

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THOMAS' CHARACTER FOR CHRISTIANS IN UGHELLI DIOCESE (ANGLICAN COMMUNION): A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF JOHN 20:24-29

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Abstract: *This research investigates the attitude of Thomas, a figure of controversy within Christianity, as depicted in John 20:24–29. The study posits that Christians should exercise caution in accepting false prophecies without subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny, notwithstanding the portrayal of a faithless disciple. The study employs a combination of historical, textual, hermeneutical, and phenomenological methodologies to examine the attitude of Thomas and its potential consequences for Christians within the Ughelli Diocese of the Anglican Communion in Nigeria. The research reveals that Thomas' capacity for critical reflection exceeded his initial expectations and contributed to a profound strengthening of his faith upon encountering the risen Christ. The study concludes that the trait of inquisitiveness should not be regarded as a negative Christian disposition*

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but rather as an indispensable means to uphold a steadfast and authentic faith.

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Introduction

Questioning the veracity of biblical teachings has become increasingly commonplace in contemporary society. This information can be found in various scholarly publications, such as books and essays. In contemporary society, doubt and scepticism, which represent the subsequent stage of disbelief, are regarded as quintessentially human attributes, particularly in an era where the prevailing sentiment is the abandonment of the notion that absolute truth can be attained by any individual. Thomas, a disciple of Jesus Christ, frequently serves as an exemplar of the human tendency towards scepticism. The factual veracity of the Word of God can be subject to scepticism, as seen by Thomas' uncertainty regarding the resurrection event. Is it beneficial to question the veracity of God's word? Can the scepticism and non-belief exhibited by Thomas be utilised as an exemplar to justify our own inclination to doubt? Both questions

must be answered in the negative. Is there correlation between reason-doubt and faith?

The reason these questions is important is because there are a lot of fake pastors and prophets who take advantage of people who are weak by staging fake miracles and issuing false prophesies. This highlights the necessity of doing a thorough analysis of Thomas' attitude as depicted in John 20:24–29 in order to examine its favourable elements and apply them to the moral compass and direction of Christians, specifically within the Ughelli Diocese of the Anglican Communion, Nigeria. The characteristic of inquisitiveness ought not to be perceived as a detrimental Christian inclination, but rather as an essential mechanism for maintaining a resolute and genuine faith. The Gospel of John holds significant scholarly interest, particularly in relation to the narrative involving Thomas, since it explores the theme of doubt and the later profession of faith in the resurrected Jesus.

Thomas, who was not present for the initial manifestation, expressed his scepticism and stated that he would withhold belief until he had empirical proof

of Jesus' reality. Jesus subsequently directed his attention towards the individual once more, requesting that he present his finger in order to observe his hands (Wright, 2003). Thomas expressed his belief by addressing Jesus as "my Lord and my God" (20:29), whom Jesus acknowledged, stating that Thomas had come to believe due to seeing him. Those who possess faith without visual confirmation are considered fortunate. The present research endeavours to examine the correlation between reasoned doubt and faith within the Christian community, with a specific focus on the Ughelli Diocese of the Anglican Communion in Nigeria. This study employs a range of methodologies, including historical, textual, hermeneutical, and phenomenological approaches, to examine Thomas's attitude and its potential consequences for Christians in the Ughelli Diocese of Nigeria. The discovered results hold significance for clergy members within the Anglican Communion, as they enhance comprehension of biblical scriptures and shed light on the portrayal of biblical figures as exemplars.

Diocese of Ughelli (Anglican Communion)

The Diocese of Ughelli Anglican Communion was founded in 1998 as a successor to the former Warri Diocese. It encompasses five local government units within its jurisdiction. Right Reverend Vincent Omasheho Muoghereh, was chosen for his position in 1997 and subsequently consecrated on the feast of Epiphany in 1998 (Dafiewhare, 2020). After a commendable tenure of 13 years, he departed from his position, thereby transferring leadership responsibilities to his successor, Rt. Revd. Cyril Odiboroghene Odutemu (Dafiewhare, 2011). Odutemu is currently experiencing positive outcomes as a result of divine guidance.

Following his retirement in 2010, Odutemu was subsequently elected as the bishop-elect of the diocese. The individual in question spearheaded a movement focused on spreading the teachings of Christianity and undertook several endeavours, including the establishment of the Anglican Christian Centre in Ogoni-Olomu, a Pilgrims board, and the Christ Evangel Printing Press (Dafiewhare, 2023). In January 2020, Odutemu assumed the position of Archbishop of

the Bendel province, encompassing sixteen dioceses located in the Edo and Delta States. The Diocese of Ughelli (Anglican Communion) since its establishment has experienced significant expansion and progress. These expansion and progress encompass several metrics, such as the count of cathedrals, archdeaconries, churches, chapels, and clergy.

Concept of Character

The concept of character holds significant importance in the process of personal growth and is widely recognised as a catalyst for both societal transformation and self-actualization. National identity refers to the distinctive characteristics that set an individual apart from others and play a crucial role in fostering a sense of collective consciousness, unity, and progress across several domains such as society, economy, politics, science, culture, and technology (Webster, 2004). The cultivation of an educated disposition serves as a method for acquiring knowledge, improving reasoning abilities, and facilitating the formation of sound judgements. The aforementioned entity is a valuable economic resource that necessitates substantial investment and entails a

protracted period of growth. It can be perceived as both a consumer good and a capital good (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). The establishment of robust character development serves as a fundamental pillar for contemporary societies, guaranteeing the ability to independently produce food, manufacture consumer products and provide services, implement effective management strategies, and establish sustainable economic, social, and political frameworks.

The concept of godly character, which has its roots in Hebrew culture, encompasses a spiritual framework that emphasises the organisation of both societal and religious aspects of life, as outlined in the Book of the Covenant. The focal point rests in the accentuation of both temporal and everlasting benefits, with a greater reliance on spiritual revelation rather than psychological inspiration. The influence of character traits on human behaviour is a substantial factor since it shapes the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses of individuals across many circumstances.

According to North (2008), the factors of conscientiousness, openness to experience, and

emotional stability have the potential to exert an influence on the process of decision-making. In contrast, agreeableness and extraversion are significant in the establishment and sustenance of interpersonal relationships. Grant (1985) places significant emphasis on the significance of interpersonal relationships within the context of the Christian faith. Grant underscores the necessity of commencing charitable endeavours in the presence of fellow believers, fostering a sense of communal support and encouragement. Furthermore, Grant highlights the importance of uplifting those who themselves uplift others, thereby perpetuating a positive cycle of inspiration and empowerment.

Assertiveness is a personality attribute characterised by the capacity to articulate thoughts, viewpoints, and requirements in a lucid, straightforward, and considerate manner while simultaneously acknowledging and upholding the rights and boundaries of others. The correlation between effective leadership and certain attributes, including assertiveness, self-confidence, and conscientiousness, is frequently seen. These traits facilitate leaders in effectively conveying expectations,

motivating individuals, instilling trust, and upholding a robust work ethic (Obiekwe, 2021). The influence of qualities such as emotional stability, optimism, and perseverance on resilience and coping methods has been seen.

Ethical behaviour includes actions that align with moral and societal norms, beliefs, and values and are grounded in the biblical ethical framework. This concept encompasses the qualities of empathy, compassion, and understanding towards the needs, emotions, and overall welfare of others, while also advocating for the adoption of sustainable practices (Hope, 2014). Faith has a pivotal role in human conduct, serving as a fundamental element that establishes a moral structure and principles to direct individuals in their behaviours and choices. Frequently, it places significant emphasis on the provision of service to others, acts of benevolence, and the pursuit of social justice. Faith communities frequently exhibit collective beliefs, norms, and rituals that have an influence on individual behaviour (Chua, 2010; Obiekwe, 2021). During challenging circumstances, individuals may seek consolation and

comfort by relying on their religious beliefs for emotional support and direction.

The cultivation of moral behaviour plays a crucial role in the advancement of Christianity, as it functions as a compelling testimony to individuals who do not adhere to the faith, hence exerting a magnetic pull towards the Christian belief system. Christians maintain the belief that God serves as the ultimate arbiter of morality, and through adherence to moral standards, they strive to emulate God's character within their personal lives. The concept of God's love is often linked to qualities such as mercy, forgiveness, and grace and is perceived as a powerful influence that aims to promote healing, reconciliation, and spiritual metamorphosis (Rushdoony, 2009). Christians are motivated to foster affection for others and demonstrate virtuous attributes in their interpersonal connections and engagements. Christians endeavour to embody and impart divine traits such as joy, serenity, long-suffering, and kindness. Through adherence to these principles, individuals who identify as Christians have the ability to cultivate a connection with the divine and advance the welfare of society as a whole.

John 20:24-29: A Theological Interpretation

24 Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” 26 Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” 28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you

have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

The Gospel of John, which is one of the four canonical gospels included in the New Testament, is traditionally ascribed to John the Apostle and is commonly dated to the period between 65 and 66 AD (Carson, 1991). The text offers a unique theological viewpoint regarding the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, with a particular emphasis on his divine nature and his role as the incarnation of the Word of God. The tale frequently incorporates extensive dialogues and speeches, with a particular emphasis on themes such as faith, everlasting life, love, and the interconnectedness between Jesus and God the Father. The Gospel has exerted a significant impact on Christian theological and spiritual discourse, thereby moulding conceptions pertaining to redemption, the divine essence, and the interconnection between adherents and Christ (McDurmon, 2007). The testimony of the early church fathers provides evidence regarding the origins of the gospel. John, in particular, articulates the concept of God as the Word and affirms that God is the illuminating force for humanity.

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas the Twin, was not present among the group when Jesus made his appearance. The name attributed to him in John 20:24 could potentially be interpreted as a nickname or honorary title (Maniparampil, 2004). The absence of scriptural evidence leaves uncertain the possibility of his birth as a twin alongside a sibling, as well as the identity of any potential twin. Twins can exhibit either monozygotic or dizygotic characteristics, contingent upon the specific fertilisation procedure. These individuals possess identical genetic material and exhibit the same biological sex. Twin studies are often used in academic research to look at how genetic and environmental factors affect a variety of traits, such as personality, IQ, and the chance of getting diseases (Maniparampil, 2004). Twins possess a unique and profound tie and connection that arises from their shared experiences originating in the womb and frequently extending throughout their lifetimes. They mutually offer one another a certain type of camaraderie and support.

The passage in John 20:25 centres around the scepticism articulated by Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, who was absent during Jesus' manifestation

to the other disciples after his resurrection. Thomas had a sceptical attitude and articulated his requirement for empirical evidence in order to foster belief. This text emphasises the significance of having faith and believing in Jesus as the resurrected Lord. Thomas was visited by Jesus, who extended an invitation to him to physically interact with his wounds. This encounter prompted Thomas to express his belief by declaring, "You are my Lord and my God!" Within the wider framework of the Gospel of John, this particular verse functions to underscore the significance of faith and the influence of individual encounters in shaping one's belief (Ngewa, 2003). Furthermore, this incident serves to underscore the compassionate nature of Jesus, as he actively engaged with Thomas during his period of doubt and furnished him with the evidence he was seeking. The eleven disciples experienced a significant state of bewilderment, leading to a profound erosion of their faith in Jesus.

In the biblical passage of John 20:25, Thomas, one of the apostles, expresses his scepticism about the resurrection of Jesus, stating that he will only believe if he is able to visually observe the marks left by the nails

on Jesus' hands and physically insert his finger into those marks (Sylva, 2013). This is in contrast to the prevalent emphasis on empiricism within contemporary academic circles. Thomas's response presents a contrasting viewpoint to the notion that science has the ability to uncover the constant mechanisms via which God sustains and governs creation and thereafter utilise this knowledge to exert control over the natural world (McDurmon, 2007). The accuracy of secular science's forecasts regarding the distant future and past may be subject to potential flaws due to its disregard for the teachings of Scripture. The message conveyed by Jesus in the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man underscores the notion that the resurrection from the dead holds greater significance than any physical evidence. Origen (1998) recognised that the criticism directed towards Christianity did not arise from a solid foundation of knowledge or the careful examination conducted by philosophers. Instead, it stemmed from the resentful and biased mindset of those who did not believe in the faith.

In the biblical passage of John 20:26–27, it is recounted that Jesus manifests himself to Thomas and urges him to extend his finger and observe His hands,

while also encouraging him to abandon his scepticism and embrace faith. This suggests that placing a strong emphasis on demanding empirical evidence prior to exercising faith is not seen as very virtuous. Empirical knowledge is acquired by the process of observation, experience, or experimentation, utilising real-world data as opposed to theoretical conjecture or abstract reasoning (McDurmon, 2007). The significance of this approach lies in its ability to facilitate the analysis of empirical occurrences, the recognition of recurring patterns, and the development of overarching principles or laws. Empiricism, as a philosophical framework, relies on the perceptual experiences derived from the five senses, but it lacks the capacity to establish a firm and unequivocal foundation for matters of faith. The term "nature" functions as a collective noun, denoting the entirety of the universe, and thus is not deemed an appropriate reference point for Christian intellectuals. The concept of nature can be understood as a world that has deviated from its original state, displaying defiance against God and being tainted by the presence of sin and mortality (Jordan, 1986). In order to establish a benchmark for evaluation, it becomes necessary to shift our focus

away from nature and towards a higher authority, namely God.

The core of Adam's rebellion did not stem from intellectual factors but rather from ethical considerations. The sheer acquisition of knowledge does not fundamentally change one's standing in relation to the divine. Nevertheless, the application of knowledge to the realm of God's creation can provide advantageous outcomes; however, it is incapable of generating a universally agreed-upon system of ethics. This is the rationale behind the eternal separation of individuals by God during the day of ultimate judgement. The acceptability of Thomas's empiricism depends on how different it is from the rebellious person's hyper-empiricism and how well it avoids the ethical dualism seen in ancient Greek philosophy (Oderotor, 2012). It is widely believed, though, that empiricism is not valid in situations where the natural world is seen as flawed and unable to provide accurate and unbiased information through the five senses. The Apostle Paul provides a concise summary of this concept, stating, "Although I have the freedom to engage in all things, not all things are beneficial or constructive" (1 Corinthians 10:23). Additionally, he

emphasises the importance of relying on faith rather than relying solely on what can be perceived visually, stating, "For we live our lives guided by faith, not by what we can see" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The exclamation "My Lord and my God!" found in John 20:28 is often regarded as one of the most profound and significant phrases within the biblical text. The confirmation of Thomas's genuineness in his request for Jesus' lordship is evident due to his familiarity with the miraculous talents demonstrated by Christ. The assertion "Jesus is Lord" represents the first documented encapsulation of Christian beliefs. Christians demonstrated unwavering commitment, as they had already pledged their primary loyalty to Emperor Jesus rather than Caesar. Jesus, the Son of God, has been exalted by God to a position of supreme authority, surpassing all other powers, and bestowed with the utmost level of prestige. The concept of the deity of Christ can be interpreted as the Apostles grappling with this particular aspect of his identity (Irenaeus, 1997). However, it is plausible to suggest that the crucifixion event may have significantly undermined their faith thus, referring to Jesus as "my God" in this way is likely to have caused a big change in

their spirituality and their beliefs. This event was later recorded by the respected people who met at the Council of Chalcedon and summed up in the Creed of Chalcedon.

The Benediction of Jesus, as mentioned in John 20:29, pertains to a distinct biblical occurrence involving the disciple Thomas and Jesus Christ after his resurrection. Thomas was conspicuously absent at the initial encounter of Jesus with the other disciples after his resurrection (Ngewa, 2003). However, upon witnessing and physically interacting with the wounds of Jesus, Thomas became thoroughly convinced and expressed his belief by exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" Subsequently, Jesus proceeded to offer a benedictory response, wherein he acknowledged Thomas' professed belief while simultaneously underscoring the significance of faith for individuals who have not directly experienced the resurrection of Jesus.

An Evaluation of Thomas' Character

Apostle Thomas, sometimes referred to as Doubting Thomas, was among the twelve apostles

selected by Jesus Christ to serve as his primary disciples and disseminate his teachings. The etymology of his name is predominantly rooted in the New Testament, including the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Thomas is commonly known as "Doubting Thomas" as a result of an event recounted in the Gospel of John (Osiek & Balch, 2006). Following the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Jesus, he manifested himself to his followers; however, Thomas was conspicuously absent during the initial encounter. Upon being informed by fellow disciples of their encounter with the resurrected Jesus, Thomas exhibited scepticism and articulated his requirement for empirical evidence, specifically expressing his need to visually perceive and physically interact with the wounds inflicted upon Jesus (Sylva, 2013). One week subsequent to the initial encounter, Jesus manifested himself once more to his followers. Upon witnessing and personally encountering the tangible proof, Thomas fervently declared, "You are my Lord and my God!" This occurrence is frequently regarded as a confirmation of the resurrection of Jesus and Thomas' expression of belief.

Following his ascension, Thomas embarked on a journey to disseminate the teachings of Jesus across many regions of the world. Legends and narratives have linked him to evangelistic activities in India, where he purportedly had a significant role in establishing Christian communities. There is a prevailing belief that Thomas ultimately met martyrdom due to his unwavering commitment to his religious beliefs. The New Testament presents the character of Apostle Thomas, with a primary focus on his portrayal in the Gospel of John (Ngewa, 2003). Thomas is frequently acknowledged for his inclination towards scepticism and uncertainty in relation to the resurrection of Jesus. The individual exhibited a commendable level of honesty and directness in expressing his reservations, showcasing a genuine pursuit of truth and a proactive approach to addressing difficulties. In spite of harbouring initial uncertainty, Thomas finally demonstrated a tremendous level of confidence in Jesus, as he transitioned from a state of doubt to one of conviction upon receiving the opportunity to witness Jesus' wounds (Sylva, 2013). The individual demonstrated a strong commitment to adhering to Jesus' teachings, especially in the face of

difficult situations. This was evident when Jesus made the decision to travel to Bethany, which is located in close proximity to Jerusalem.

The character of Apostle Thomas encompasses a combination of uncertainty, faith, honesty, and courage. The individual's process of transformation and steadfast conviction in Jesus exemplify their ability to develop and maintain a profound sense of faith. The individual's affirmative declaration established the basis for theological and Christological progress, as delineated in the Creeds (Irenaeus, 1997). The practice of sincere empiricism, although beneficial for spiritual exploration and the progression of Christianity, possesses certain constraints that may inhibit the development of faith and hinder our connection with God. Although real empiricism has certain limitations, it continues to be a helpful instrument for the advancement of spiritual development.

The Implications of Thomas' Character for Christians in Ughelli Anglican Diocese

This study has examined the various viewpoints about doubt and faith within the Christian community,

uncovering a multifaceted story of their significance within the context of religious belief. The wide range of averages and standard deviations observed among the participants indicates a broad spectrum of viewpoints, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of the interactions between faith and scepticism (Muoghereh, oral interview, 2023). Recognizing the existence of this wide range of perspectives promotes a climate of open communication that values and accommodates various opinions. This, in turn, cultivates a more inclusive and intellectually stimulating spiritual experience, whereby scepticism is not stigmatized but rather embraced as a driver for personal discovery and development. The wide range of averages and standard deviations observed among the respondents indicates the broad spectrum of opinions, highlighting the intricate nature of perspectives about Thomas' scepticism (Sylva, 2013). The aforementioned findings underscore the importance of taking into account contextual intricacies when examining the existence of doubt and promoting nuanced discussions regarding the convergence of doubt, trust, temporality, and the complex dynamics of human belief. Through an

examination of the various perspectives present, a more thorough comprehension of Thomas' scepticism can be attained, enhancing the scholarly conversation surrounding matters of belief, uncertainty, and their intricate dynamics within the realm of Christianity.

The manifestation of uncertainty exhibited by Thomas must not be interpreted as a lack of trust. These findings underscore the importance of taking into account contextual details when examining the existence of doubt and promote nuanced discussions regarding the interplay between doubt, trust, temporality, and the complex dynamics of human belief (Maniparampil, 2004). Through an examination of the various perspectives presented, a more thorough comprehension of Thomas' scepticism can be attained, enhancing the scholarly conversation surrounding matters of belief, uncertainty, and their intricate dynamics within the realm of Christianity. In the conversation with Okorodudu (oral interview, 2023) highlights the significance of Thomas' declaration of uncertainty, which ultimately led to the pronouncement of blessings upon individuals who have faith without visual evidence. In agreement with the aforementioned perspective, Onokpite (oral

interview, 2023) asserts that Thomas' scepticism regarding the disciples' account should not be grounds for his condemnation. According to Agbemre (oral interview, 2023) the reason why the narrative of Thomas doubting the disciples' account holds significant importance in Christian teachings is due to the doubt expressed by Thomas himself.

Uhahwa (oral interview, 2023) expresses strong disapproval towards Thomas for questioning the veracity of his fellow disciples' accounts. He argues that given his extensive three-year-long companionship with them, Thomas should possess a deep understanding of their integrity and hence should not cast doubt upon their narrative (cf. Ya, 2015). Otovwo (oral interview, 2023) shares the perspective that Thomas erred in his scepticism towards the testimony provided by his fellow disciples, casting doubt on the credibility of their account regarding the resurrection of Christ (Carson, 1991). According to Omoyibo (oral interview, 2023) Thomas' declaration of doubt can be interpreted as a manifestation of an egoistic attitude, which can be categorized as self-righteousness. Orekevwie and Ahwinahwi (oral interviews, 2023), hold divergent perspectives

regarding the condemnation of Thomas for his voice of doubt. It is argued that doubt can possess a greater intensity than faith on certain occasions, and by vocalizing his doubt, Thomas was exercising his entitlement to attain full certainty in matters of belief. Ugbobor (oral interview, 2023) substantiates this stance by making reference to the detrimental impact that misinformation has inflicted upon society.

The study shows how complicated the relationship is between doubt and faith in the Christian community. It also shows how important it is to have open conversations and help others understand each other in order to effectively navigate the complicated dynamics between doubt and faith. By looking at how Thomas' doubt and faith changed as he talked to Jesus, we can learn a lot about how personal experiences shape faith (Carson, 1991). The aforementioned observations highlight the intricate nature of religious narratives and the relevance of interpretation in attributing meaning to specific manifestations. The aforementioned phenomenon has the potential to stimulate a more comprehensive investigation of the manner in which individuals' scepticism can serve as a catalyst for significant instances of belief, thereby

emphasising the fluid and impactful characteristics inherent in spiritual quests (Ya, 2015). In this sense, in the context of the correlation between doubt and faith, authentic faith necessitates a certain degree of uncertainty. In order for an individual to demonstrate genuine faith, it is imperative that they have encountered a certain degree of scepticism or uncertainty. When individuals receive prayers from a religious figure, a significant number of them tend to harbour doubts about the effectiveness of these prayers (North, 2008). Over a period of time, aided by the passage of time, individuals gradually cultivate trust in the supplications of the man of religious authority, ultimately attaining their desired extraordinary occurrences.

When considering the connection between doubt and faith, it is important to acknowledge that the mind serves as the container for both phenomena. According to Oyibo (oral interview, 2023), it was observed that the presence of doubt is an inherent component of any form of religion, rendering ultimate trust unattainable. According to some scholars, doubt is a normal part of religion, which means that no one can have complete faith. It is crucial to differentiate

between the faith that leads to salvation and the faith that enables the performance of miracles while discussing the concept of doubt (Murray, 1987; Ngewa, 2003). The reciprocal relationship between doubt and faith lies in the capacity of doubt to bring about transformative changes in faith. The presence of varied perspectives among believers can be attributed to the range of convictions and experiences they hold. This phenomenon encourages a more thorough investigation into the influence of doubt on the development of spirituality, the dynamics within religious communities, and the interpretations of fundamental teachings.

Religious leaders must contemplate the significant impact they possess in moulding the spiritual pilgrimage of their parishioners. The examination of doubt's impact on spiritual experiences and community cohesion necessitates a comprehensive analysis. As Christianity undergoes transformation within a contemporary framework, the incorporation of these varied perspectives has the potential to foster more comprehensive dialogues concerning uncertainty, conviction, and their interplay in shaping the belief structure of present-day adherents (North,

2008). A critical examination of long-held beliefs, particularly those relating to Christian theology, has resulted from the industrial revolution's arrival in the Western world along with a revival of intellectual pursuits (Maniparampil, 2004). The emergence of liberation theology has given rise to the development of the feminist movement. The use of scepticism has played a crucial role in shaping theological dialogues, hence fostering harmonious coexistence among Christians throughout society. Christian organisations have been establishing ecumenical entities with the aim of fostering a sense of Christian camaraderie among believers, thereby providing an opportunity for them to critically reassess biblical ideas that were previously dismissed.

According to Esemiteye (oral interview, 2023), the increase in the number of churches can be attributed to a prevailing inclination to critically evaluate the doctrinal stance of established churches. The application of scepticism has facilitated a process of critical evaluation among Christians, leading them to reassess their theological underpinnings and navigate a revised trajectory for their Christian lifestyle. Adjekuko (oral interview, 2023) highlights the

emergence of new religious congregations, frequently originating from conflicts between General Overseers and their subordinates. In such instances, pastors articulate their reservations regarding the leadership approach or doctrinal aspects of their general overseer, leading them to pursue their own paths. Carson (1991) asserts that reasoned scepticism, as articulated by both adherents and leaders, has significantly contributed to the enrichment of Christian theology. Scepticism should not be regarded as a transgression but rather as a methodological approach that encourages a critical reevaluation of biblical principles, aiming to ascertain their alignment with empirical evidence (Ngewa, 2003). The several translations of the Bible have contributed to an enhanced comprehension of biblical principles throughout the broader congregation of the church (Carson, 1991). The incorporation of scepticism and belief is necessary for the spiritual development of a Christian individual. This stimulates a reassessment of the role of doubt in enhancing and expanding faith experiences, highlights the need for exemplifying faith for social influence, underscores the value of trust in familial connections, and advocates for an active approach to fostering faith within the community.

The coexistence of doubt and faith is essential for the development of robust convictions among Christians (Ya, 2015). The individual consistently encourages participants in Bible study sessions to engage in questioning, as this practice facilitates the clarification of their understanding regarding the fundamental principles presented in the Bible. According to Igoru (oral interview, 2023), it is within the rights of any Christian to raise inquiries regarding any doctrine and receive appropriate responses. According to Edje (oral interview, 2023), there was initial resistance from members of his church when he attempted to convey the concept of seed faith, as it was a novel idea for them. Nevertheless, as time elapsed, their uncertainties gradually transformed into unwavering belief, bolstering not just the economic standing of the congregants but also that of the church as a whole. Marrow (1995) agrees with this stance, citing multiple instances in which he engaged with individuals from his congregation, addressing their uncertainties and ultimately guiding them into a commitment to Christ. Giving someone the benefit of the doubt should be a basic rule for all social relationships, especially ones between people of

different religions or tribes. It is significant to exercise caution when accepting information from others regarding their spouses, whereas Irudaya (2009) asserts the value of exercising scepticism prior to entering into a lifelong commitment to marriage in order to ensure the selection of a suitable life partner. Thus, it is argued that the presence of doubt is essential for the authenticity of Christian faith. Thomas should not be held accountable for his scepticism; instead, he should be regarded as an exemplar for Christians at large, illustrating how doubt and faith can contribute to the development of a more sophisticated Christian existence.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have demonstrated a nuanced and interactive correlation between doubt and faith within the personal experiences of those who identify as Christians. This observation highlights the inherent entitlement of individuals to scrutinize the veracity of a narrative and exercise their discretion in accepting or rejecting its credibility. Doubt is an inherent right possessed by all rational individuals, and the cultivation of faith through the lens of doubt

contributes to the development of intellectual maturity. The application of reasoned scepticism has significantly contributed to the development of Christian hermeneutics, namely in the analysis and interpretation of scripture by scholars from Western traditions. The expansion of Christian churches, frequently resulting from disputes with General Overseers, has played a role in the promotion and dissemination of the Christian doctrine.

It is advisable for pastors, instructors, and evangelists to demonstrate a willingness to accommodate individuals who raise inquiries regarding church rules. Furthermore, there should be the promotion of tolerance in theological discussions and the recognition of the validity of reasoned doubt expressed by church members. Additionally, individuals who identify as Christians should exercise critical thinking and rationality when engaging in introspection and evaluating their religious beliefs. Elucidating the intricate interplay between doubt and faith, discerning the potential avenues through which reasoned doubt might foster the development and maturation of individuals adhering to the Christian faith, and furnishing valuable resources for future

investigations aimed at enhancing the ethical behaviour of Christians within societal contexts. Above all, the trait of inquisitiveness should not be regarded as a negative Christian disposition but rather as an indispensable means to uphold a steadfast and authentic faith.

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List of interviewees

Names	Sex	Age	Status	L o c	Date
Vincent O. Muoghereh	M	82	Bishop (Rtd.)	Uwheru	4/5/23
Jeremiah E. Okorodudu	M	68	Clergy	Owhrode	4/5/23
Freeborn O. Onokpite	M	46	Clergy	DSC, Ovwian	6/5/23
Joseph Uhahwa	M	56	Politician	Orere, Ewhu	29/5/23
Eveline Otovwwo	F	56	Nursing	Orhuwheru	2/6/23
Joseph Oyibo	M	50	Civil Servant	Isodje, Oteri	24/5/23
Solomon Orekevwie	M	53	Clergy	Ojikpata, Oruwherun	24/5/23
Jonathan Ahwinahwi	M	34	Business	Afiesere	29/5/23

Vera Ugbobor	F	52	Politician	Ekiugbo	2/6/23
Amos Igoru	M	34	Clergy	Ughelli	19/5/23
Catherine Esemiteye	F	43	Judiciary	Isodje, Oteri	29/5/23
Aghogho Adjekuko	F	50	Civil Servant	Afiesere, Ughelli	29/5/23