

Basis for Religious and Paranormal Beliefs

Basis for Religious Beliefs

Religion, as stated earlier, has to do with belief or a set of beliefs in a personal God or gods. From our analysis so far, it is evidently clear that belief in God which is central to religion is predominantly on the appeal to faith. It is often said that without faith, there is no religion. Faith is the source of religious beliefs; it goes beyond the ordinary reason.¹ Thomas Nagel, in his article “A Philosopher Defends Religion” noted that “God endows human beings with a *sensus divinitatis* that ordinarily leads them to believe in him.”² The implications of Nagel's position is that faith is a gift of God since it is only God that endows the human person with the capacity to believe in him. It follows to say that faith is not common to all human beings; it is meant for those who are privileged to receive it. Nagel went further to paraphrase Plantinga's views on this issue about faith thus: “faith is a kind of cause that provides a warrant for theistic belief, even though it is a gift and not a universal human faculty.”³

Faith as the central basis for religious belief is grounded on revelation. For the three popular world religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – their faith is supported on revelation. Christianity accepts the revelation of God through Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament; Islam heeds to the revelation of Allah to Prophet Mohammad as recorded in the Quran; the Jews conforms to the words of the Old Testament as revealed to Moses and the Prophets.

The Sacred texts of the three major monotheistic religions of the world, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are based upon alleged miraculous revelations received from on high. These documents affirm that three

great figures, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, have had contact with God and brought messages to earth as his prophets or, in the case of Jesus, as his son ... Appeals to revelation have been made by others: Paul of Tarsus, Joseph Smith, Baha'u'llah, Ellen White, Mary Baker Eddy, Oral Roberts and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.⁴

The basis for religious belief is also anchored on the appeal to authority. Religious people regard their founders, prophets, clergy, etc. as authorities; and as such make appeal to them for their beliefs. It does not matter whether the particular 'authority' being appealed to is logical or illogical. What matters is that the prophet or the pastor has spoken. In sum, we can say that the core bases for religious beliefs are appeals to faith, revelation and authority. However, we have to note also that religious beliefs can also be based on intuition, customs and sense-experience.

The Basis for Paranormal Beliefs

The understanding of the concept paranormal, from our earlier analysis, has to do with the claim to knowledge beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation. Paranormal belief has to do with any claim to knowledge that defies known science. Our concern now is to find out the basis for paranormal beliefs.

Recent studies have shown that the basis for the increase of the belief in the paranormals is custom or popular opinion. For Emeka Onwuama, belief in the paranormal is being reinforced by popular opinion or tradition. He observed:

Different sorts of groups, in offices, for instance, accept the popular notion that occult practices are potent; consequently, events are readily interpreted through the prism of the occult ... The result is the reinforcement of both the belief and the practice of the paranormal and the occult.⁵

Many people tend to believe in the paranormal because of what other people say. The alleged testimony being made in the churches and public places is an amplifier to the belief in the paranormal. The influence of the media cannot be overlooked in this regard. Christopher C. French and Krissy Wilson are of the view that the media has a great influence on people's assent to paranormal.⁶ They argued that the “uncritical media coverage of paranormal claims and reports of all manners of anomalous events and experiences may have a powerful influence over a largely uncritical audience ... such programmes creates an atmosphere of acceptance that paranormal phenomena must and do exist.”⁷

Another factor underlying belief in the paranormals is perceptual bias. When one's perception is already biased by religion, custom, or individual society, etc., one can begin to see or hear what is not visible or audible. This bias has to do with expectations. Some people may claim to see ghosts based on the expectations they earlier entertained. This is why French and Wilson noted that “perception in itself can often be influenced by our expectations, particularly in less than perfect observational conditions.”⁸

Another basis for paranormal beliefs stems from intuition. Some scholars are of the opinion that intuition is a higher form of knowledge. Studies have shown that intuition gives credence to paranormal beliefs.⁹ Annika Svedholm strongly argued that belief in the paranormals “lies in biases in intuitive processing.”¹⁰ It is also important to note that belief in the paranormal is influenced by appeal to authority, faith and revelation. Some pseudo-scientists, parapsychologists, and religious leaders are seen as authorities in their respective areas; and as such people tend to accept whatever they say

without objective critical inquiry. On this note, one may agree with French and Wilson that poor critical thinking is responsible for belief in the paranormals.¹¹

Endnotes

1. Thomas Nagel, "A Philosopher Defends Religion" <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/sep/27/philosopher-defends-religion/?pagination=false>
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Paul Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986), 106.
5. Emeka M. Onwuama, "The Epistemological Basis of the Belief in the Occult" in Ebelebe, Charles A. (ed.), *Spirits: Occultism, Principalities & Powers* (Enugu: SAN Press Ltd., 2012), 79
6. Christopher C. French & Krissy Wilson "Cognitive Factors Underlying Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences" in www.pnarchives.org/docs/pdf/cognitive_Factors_Underlying_Paranormal_Belief_Chapter_French.pdf
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. See D. Sosa, "Skepticism About Intuition" *Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy vol 81* (2006), 318; Onwuama, "The Epistemological Basis of the Belief in the Occult", 75.
10. Annika Svedholm, "The Cognitive Basis of Paranormal, Superstitious, Magical and Supernatural Beliefs: The Roles of

Core Knowledge, Intuitive and Reflective Thinking, and Cognitive Inhibition” in <http://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138138201>

11. Christopher C. French & Krissy Wilson “Cognitive Factors Underlying Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences” in www.pnarchives.org/docs/pdf/cognitive_Factors_Underlying_Paranormal_Belief_Chapter_French.pdf