

# Binary Faith and Core Rationality: Evidence-Proportionate Belief vs. Biblical Commitment — 20

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## Central claim

The target is the **binary-certainty posture**: treating unwavering high confidence in contested biblical propositions as a virtue even when the total relevant evidence materially weakens their support. For truth-seeking, the minimum standard is the **responsiveness principle**: confidence must be permitted to fall when support falls. The target violates that standard and is epistemically inferior to evidence-proportionate credence; trust, hope, or practical commitment may persist under uncertainty, but their persistence supplies no additional propositional evidence.

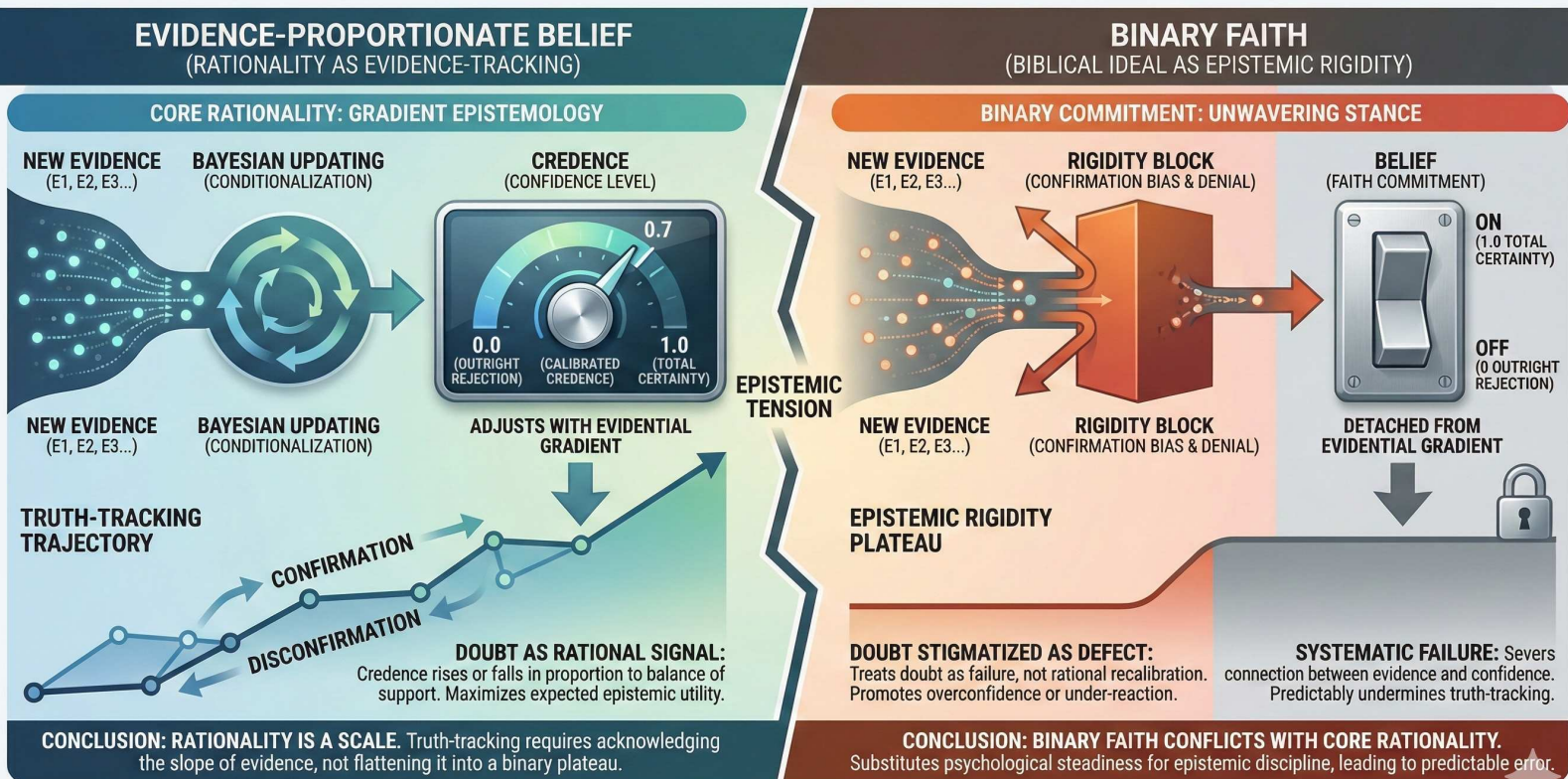
## Preview:

| Target posture                                                                                     | Responsiveness principle                                                                          | Decisive comparison                                                                             | Bounded result                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preserve high confidence because wavering is unfaithful, even when total support materially falls. | Truth-directed confidence must be allowed to move in the direction of material evidential change. | Calibrated credence can fall; the target forbids the very fall that weakened support calls for. | Reject the target as a truth-tracking norm; trust, hope, and action remain distinct stances under risk. |

*The principle does not require movement after every objection or one exact numerical credence. It applies when the agent's total relevant evidence materially changes, and it prevents practical persistence from being redescribed as evidential support.*

## Visual preview:

## THE EPISTEMIC TENSION: EVIDENCE-PROPORTIONATE BELIEF VS. BINARY FAITH



**ULTIMATE CONCLUSION:** Biblical faith, construed as binary and unwavering, conflicts with evidence-responsive rationality and is epistemically inferior to models that enforce alignment between confidence and evidence (e.g., Bayesianism, Evidentialism).

*The infographic contrasts evidence-responsive updating with the binary-certainty posture. Its right-hand trajectory depicts confidence protected from a material weakening in total support, not every biblical or philosophical account of faith; both trajectories are conceptual rather than measured empirical curves.*

## Abstract

This paper argues that the binary-certainty posture is epistemically inferior to evidence-proportionate credence for truth-seeking. The target treats unwavering high confidence in contested biblical propositions as a virtue even when the agent's total relevant evidence materially weakens their support. The comparator follows a minimum responsiveness principle: confidence must be permitted to fall when support falls. Conceptual analysis, formal constraints on credence, and the strongest accounts of faith as belief, trust, hope, or commitment converge on one result. Coherence and Bayesian conditionalization do not mechanically produce unique priors, likelihoods, or exact credences, but permissiveness about numbers is not permission to make confidence immovable. Audi, Buchak, Jackson, McKaughan, Morgan, and Plantinga show that religious belief or commitment may have non-inferential, categorical, relational, or practical dimensions. Those alternatives sharpen the category boundary. If faith is offered as truth-directed confidence, it remains answerable to materially changed support and defeaters; if it is hope, trust, loyalty, or a policy for action, its persistence supplies no additional propositional evidence. The thesis is conditional rather than sociological: it does not estimate how many Christians adopt the target, decide what any doctrine finally warrants, or condemn Christian faith that acknowledges uncertainty. It rejects only the norm that makes non-revision itself an epistemic virtue.

**Keywords:** faith; credence; evidence; rationality; doubt; Christianity; epistemology of religion

## 1. The Confidence Under Pressure

One theme governs every section: truth-directed confidence must remain answerable to the total relevant evidence. This paper is addressed especially to Christians and apologists who treat unchanging confidence as a sign of spiritual or intellectual strength. Its conclusion is direct: if confidence in a contested proposition is not permitted to fall when the evidential balance materially weakens, that confidence is not tracking the change. It may express loyalty, hope, identity, or resolve. It should not be presented as epistemically superior to honest doubt.

The target is narrower than “faith” without qualification. It is the **binary-certainty posture**: high confidence in a contested religious proposition is treated as the faithful state, lowering that confidence is treated as a defect, and preserving it is praised even when the agent's total relevant evidence materially weakens its support. The posture can appear in sermons, devotional practice, apologetic rhetoric, or individual reasoning. The thesis is conditional, not a prevalence estimate: where this norm is taught or adopted, the criticism applies. The paper does not claim that all Christians adopt it or that every biblical use of faith has this structure.

Nor does the argument assess theism in general. A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity; *theism* is the general position that at least one deity exists. Different Christian God-concepts attach different aims to revelation, doubt, relationship, salvation, and evidence. The target here is not every such account. It is one epistemic norm: confidence should remain high because wavering is unfaithful, even when the total reasons available to the believer no longer support the same level of confidence.

The comparator is **evidence-proportionate credence**. A credence is a degree of confidence. Proportionality does not require a precise decimal for every proposition or a revision after every objection. It requires confidence to stay within the range warranted by the person's total evidence and to be permitted to move when that warrant materially changes. The scale can be coarse—weak, moderate, strong—so long as it is corrigible. This is the **responsiveness principle**. The decisive contrast is not certainty versus total rejection. It is evidence-responsive confidence versus confidence insulated by rule.

**The evidence-responsiveness argument**

1. A truth-directed confidence policy must permit confidence to move when the agent's total relevant evidence materially changes the proposition's support.
2. Evidence-proportionate credence permits confidence to rise when support strengthens and fall when support weakens.
3. The binary-certainty posture forbids the downward movement in cases where materially weakened support would call for it.
4. A policy that forbids a warranted downward movement cannot represent the evidential change that calibrated credence can represent.
5. Therefore, for truth-seeking under materially changing evidence, the binary-certainty posture is epistemically inferior to evidence-proportionate credence.

The argument does not say that every objection should lower confidence. An apparent defeater may be outweighed, answered, or too slight to alter the permitted range. The conclusion applies when the total evidential balance really has weakened. It is comparative rather than a disproof of Christianity, and it does not decide what the total evidence about any particular doctrine finally supports. It shows why refusing in advance to lower confidence is a bad way to answer that question.

## 2. The Target Is Binary Certainty, Not Faith as Such

The biblical material supplies pressure in both directions. James 1:5–8 connects doubt in prayer with dividedness and instability; Romans 4:18–22 praises Abraham for not weakening or wavering; Hebrews 11:1–6 links faith with assurance, conviction, and approach to the deity; and John 20:29 commends those who believe without seeing (National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 2021). These passages provide textual material from which unwavering confidence can be commended.

It would nevertheless be poor exegesis to define every biblical occurrence of faith as maximal propositional credence. Morgan's historical study of *pistis* and *fides* places early Christian language within a wider field of trust, trustworthiness, fidelity, relationship, and social practice (Morgan, 2015). McKaughan likewise argues that New Testament authors show limited interest in isolating the modern interior state of propositional belief and that relational faith can coexist with doubt substantial enough to preclude belief (McKaughan, 2018). The textual record is therefore not exhausted by a dimmer-switch-versus-toggle metaphor.

That nuance fixes the target rather than dissolving it. If biblical faith is relational trust, loyalty, hopeful affirmation, or a practice under uncertainty, then the binary-certainty posture has wrongly turned a richer stance into a demand for high, immovable confidence. If a particular interpretation or community really does make such confidence the faithful ideal, the responsiveness criticism applies. Either way, a lowered credence that answers to materially weaker support should not be treated as betrayal.

The same discipline applies to the word *doubt*. Doubt can mean indecision, disloyalty, anxiety, intellectual withholding, recognition of counterevidence, or a temporary inability to act. Condemning every one of these states together hides the difference between refusing a responsibility and honestly registering weaker support. A truth-seeking community needs that difference.

## 3. Why Responsiveness Is the Minimum Standard

The responsiveness principle does not make formal epistemology an automatic confidence calculator. Formal tools supply constraints, not every input. Uncertain numbers do not vindicate immobility.

First, probabilistic coherence concerns the internal structure of credences. Accuracy-based arguments contend that an incoherent credence function can be dominated by a coherent alternative—an alternative that is closer to the truth in every possible world under the relevant scoring assumptions (Joyce, 1998). Dutch-book arguments give a practical illustration: some incoherent combinations of betting prices expose an agent to guaranteed loss (Christensen, 2004). These arguments support probabilism, the norm that graded confidence should obey the probability axioms. They do not by themselves say which prior probability or likelihood a person should adopt.

Second, conditionalization concerns learning. In a simple Bayesian setting, after learning evidence  $E$  with certainty, the new credence in a hypothesis  $H$  is

$$P_{\text{new}}(H) = P_{\text{old}}(H \mid E). \quad (1)$$

Greaves and Wallace show that, under independently motivated conditions on epistemic utility, conditionalization uniquely maximizes expected epistemic utility (Greaves & Wallace, 2006). The qualification matters. Conditionalization preserves information encoded in the prior conditional probabilities; it does not generate priors or likelihoods from nothing, settle how to model uncertain evidence, or end disputes about idealization.

Third, evidential proportionality concerns fit between confidence and evidence. Evidentialism says, in its familiar form, that epistemic justification depends on fitting one's evidence (Conee & Feldman, 2004). Evidence is valuable because it improves the prospects of knowledge and rational action, but philosophers disagree about the exact nature of that value and about how evidence constrains belief (Dutant, 2016). White's defense of epistemic impermissivism argues against broad latitude on fixed evidence, yet the uniqueness question remains contested (White, 2005).

This paper does not need the strongest uniqueness claim. Suppose the evidence rationally permits a range of credences. New information may leave that range unchanged, narrow it, or shift it. The responsiveness principle requires movement only when the changed evidence no longer supports the prior confidence within the permitted range. If the range and the prior confidence remain warranted, no movement follows. What the principle excludes is a standing rule that the upper endpoint must be occupied regardless of a material change. Formal epistemology leaves many inputs open; it does not make permissiveness equivalent to immobility.

## 4. Four Stances Too Often Called Faith

The central confusion disappears once epistemic confidence and practical commitment are separated. Table 1 compares four stances that ordinary religious language can place under one word.

| Stance                          | Relation to evidence                                                                           | Relation to action                                                               | Epistemic verdict                                                                    |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Calibrated credence</b>      | Confidence can rise or fall when the total evidential balance materially changes.              | Action may cross a practical threshold while confidence remains below certainty. | Satisfies the responsiveness principle defended here.                                |
| <b>Categorical acceptance</b>   | A proposition is adopted for deliberation or policy without implying credence 1.               | Enables planning, coordination, and decisive action.                             | Can be practically useful; it must not be misreported as maximal evidential support. |
| <b>Relational trust or hope</b> | A person remains open, loyal, or committed while acknowledging risk and possible error.        | Can sustain a relationship or long project through uncertainty.                  | May be rational when defeaters, stakes, and exit conditions are faced honestly.      |
| <b>Binary-certainty posture</b> | High confidence is protected even when total relevant evidence materially weakens its support. | Action, identity, or fidelity is used to make lowering confidence a failure.     | Fails responsiveness and is inferior as a truth-tracking norm.                       |

Table 1: Four stances that should not be collapsed into a single binary notion of faith. The table distinguishes the rationality of acting from the evidential warrant for high confidence.

Audi treats religious commitment as a way of life connected with belief, conduct, hope, emotion, and moral practice rather than as the bare possession of doctrinal certainties (Audi, 2011). McKaughan distinguishes belief-plus, trusting acceptance, and hopeful affirmation, each of which changes how faith relates to doubt and justification (McKaughan, 2013). These accounts supply the strongest correction to any blanket attack on faith.

They also reveal the cost of the correction. If commitment can survive because it is hope or trust rather than high credence, its survival does not show that the proposition deserves high credence. If categorical acceptance is adopted to make action possible, its practical usefulness does not raise the evidential probability. If a person remains loyal while saying “I may be wrong,” the stance has already abandoned binary certainty. The responsiveness principle governs confidence; it does not require every valuable commitment to disappear when confidence falls.

## 5. The Epistemic–Practical Fork

The responsiveness principle governs the first of two questions that defenses of faith can slide between:

1. *How confident should I be that this proposition is true?*
2. *How should I act while uncertainty remains?*

The first is epistemic. The second is practical. Stakes, deadlines, relationships, identity, and the costs of indecision can make action rational before certainty arrives. A physician may choose the best available treatment while substantial uncertainty remains; a juror may withhold conviction under a demanding legal threshold; a spouse may continue a difficult relationship while acknowledging serious doubt. None of those actions converts the practical reason to act into stronger evidence that the underlying proposition is true.

Buchak offers a powerful account of steadfast faith as maintaining a commitment to act on a proposition through counterevidence, thereby protecting long-term projects that would otherwise collapse under short-term fluctuations (Buchak, 2017). That insight concerns the rationality of commitment over time. It does not establish a general license to freeze evidential confidence. Indeed, the defense is clearest when the agent knows that counterevidence exists and chooses how to act in light of the project’s value.

Jackson argues that faith may rationally go beyond some evidence by distinguishing the evidence relevant to categorical belief from the evidence relevant to credence (Jackson, 2019). Even if that belief–credence distinction succeeds, the present conclusion survives in bounded form. The categorical state may play a role in inquiry or

action, but the agent's graded confidence still records uncertainty. Calling the categorical state "belief" does not make its content more probable, and it does not justify presenting faith as total evidential confidence.

### The fork

1. If faith is offered as truth-directed confidence in a contested proposition, it must remain answerable to material changes in the total relevant evidence.
2. If faith is instead hope, relational trust, loyalty, or a practical policy, it may persist under uncertainty, but that persistence supplies no additional evidence for the proposition.
3. Therefore faith either accepts the responsiveness principle as a confidence or relinquishes the claim that steadfast practice by itself supplies high propositional warrant.

This is not a trap constructed by redefining faith. It is a demand to say which kind of rationality is being claimed. The agent may rationally act, hope, or stay loyal while lacking sufficient evidence for high confidence. What the agent may not do is use the value of action to counterfeit evidence for a proposition. **Responsiveness and category discipline are therefore the paper's two linked requirements:** let confidence answer to support, and do not treat the rationality of commitment as if it were additional support.

## 6. Strong Replies and Their Evidential Price

### 6.1 "Faith is knowledge from a special authority"

A believer may argue that ordinary public evidence is incomplete because revelation, religious experience, or a divine authority supplies additional warrant. The reply is not that testimony or authority can never justify. Much knowledge depends on them, and an authority can itself be a source of evidence without first being proved reliable by a separate argument. The relevant question is whether the warrant available to this believer remains sensitive to defeaters: what identifies the source as trustworthy, distinguishes it from rival authorities, and determines how much confidence its deliverances merit?

If the authority's reliability is inferred only from the contested propositions it is invoked to certify, the argument is circular. If reliability is supported by testimony, experience, track record, or another reason, that support belongs in the believer's total epistemic position and may itself face defeaters. A specified God-concept may include perfect reliability, but defining a deity as reliable does not establish that this source is that deity's communication.

Plantinga offers a stronger alternative to evidential inference: Christian belief may have warrant in a basic way when produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties, rather than resting on propositional evidence or argument (Plantinga, 2000). His account nevertheless treats potential defeaters as relevant to whether such belief remains warranted. The present argument therefore need not assume that every justified belief is inferred from public evidence. It asks whether unwaveringness itself is a virtue after the believer's total epistemic position has been materially weakened by an undefeated defeater. Calling warrant basic does not make it indefeasible.

### 6.2 "Steadfastness is a virtue"

Steadfastness can be admirable. It helps people keep promises, sustain difficult inquiry, resist social pressure, and protect relationships from panic. Its value is domain-specific. A research program may rationally survive an anomalous result because measurement error and theoretical repair are live possibilities. It becomes dogma when no accumulating failure can lower confidence or trigger exit.

The proper question is not whether to quit at the first difficulty. It is which defeaters matter, whether they materially change the total support, how much confidence should move, and what would eventually justify revision. Steadfastness without such conditions is not resilience; it is insulation.

### 6.3 “Exact evidence is too ambiguous for calibration”

People rarely possess objective numerical measures of evidential support. Evidence can be noisy, theory-laden, incomplete, and permissive. That fact supports humility, not a jump to certainty. A coarse but responsive scale—low, medium, high—is epistemically better than protected high confidence when the total balance visibly changes.

Nor does uncertainty about calibration make every confidence equally rational. An engineer may disagree about whether failure risk is 2 or 5 percent while both reject 90 percent. A historian may permit a broad range while excluding certainty. The impossibility of perfect measurement does not erase evidential direction.

### 6.4 “Comfort and transformation vindicate faith”

Religious commitment may comfort, organize a life, sustain moral effort, or transform a community. These are real practical goods. Their existence does not by itself identify the truth of the propositions attached to them. Incompatible worldviews can each produce belonging, discipline, meaning, and courage.

The correct inference is limited: the practice has value for these people under these conditions. To infer truth, one needs a bridge connecting the beneficial effect to the truth of the specific doctrine. Without that bridge, pragmatic success and epistemic warrant remain different achievements.

The replies therefore divide into three kinds. One may deny that the total epistemic position has materially weakened, appeal to a source of warrant that remains answerable to defeaters, or reclassify faith as a practical or relational stance. Any of these may be defensible in a particular case. None makes non-revision itself evidence or defeats the responsiveness principle.

## 7. A Calibration Test for Religious Confidence

The paper’s conclusion asks for a change in intellectual practice, not a ritual display of decimal probabilities. Any contested Christian confidence offered as truth-directed should answer five questions.

1. **What is the proposition?** State it precisely enough that relevant support and counterevidence can be identified.
2. **What confidence is claimed?** Distinguish tentative openness, moderate belief, strong belief, practical acceptance, and certainty.
3. **What would materially change it?** Name defeaters and confirmers in advance, and say what change in the total evidential balance would raise or lower confidence.
4. **Is the standard symmetrical?** Ask whether the same method would justify a rival religion, political identity, or cherished secular theory.
5. **What belongs to action rather than evidence?** State when commitment is being chosen for relational or practical reasons instead of redescribing that choice as proof.

A confidence that can answer these questions may still be wrong. It is at least exposed to correction. A confidence that refuses the questions has declared its immunity in advance. This is the responsiveness principle in practice: not compulsory doubt, but a refusal to protect confidence from material evidential change by definition.

The practical implication for Christian communities is equally direct. Lowered confidence should sometimes be treated as intellectual honesty rather than moral failure. Testimony should include failed expectations as well as favorable experiences. Apologetic arguments should report the size and limit of the shift they support. A faith able to survive acknowledged uncertainty has no need to punish calibration.

## 8. Conclusion

The binary-certainty posture fails as a truth-seeking norm because it celebrates precisely what rational inquiry must resist: high confidence protected from a material weakening in the total relevant evidence. Evidence-proportionate credence is superior not because it guarantees truth, requires revision after every objection, or produces one uncontested decimal, but because it permits confidence to register stronger and weaker support. It lets confidence learn.

The strongest accounts of faith make the category boundary clearer. Faith may be a properly basic belief, relational trust, hope, categorical acceptance, loyalty, or long-term commitment under acknowledged risk. Those stances may have epistemic or practical value when their defeaters and limits are faced honestly. They do not make unwaveringness itself evidence, and practical persistence does not convert into high propositional warrant.

The requested intellectual change is therefore modest and consequential: stop treating non-revision as a virtue in itself and stop treating confidence and fidelity as synonyms. Let confidence fall when the total relevant evidence materially weakens support; let action remain possible without pretending uncertainty has disappeared; and apply the same responsiveness standard to cherished doctrines that one would apply to rival claims. Rationality is not a switch, and honesty about doubt is not an epistemic vice.

## A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

- P1.** Any posture offered as a truth-directed confidence policy must, at minimum, permit confidence to fall when the agent's total relevant evidence materially lowers support for its proposition.
- P2.** Evidence-proportionate credence satisfies this condition by permitting confidence to fall when materially changed evidence no longer supports the prior level within the warranted range.
- P3.** The binary-certainty posture fails this condition by treating the preservation of high confidence as virtuous even in cases where total support has materially weakened.
- P4.** A truth-directed confidence policy that fails this minimum condition is, in that respect, epistemically inferior to a policy that satisfies it.
- P5.** Hope, relational trust, loyalty, or a practical policy may rationally persist under uncertainty, but persistence does not by itself add evidential support to the proposition involved.
- P6.** Where biblical commitment is presented as epistemically admirable unwavering high confidence rather than acknowledged-risk belief or action, it instantiates the binary-certainty posture.

**Conclusion.** For truth-seeking under materially changing evidence, the binary-certainty posture is epistemically inferior to evidence-proportionate credence. This conclusion does not extend to every form of Christian faith or determine which credence a particular doctrine finally warrants. Properly basic belief, hope, relational trust, and practical commitment remain live alternatives when they face defeaters honestly and do not treat persistence itself as propositional evidence.

**Validity.** Premises 1–4 deductively yield the comparative result: the two policies respectively satisfy and fail the stated minimum condition, and premise 4 gives the evaluative bridge. Premise 5 blocks an equivocation from the rationality of persistence to increased evidential support. Premise 6 conditionally applies the result to uses of biblical commitment that instantiate the target.

**Support for the premises.** Premise 1 states the paper's minimum truth-tracking standard; evidentialism, probabilism, and Bayesian learning support it without fixing one exact credence. Premise 2 follows from the definition of evidence-proportionate credence. Premise 3 follows from the stipulated target, while premise 4 states the limited respect in which the comparison is made. Work on basic warrant, commitment, trust, belief, and credence supports premise 5's category distinction. Premise 6 is interpretive and must be established case by case; the paper therefore makes a conditional claim about uses of biblical commitment that actually praise evidence-insulated high confidence.

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