists merely in certain feeling or sentiments; in something that depends on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles of which we are not master, when we are convinced of any matter of fact we do nothing but conceive it along with certain feelings.⁴

The implication of the position of Hume is that a belief has to arise from a particular cause. It is pertinent, at this point, to distinguish between knowledge and belief. Afaqi observed that in traditional philosophy belief and knowledge were accepted as mental faculty *sui generis*. However, Plato is of the view that belief and knowledge are not the same. For instance, a jury may believe that the accused is guilty but does not have enough evidence to claim knowledge to that effects.⁵ This is why Afaqi said that “in believing we may be wrong.”⁶ H. H. Price gives an insight to the distinction between belief and knowledge. Price argued that by definition, knowledge is infallible, but belief is always fallible.⁷ In the traditional characterization, knowledge is seen as a justified true belief. Therefore, one can say that belief generally has to do with the state of the mind that arises from certain causes or principles.

Having taken a glance at the general understanding of belief, we shall now focus our analytical searchlight on the religious and paranormal beliefs.

Religious Beliefs

It is pertinent to note that religion, as stated in chapter one, is used in this study not simply as a worldview or a strong belief in something, but as a belief or set of beliefs in a supernatural or a superhuman being.

Religion is seen as a relationship between “the human person as the divine person believed to exist.”⁸ The point we have to note here is that belief is central to the nature of religion. It therefore follows to say that without a belief in a supernatural being, there is no religion. It is in this regard that Omoregbe observed that “where a belief in a deity is lacking there can be no religion.”⁹ Religion is understood here as a relationship between the human person and a transcendental being believed to exist.

The question as to whether or not such a transcendental being (deity) really exists does not arise. So long as the religious man believes that such a being really exists and believes himself to be in dialogical relationship with him, he is practicing religion. Such a being may not actually exist, yet so long as he believed in reciprocal activities with him, religion is established.¹⁰

The basic thing we have to note is that a religious person is essentially a person of belief. It is belief that characterizes a person as being a believer or not. But we are not talking about belief in anything, but belief in a transcendental being. In our society today, there are many religions, namely, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, African Traditional Religion, etc. However, our focus shall be on Christianity and Islam.

Christian Religious Beliefs

Christianity is a religion founded by Jesus of Nazareth. It has to do with those that accept the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christianity has been defined as “the religion derived from Jesus Christ, based on the Bible as a sacred scripture and professed by Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant bodies.”¹¹ The Oxford Dictionary has this to say about Christianity:

Christianity is today the world's most widespread religion, with more than a billion members, mainly divided between the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox Churches. It originated among the Jewish followers of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who believed that he was the promised messiah (or Christ) but the Christian church soon became an independent organization, largely through the missionary efforts of St. Paul.¹²

The basic understanding of Christianity from the above analysis is that Christianity is a religion that is anchored on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. There are some beliefs that Christianity as a religion holds which include the following:

1. Bible

Christians believe that the Bible (the sacred scripture) is the word of God.¹³ Bible, therefore, becomes the reference point for Christian life. For some Christians anything outside the Bible does not hold water. Bible is believed to be the words breathed out from God.¹⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church said that the “sacred scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵

2. God

Christianity believes in one God. For the simple fact that Christians believe in one God, Christianity is seen as a monotheistic religion. But the monotheistic nature of Christianity can be defined as a liberal monotheism.¹⁶ It is liberal monotheism in the sense that it accommodates belief in three persons in one God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit. This is the belief in the triune nature of God.¹⁷ Christians affirmed: “Trinity is One. We don't confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'Consubstantial

Trinity”¹⁸ Christians entertain the belief that “God is infinitely good, infinitely powerful, all-seeing, omnipresent, etc.”¹⁹ This belief accounts for the total surrender of Christians to their God. God is understood as the creator of the whole world. This is called belief in creationism as against evolutionism.

3. Human Being:

Since God is seen as the creator of all things, Christians also believe that God is the creator of the human person. It is believed that human being is created in the image and likeness of God.²⁰ So, the being of the human person is derived from the being-ness of the being of God.

4. Spiritual Beings:

Christians believe in the existence of spiritual beings such as angels, Satan and evil spirit. God created angels to serve him; it is believed that they are God's ministers. Omoregbe affirmed that “Christianity teaches that there are spiritual beings called angels.”²¹ Satan is believed to be the head of the fallen angels.²²

5. Eschatology:

Christians believe in eschatology. Eschatology has to do with the study of the last things which include death, judgment, hell and heaven. It is a strong belief among Christians that there is an afterlife. This presupposes the reason for encouraging people to lead a good life in order to inherit heaven on the Last Day.

6. Morality:

Christians entertain the belief that God is the source of all goodness. And so they believe that all good actions come from

God; invariably, without belief in God, there is no morality. From this understanding, it means that believing in God is a *conditio sine qua non* for morality.

7. *Miracle/Prayer*

The belief in miracle is not exclusive to Christians. However, miracle is at the centre of Christian belief. Jesus is believed to have performed many miracles while on earth. After his death, he was miraculously raised from the dead. His disciples are believed to have performed many miracles after his death. Miracle, for Christians, is a way of proving the power of God. More so, Christians believe that prayer can do the 'impossible'. This explains why Christians pray every day, seeking for God's favours and blessings since God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.²³

One thing we must note is that there are other aspects of Christian beliefs. However, the ones enumerated above are for the purpose of our discussion in this study. The detailed discussion on Christian beliefs is outside the scope of our inquiry.

Islamic Religious Beliefs

Islam is one of the world's religions. It was founded by Prophet Mohammad. However, Omoregbe reports that some orthodox Islamists reject the idea that Islam was founded by Mohammad. This group maintains that Islam “was not founded by Mohammad but by Allah himself. Mohammad was only a messenger through whom Allah made his message known to mankind.”²⁴ In any case, the fact is that

Prophet Mohammad is generally regarded as the visible founder of Islam.

Islam is a religion of submission to the will of Allah as revealed in the teachings of Prophet Mohammad. The *Islamic Bulletin* has it that “Islam means to submit freely to The Commandments and Will of the One and Only God (Allah). This submission should come from within, from sound belief in and conviction to Allah, with no doubt. It should also come from love, trust, and affection.”²⁵ Islam is anchored on some fundamental beliefs as we shall see below:

1. God:

Islam is a religion that believes in one God. It is a monotheistic religion. It is also seen as a rigid monotheistic religion as against the liberal monotheism of Christianity. It does not accommodate the triune nature of God. God is one and does not have a son. The word for God in Islam is Allah. Islam believes that God is the creator of the whole universe.²⁶ Scholars have noted that Islam emphasizes the divine attributes of God.

Islam places emphasis on God's attributes and often addresses him by his attributes – 'the Compassionate', 'the merciful', 'the omnipotent', ... omniscient, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-wise, all-just, and so on. God is said to have ninety-nine names, that is, ninety-nine attributes, and this forms the basis of the Muslim Rosary consisting of the ninety-nine beads.²⁷

2. Human Being:

Moslems believe that God is the creator of the human person. There is this belief in Islam about the oneness of the human person. In Islam “people are created equal in the sight of Allah. There is no superiority of one over another for any reason except

piety and righteousness.”²⁸ It is fundamental to Islamic belief to respect the dignity of the human person not minding the nationality, race, ethnic group or religious group that one belongs to. In fact, Islam believes in the equality of the human person as a creature of Allah.

3. *Angels/Devils*

It is the belief of Islam that some spiritual beings exist, such as angels, the devil and his agents. Angels are believed to be the messengers of God; while devils are bad angels. Moslems believe that it was one of the angels that was sent by Allah to dictate the content of the Quran to Prophet Mohammad.²⁹

4. *Books of Allah*

Central to the belief of Islam is the idea that God revealed his words to mankind through his prophets. This is why the books are accepted by Moslems as sacred books. The *Islamic Bulletin* records that the five most notable books of Allah are (1) Abraham's Scrolls (2) Zabur (Psalms) revealed to Prophet David (3) Tawrah (Torah) revealed to Prophet Moses (4) Injil (Gospel) revealed to Prophet Jesus (5) Quran revealed to Prophet Mohammad.³⁰

5. *Day of Judgment*

For Moslems, there is a day set aside by Allah to judge all men and women. It is the last judgment day. This is the day when the good will be rewarded with heaven and the bad will be punished with hell fire:

Following the General Judgment on the Last Day, the good people who have served Allah will go to heaven for their reward while all the

wicked people (and idol worshipers) will go to hell fire where they will be tormented forever. The believers who served Allah ... will be provided with beautiful girls, nice clothes, nice music and continuous feasting.³¹

6. Morality

The idea of morality in Islam is based on God. Omoregbe relates that “Islamic ethics is centered on God consciousness and universal brotherhood.”³² The understanding of universal brotherhood is on the basis that all human beings are God's creatures; all were created by one father and should be able to relate as people who have common origin. Islam encouraged the Moslem to be compassionate, just, meek, truthful and to strive to do good all the time.³³

7. Pillars of Islam

Moslems are expected to adhere to the pillars of Islam. For one to be regarded as a true Moslem, one must strive to abide by the demands of these five pillars of Islam. These include (a) Shahada (creed), (b) Salah (prayer), (c) Seyam (Fasting), (d) Zakat (charity) and (e) Haji (pilgrimage). Every true Moslem is expected to recite the creed every day. This is the verbal commitment and pledge that there is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.³⁴ It is also mandatory for Moslems to pray five times a day: at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and at night. Moslems are also obliged to do fasting especially during the month of Ramadan from dawn to sunset. Also Moslems are encouraged to give arms (charity) in Allah's name. Another religious exercise that constitutes the five pillars of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. This

pilgrimage is required of every Moslem at least once in a lifetime especially if financially and physically able.³⁵

Paranormal Beliefs

It is good to note that the understanding of the paranormal as stated in Chapter One has to do with the claim to knowledge or beliefs that is beyond the range of scientific explanation or normal experience. Belief in paranormals is seen from the point of view of extrasensory perception (ESP). This is awareness beyond the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. When someone experiences something without using any of the five senses, it is said to be 'extrasensory' – beyond the senses.³⁶ When we talk of paranormal beliefs, the following quickly come to mind:

- (a) *Precognition*: This is the claim to know the future without any basis on the normal five senses.
- (b) *Clairvoyance*: This is the claim to see things beyond the normal sight without any material support.
- (c) *Telepathy*: This is the claim to communicate between minds through extra-sensory means.
- (d) *Psychokinesis*: This is the claim that one can affect objects by mind-power without physical contact.
- (e) *Ghosts*: This is the claim that people's spirit can exist independent of their bodies. Ghosts are sometimes referred to as the souls of the dead that visit the living.
- (f) *Faith-healing*: This is the claim that a person can receive cures from illness without medical treatment. This belief is rampant in our contemporary society.
- (g) *Levitation*: This is the claim that somebody or something can float in the air without any material or scientific support.

- (h) *Astrology*: This has to do with the claim that human life and terrestrial lives are influenced by the positions of stars. It is said that “astrology is the most popular and widely used of the paranormal arts.”³⁷

We must note that there are other aspects of paranormal beliefs apart from the ones mentioned above. The ones stated are simply for the purpose of our discussion in this study. It has been observed that belief in the paranormal is on the increase in our contemporary society. A recent survey of students carried at Hollins College, Virginia reveals that 37% believed in ghosts, 64% believed in telepathy and 46% believed that one can make plants grow by talking to them.³⁸ Eve and Dunn exclaimed:

Surprisingly even those in the general population who have had scientific training believe in the paranormal. Thus a survey of high school biology teachers showed that 34% agreed that psychic powers could be used to read other people's minds, 22% believed that ghosts exist, 18% believed there is a supernatural force operating in the Bermuda Triangle.³⁹

From the observation of Eve and Dunn, it is clear that belief in the paranormals has to do with both the educated and the uneducated. Oguejiofor reveals that “all societies, both industrialized and developing ones have a good dose of occult belief and practices as well as belief in the paranormal.”⁴⁰

Endnotes

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4. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 624.
5. Plato as quoted in Afaqi, *Knowledge, Belief and Faith*, 148
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7. Price, as cited in Afaqi, *Knowledge, Belief and Faith*, 150
8. Joseph Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Religion* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1996), 3.
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13. Cf. Peach David, “10 Basic Christian Beliefs” in www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/10-basic-christian-beliefs/
14. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21
15. The Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1994), No. 81, p. 50.
16. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 23
17. Cf. Matt. 3:16 – 17; 28:19; John 14:16 – 17; 2 Cor. 13:14; Acts 2:32-33; John 10:30; 17:11,21; 1 Peter 1:2; CCC, Op. Cit. p. 90

18. CCC, 90.
19. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 23
20. Gen. 1:26; 9:6; I Cor. 11:7
21. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 26
22. See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*
23. See Omoregbe, *Philosophy of Religion*, 114; See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*
24. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 53
25. *The Islamic Bulletin* “Islam Beliefs and Practices” in <http://www.islamicbulletin.org/newsletters/issue24/beliefs.aspx>
26. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 55
27. Ibid.
28. *The Islamic Bulletin*, “Islam Beliefs and Practices”
29. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 56
30. *The Islamic Bulletin*, “Islam Beliefs and Practices”
31. Omoregbe, *Comparative Religion*, 56
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33. Cf. Quran, Sura 4:135
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38. P. J. Woods, “Evidence for the Effectiveness of a Reading Program in Changing Belief in the Paranormal” in *The Skeptic Inquirer* vol. 9 (1984), 67.
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