

Would a Holy Book Omit Essential Elements of Rational Thought and Belief — 07

Phil Stilwell
Independent Scholar
ORCID: 0009-0009-3725-8682
Revised August 2026

Central claim

Rational belief is a degree of belief that maps to the degree of the relevant evidence. A canon decisively authorized for high-stakes truth guidance should unite testing, testimony, comparison, and correction into a portable method for adjusting confidence. The Bible offers those practices locally but not as an integrated, symmetric, self-applying method; that mixed profile moderately favors historical-human development over a strong divine-pedagogy model, though not every model of inspiration.

Preview:

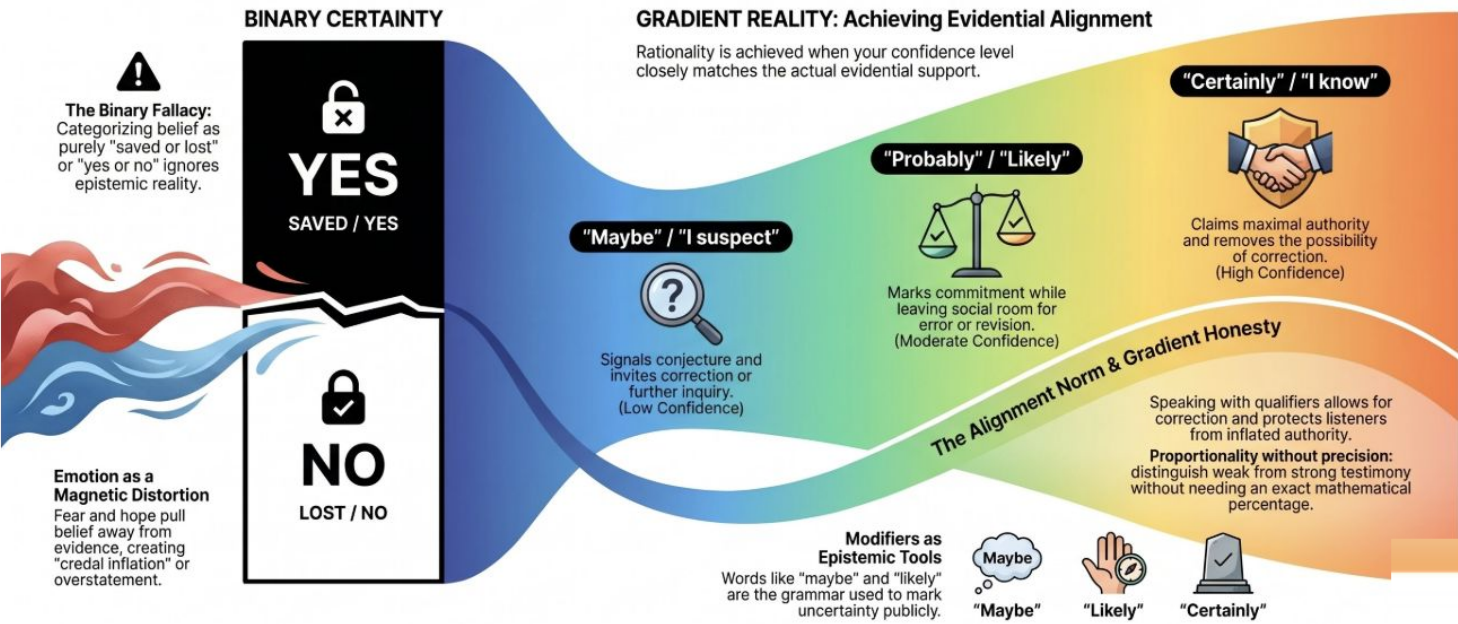
Target model	Expected curriculum	Observed profile	Comparative result
Decisive authorization for high-stakes truth guidance	Portable, symmetric checks that make confidence track evidence	Valuable local checks, but no integrated self-applying method	Profile moderately favors historical-human development over the strong divine-pedagogy model

Scope: the result targets one strong model, not every model of inspiration or theism.

The issue is whether confidence is taught to rise and fall with relevant evidence under standards that apply symmetrically, including to favored authorities.

Visual preview:

The Grammar of Credence: Aligning Belief with Evidence



The visual depicts only the paper's core norm: confidence should rise or fall with relevant evidence. It does not by itself establish the comparative argument, and numerical credences are not required.

Abstract

Rational belief, as used here, is a degree of belief that maps to the degree of the relevant evidence: stronger evidence warrants greater confidence, weaker or defeated evidence warrants less, and mixed evidence warrants proportionate uncertainty. This paper asks whether the Bible clearly teaches that norm and the practices needed to apply it. The argument is comparative rather than deductive. A strong divine-pedagogy model predicts that a canon decisively authorized for high-stakes truth guidance would make evidence-sensitive belief revision salient, feasible, portable, and self-applying. The Bible contains genuine epistemic resources: rules for testimony, prophetic tests, wisdom about caution and correction, evidential appeals, and communal deliberation. Yet these resources remain largely local, genre-bound, and indexed to covenantal or communal authority. They do not clearly form an integrated curriculum for calibrating confidence to source quality, independent support, defeaters, rival explanations, and failed expectations—especially when the canon’s own authority is at issue. This profile provides moderate comparative support for a historical-human model over the strong divine-pedagogy model. Mediated revelation, accommodation, embodied formation, communal epistemology, and internal divine warrant reduce the contrast. The conclusion is therefore limited: the omission counts against one strong model of divine pedagogy, not against every form of inspiration, theism, religious trust, or knowledge of the deity posited by Christianity.

Keywords: biblical epistemology; divine authorship; epistemic calibration; evidence of absence; faith and trust; rational belief; testimony

1 The Question and Its Proper Scope

Readers who regard the Bible as decisively authorized by a rational deity for high-stakes truth guidance should expect more than scattered sound advice: they should expect a portable method for letting confidence rise and fall with relevant evidence. The canon contains real practices of testimony, testing, counsel, correction, and deliberation, but it does not clearly integrate them into a symmetric, self-applying curriculum. That mixed profile moderately favors historical-human development over the strong divine-pedagogy model, while leaving mediated forms of inspiration and theism open.

Throughout this paper, *rational belief* means a degree of belief that maps to the degree of the relevant evidence. Stronger evidence should normally support greater confidence; weakened or defeated evidence should reduce confidence; and sparse, balanced, or ambiguous evidence should be reflected in uncertainty. The mapping need not be numerical or exact. It requires direction and rough proportionality: confidence should respond to evidential strength rather than remain fixed by preference, identity, or authority alone.

Relevant evidence includes observation, records, credible testimony, source independence, track record, and facts that discriminate a claim from live alternatives. It also includes defeaters: information about bias, dependence, contrary evidence, failed expectations, or a better explanation. Which considerations are relevant and how much they weigh can be disputed. Rational belief does not eliminate judgment; it requires that judgment remain answerable to those considerations.

By a *God-concept* I mean a specified conception of a deity, not theism in general. The God-concept under direct examination combines omniscience and communicative ability with decisive authorization of the canon for high-stakes truth guidance. The argument therefore compares models that make different predictions about the canon’s epistemic pedagogy; it does not move from a thin definition of theism to a verdict about every possible divine purpose.

The question is therefore not whether the Bible contains modern probability theory or requires every reader to assign a number to every belief. It is whether the canonical collection exhibits a recognizable architecture for aligning confidence with evidence: testing testimony, seeking defeaters, comparing alternatives, tracking outcomes, and correcting individual or institutional judgment. That architecture could have been expressed in stories, proverbs, legal procedures, rituals of inquiry, community rules, or repeated patterns of exemplary revision.

Technical notation is only one possible vehicle.

The comparison begins with three models rather than a forced choice between dictation and secular reductionism.

- On the *strong divine-pedagogy model*, an omniscient and communicatively capable deity decisively authorizes the canon for high-stakes truth guidance and intends it to cultivate portable, resilient competence in forming rational belief among broadly capable readers.
- On a *mediated or participatory model*, divine communication occurs through historically situated authors and communities whose conceptual limits, disputes, rituals, and interpretive agency remain constitutive of the product. Divine intention may concern covenantal formation more than publicly discriminating method.
- On the *historical-human model*, the canon is a heterogeneous library composed, edited, transmitted, and delimited by communities with local pedagogical aims and no special guarantee of a unified domain-general error-correction curriculum.

These models are families, not point hypotheses. Historical accounts of biblical formation emphasize diversity of genres, periods, authors, editors, and communities (Barton, 2019; Brettler et al., 2012). Philosophical and theological accounts show how divine discourse might appropriate human speech without dictating every sentence (Wolterstorff, 1995), while participatory theories of revelation explicitly make a community's interpretation and response part of the revelatory process (Sommer, 2015). The observed profile may therefore discriminate more clearly between the strong divine-pedagogy and historical-human models than between mediated revelation and ordinary historical formation.

The conclusion is correspondingly restricted. The paper does not establish atheism, naturalism, or the falsity of every doctrine of inspiration. It asks whether one important textual feature—the organization of epistemic pedagogy—is more expected on some provenance models than on others.

2 When Can an Omission Be Evidence?

An argument from silence is not automatically fallacious, but neither is every unmentioned feature evidentially significant. Failure to observe something favors its absence only to the extent that one would probably have found it if it were present. Sober's analysis of evidence of absence makes this dependence on expected detectability explicit (Sober, 2009). Applied to a canon, that principle requires more than reporting that a preferred sentence cannot be found.

2.1 Antecedent expectation

The expected feature must follow from the model before the text is inspected. The strong model predicts some portable pedagogy of rational belief because it combines four commitments: divine cognitive competence, divine communicative ability, high-stakes truth guidance, and an intention to form resilient knowers across communities. On that model, readers should be helped to raise or lower confidence as relevant evidence strengthens, weakens, or is defeated. Remove the formative commitment and the expectation weakens. If the canon is intended primarily for worship, covenant identity, moral formation, or encounter, then the absence of domain-general inquiry rules may be unsurprising.

This model dependence prevents a common slide. One cannot begin with a thin claim that a deity inspired the Bible, observe a feature one dislikes, and then treat that feature as unlikely under every possible divine purpose. The argument has force only against a model whose declared aims make the missing pedagogy salient.

2.2 Feasibility and recoverability

The relevant teaching must have been feasible in the medium and likely to remain visible. A demand for probability notation would fail this condition. A demand for culturally adaptable practices does not. The canon already communicates portable norms through commandments, legal forms, proverbs, narratives, repeated formulae, communal rituals, letters, and exemplary characters. It also preserves teachings about witnesses, counsel, false prophecy, deception, correction, and testing. The medium was therefore capable of carrying epistemic guidance.

Preservation is more difficult. Biblical texts have complex compositional histories, variant forms, differing canons, and long reception histories. A narrowly localized teaching could have disappeared. The argument accordingly concerns a feature that the strong model itself makes recurrent and central. A deliberately portable charter expressed across genres would be harder to erase than an isolated saying. The evidential object is not a missing technical paragraph but a missing pattern of integration.

2.3 Five diagnostic dimensions

The analysis uses five dimensions to distinguish bare silence from a significant pedagogical omission. Table 1 makes the burden explicit.

Table 1: Conditions for an evidential argument from pedagogical omission

Dimension	What strengthens the inference	What weakens the inference
Antecedent expectation	The model independently assigns the canon a truth-guiding, error-correcting aim.	The aim is supplied only after the omission is noticed.
Feasibility	Functional equivalents could be taught through ordinary genres and practices.	The demand requires inaccessible concepts or an unsuitable medium.
Coverage	A central, recurrent feature would probably survive and be recognized.	Textual loss, canon variation, or ambiguous genre makes detection unlikely.
Integration and portability	Norms link evidence to appropriate confidence and apply beyond one local dispute.	The proposed evidence consists only of scattered analogues.
Symmetry and self-application	Favored authorities and in-group beliefs face the same evidential standards as rivals.	Testing is controlled by the authority whose reliability is at issue.

The last two dimensions are the heart of the case. A library may contain excellent local advice without teaching a transferable relationship between evidence and confidence. It may also recommend testing while fixing the permitted result through prior authority. Such materials are epistemically valuable, but their presence does not by itself satisfy a prediction of symmetric, self-correcting pedagogy for rational belief.

3 Rational Belief and Rational Pedagogy

The word *rationality* carries competing theories. Evidentialism holds, roughly, that the epistemic justification of a belief depends on the evidence a person has (Feldman & Conee, 1985). Probabilist traditions stress coherence among graded credences and the accuracy of those credences (Joyce, 1998; Pettigrew, 2016). Both programs are contested; Maher's criticism of Joyce is one reminder that no formal vindication should be treated as the uncontested definition of rationality (Maher, 2002). Rational thought also involves intellectual virtue, understanding, skilled

participation, and practical judgment.

The present argument isolates one necessary discipline within that larger field: rational belief is a degree of belief that maps to the degree of the relevant evidence. The claim is not that a person must attach a percentage to every proposition. It is that confidence should vary in the right direction and with rough proportionality. Evidence that strongly favors a claim over live alternatives supports greater confidence; evidence weakened by dependence, bias, counterevidence, or predictive failure supports less; evidential parity supports suspension or modest confidence.

This evidential mapping is compatible with non-propositional goods, but it is not replaced by them. A person may be wise, loyal, courageous, or skillfully embedded in a practice while holding some associated factual claim more confidently than the available evidence supports. Conversely, rational belief can coexist with faithful action: one may act decisively for practical or relational reasons while acknowledging that the evidence warrants less than certainty. A portable error-correction curriculum would therefore help readers to:

- align certainty, high confidence, tentative judgment, and acknowledged ignorance with the strength of the relevant evidence;
- assess the competence, access, incentives, and independence of testimonial sources;
- search for information that could defeat a favored conclusion;
- compare live alternatives rather than test only a preferred claim;
- record expectations and outcomes in ways that constrain retrospective reinterpretation;
- revise individual and institutional confidence after error; and
- distinguish faithful action under uncertainty from certainty about every associated proposition.

This account does not make rational belief wholly individualistic. Testimony is indispensable to human knowledge and often constitutes relevant evidence. Coady argues that dependence on others is far more extensive than traditional epistemology often acknowledges (Coady, 1994); Lackey treats testimony as an irreducible epistemic source while retaining an important role for positive reasons and defeaters (Lackey, 2008). Recent social epistemology likewise emphasizes both the productive role of trust and the damage caused by defective trust or untrustworthiness (Carter, 2025). The relevant contrast is not trust versus reason. It is trust whose strength responds to competence, access, independence, track record, and defeaters versus trust insulated from those evidential checks.

The norms are also teachable without equations. Natural-frequency formats can improve probabilistic reasoning, and structured practice can improve forecasting calibration (Mellers et al., 2014; Sedlmeier & Gigerenzer, 2001). Brief prompts to attend to accuracy and inoculation exercises can improve resistance to misinformation in contemporary settings (Pennycook et al., 2021; Roozenbeek et al., 2022). These studies do not show what an ancient canon must contain. They establish the narrower point that representation, repeated prompts, and practiced procedures can make epistemic habits more explicit and transferable.

4 The Bible's Positive Epistemic Repertoire

Any fair assessment must begin with what the Bible already provides. The relevant materials are too substantial to be dismissed as exceptions.

4.1 Testimony, counsel, and cross-examination

Deuteronomy 19:15 and related legal materials require multiple witnesses. Proverbs 18:17 warns that the first account can appear right until another party examines it. Proverbs 14:15 contrasts simple acceptance with attention

to one's steps, while Proverbs 11:14 commends an abundance of counsel. These texts recognize premature judgment, deception, and the value of adversarial scrutiny.

The legal rule does more than count voices. Deuteronomy 19:16–21 imagines a malicious witness and assigns judges a duty of diligent inquiry. That is a genuine institutional safeguard. It recognizes that testimony can be strategic and that an authority must investigate rather than merely receive an accusation. In the present terms, testimonial evidence should alter confidence only after its reliability has been assessed. The passage does not articulate source dependence or base-rate reasoning, but it should count as positive evidence of concern for rational belief.

4.2 Prophetic discernment

Deuteronomy supplies at least two tests of prophets. Deuteronomy 18:21–22 links failed prediction with lack of divine authorization. Deuteronomy 13:1–5, however, instructs Israel to reject a wonder-worker whose sign succeeds but who directs allegiance toward other gods. The two passages jointly reveal a sophisticated point: predictive success alone does not settle authority, because evidence is assessed within a prior covenantal framework. They also expose the central problem of rational belief: how much should an observed success or failure change confidence when a prior authority already determines its meaning?

Jeremiah 28 dramatizes the difficulty. Hananiah announces peace; Jeremiah initially responds by identifying a tradition in which adverse prophecy is common and favorable prophecy awaits fulfillment. When Hananiah later dies, the narrative vindicates Jeremiah. This is more than uncritical deference. Competing prophetic claims are exposed to temporal outcome. Yet the account remains retrospective and authority-laden: later readers encounter it inside a canon that has already identified the true prophet.

4.3 Wisdom, doubt, and correction

Wisdom literature contains a repertoire of intellectual virtues: listening before answering, receiving correction, seeking counsel, and recognizing human limitation. Job exposes the inadequacy of a rigid moral calculus defended by confident friends. Ecclesiastes unsettles simple expectations about merit and outcome. Lament and protest preserve dissonant experience rather than suppress it. These genres complicate any claim that the Bible uniformly rewards certainty or forbids doubt.

Their pedagogy is often dispositional rather than procedural. They cultivate humility, patience, attentiveness, and fear of overconfident speech. These dispositions support rational belief by discouraging confidence that outruns evidence. A philosophical treatment that recognizes only explicit rules would miss this contribution. Johnson's account of biblical knowing similarly emphasizes attentive listening, embodied response, authoritative guidance, and the possibility of "getting it wrong" within scriptural narratives (Johnson, 2013).

4.4 Early Christian testing and evidential appeal

The New Testament also resists an anti-evidential caricature. Luke 1:1–4 presents an orderly account connected to prior reports and eyewitness transmission. First Corinthians 15 appeals to named and grouped witnesses of resurrection appearances. Acts 17:11 praises the Bereans for examining scripture in response to apostolic preaching. First Thessalonians 5:21 instructs a community to test everything and retain what is good; 1 John 4:1 commands testing of purported spirits; and 1 Corinthians 14:29 tells others to weigh prophetic speech.

The Thomas episode in John 20 is likewise mixed rather than simple. Thomas requests tangible evidence, and Jesus supplies it. The subsequent blessing of those who have not seen commends trust beyond direct perception, but it occurs after a narrative saturated with signs, testimony, and the evangelist's stated aim of producing belief. The episode cannot responsibly be reduced either to "evidence is unnecessary" or to a modern evidentialist manifesto.

4.5 Communal deliberation and revision

Acts 10–15 portrays communities revising inherited expectations through visions, testimony, experience, scriptural interpretation, and deliberation. Acts 15 does not merely invoke an oracle; speakers report events, dispute their significance, relate them to scripture, and formulate a practical settlement. Galatians 2 portrays Paul publicly confronting Peter’s conduct. These texts normalize at least some correction of leaders and adjustment of communal practice.

The cumulative positive case is therefore strong. The Bible contains evidential appeals, tests, cross-examination, institutional inquiry, intellectual humility, correction, and reasoned deliberation. These can help belief respond rationally to evidence. The question that remains is whether they are organized into a general discipline for matching confidence to evidential strength and whether that discipline applies symmetrically to the canon’s own authority claims.

5 From Local Goods to an Architectural Question

The distinction between a repertoire and an architecture is crucial. A repertoire is a collection of useful norms and practices. An architecture links them into a recurring system that tells agents what counts as relevant evidence, how strongly it should affect belief, what outcomes trigger revision, and whether insiders and outsiders face the same standards. The architecture is what turns isolated good advice into a pedagogy of rational belief.

5.1 Evidence-proportioned confidence

Biblical speakers hesitate, doubt, wait, misunderstand, and revise. The canon therefore displays psychological gradation. Across the representative materials examined here, however, rational belief does not emerge as a recurring explicit normative object: readers are not systematically taught that the degree of belief should map to the degree of the relevant evidence, to separate commitment from certainty, or to lower confidence when cumulative evidence weakens or defeats a claim.

Categorical contrasts—true and false prophets, wisdom and folly, fidelity and apostasy, belief and unbelief—often serve moral and rhetorical purposes. They may be entirely appropriate within a covenantal discourse. They become epistemically hazardous when later communities use them to classify honest uncertainty as disloyalty or to convert a contested authority claim into the rule by which authority is tested. A portable curriculum would explicitly protect room for provisional judgment inside committed life.

5.2 Source independence and correlated testimony

Multiple-witness rules are valuable, but numerical plurality does not guarantee informational independence. Witnesses may inherit a common source, share incentives, repeat a community’s formula, or interpret experience through the same expectations. Correlated reports provide less evidential support than genuinely independent reports and should therefore produce a smaller increase in rational confidence. The canon does not clearly develop this general distinction between corroboration and repetition, even though it matters acutely when traditions transmit extraordinary reports across generations.

This is not an objection to testimony as such. Human knowledge would collapse without trust in others. The issue is whether the canon that authorizes a testimonial tradition also teaches readers how to identify dependence, competence, and defeat within that tradition. The legal materials approach the problem locally; the broader curriculum remains implicit.

5.3 Rival explanations and self-application

Biblical narratives contain dramatic contests and alternative interpretations. The degree to which evidence supports a claim depends partly on how well that evidence distinguishes the claim from live alternatives. What is difficult to find is a general instruction to formulate the strongest rival explanation for a favored event, identify discriminating evidence, and apply the same burden to in-group and out-group claims. In prophetic testing, doctrinal loyalty constrains what counts as a successful sign. In early Christian discernment, confession of Jesus can function as a criterion. Those criteria may be justified if the prior authority is genuine, but they do less work for an outsider deciding which claimed revelation is genuine.

Self-application is therefore the pressure point. A test is publicly discriminating only if its authority does not depend wholly on the authority under test. A canon may legitimately contain first principles, but a strong truth-guiding model gives reason to expect some bridge from internal trust to public comparison among rival first principles.

5.4 Outcome tracking and institutional memory

The Bible candidly records failures: kings, priests, prophets, apostles, and communities err. Narrative exposure can cultivate humility. Yet rational belief requires more than noticing that error occurs; failed expectations are relevant evidence and should reduce confidence in the judgment, method, or authority that produced them. The canon does not clearly establish a general practice of recording predictions before outcomes, preserving disconfirming cases, comparing error rates, or specifying how institutional confidence should change after repeated failure.

Repentance is central, but moral repentance and epistemic recalibration are not identical. A leader can confess wrongdoing without a community revising the procedure that elevated the leader's judgment. A portable error-correction architecture would join personal humility to institutional memory: what was expected, what occurred, why the error happened, and what practice now changes.

5.5 Portability across domains

The positive norms are usually embedded in a domain: court testimony, wisdom instruction, prophetic allegiance, charismatic discernment, or apostolic controversy. Their application beyond the domain is possible, and later readers often make it. The canon itself, however, does not consistently perform that synthesis. It does not clearly supply a compact, recurrent charter stating that rational belief requires confidence to track relevant evidence, then linking that norm to independence, alternatives, defeat, outcomes, and revision across sacred and ordinary claims.

That is the relevant omission. The missing feature is not evidence, trust, testing, doubt, or correction in isolation. It is an integrated and self-applying pedagogy for keeping degrees of belief aligned with degrees of relevant evidence. Integration, portability, symmetry, and self-application are underdeveloped relative to the expectation generated by the strong divine-pedagogy model.

6 Pedagogy in Its Ancient Media

The architectural claim must be tested against how ancient texts actually educated. Carr argues that biblical textuality belonged to an oral-written process of enculturation in which memorization, recitation, and traditional literature formed persons and communities (Carr, 2005). This matters in two directions.

First, it blocks anachronism. The Bible was not designed as a modern reference manual for autonomous private readers. Its narratives, laws, songs, rituals, proverbs, and public readings shaped memory, identity, and practice. An assessment that searches only for abstract definitions will systematically undercount its pedagogy.

Second, the same media could carry portable epistemic patterns. Memorability is an advantage for concise

norms. A proverb could teach that confidence should match evidence; a paired narrative can contrast revision with rationalization; a legal ritual can require adversarial representation; a communal recitation can normalize saying “we were wrong.” The prediction is not that ancient education should become modern coursework. It is that a deity intending cross-cultural error resistance could exploit the media already used for cross-cultural moral and religious formation.

Johnson’s biblical epistemology deepens the challenge by presenting knowing as embodied, relational, and responsive to authoritative guides rather than as detached information processing (Johnson, 2013). This supplies a genuine rival benchmark. If knowing well means learning to attend, follow, participate, and perceive under proper guidance, then the Bible may possess a rich epistemology even without explicit calibration rules.

The reply should not deny that point. Embodied formation and procedural safeguards answer different risks. A community can skillfully inhabit a practice and still misidentify its authority; it can learn to perceive as insiders do while becoming less sensitive to external defeat. Conversely, formal scrutiny without trustworthy relationships can become sterile or cynical. The strongest pedagogy would integrate relational formation with mechanisms for discovering when trusted guides, inherited interpretations, or communal perceptions have gone wrong.

7 Comparative Fit Across the Three Models

The observed profile can now be summarized without numerical likelihoods: substantial local epistemic goods; strong social and relational dimensions; recurring tests within domains; candid depictions of error; but no clear, recurrent statement that rational belief is confidence proportioned to relevant evidence; limited integration across domains; little explicit attention to source dependence; and few procedures that apply symmetrically to rival ultimate authorities.

Here and below, *moderate* is a qualitative verdict: the profile creates a meaningful comparative advantage, but one vulnerable to plausible model revisions, neglected texts, and reception-historical evidence. It does not assign a numerical probability.

On the historical-human model, this mixture is expected. Communities need rules for testimony, warnings against fraud, practices of trust, mechanisms of identity, and resources for dispute. Different genres and institutions encode different goods. Canonization preserves a layered library rather than redesigning it as a unified curriculum. Barton and Brettler, Enns, and Harrington describe precisely the historical and interpretive plurality that makes such an uneven profile unsurprising (Barton, 2019; Brettler et al., 2012).

On the strong divine-pedagogy model, genre and mediation remain compatible with recurrent design. A competent deity need not dictate a treatise, but could ensure that the core norm—confidence should track relevant evidence—and a few memorable, self-applying practices recur across law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and community instruction. Given predictable religious disagreement and the stakes attached to error, the lack of integration is moderately surprising.

On mediated or participatory models, the result is less determinate. Wolterstorff’s account allows divine discourse through appropriation of human speech acts (Wolterstorff, 1995). Sommer’s participatory theory makes Israel’s interpretation and response constitutive of revelation rather than mere noise in a transmitted message (Sommer, 2015). Such models predict a text with divine significance and genuine human plurality. They can therefore fit much of the observed profile. Their evidential burden moves elsewhere: they need independent criteria for recognizing divine participation and for explaining why this degree and distribution of error-correction pedagogy serves the intended divine-human relationship.

No numerical posterior is warranted. The relevant expectations depend on judgments about divine aims, historical media, preservation, and salience. The conclusion is qualitative: the profile moderately favors ordinary historical development over the strong model; it provides much less leverage against mediated models that do not predict a unified public epistemic curriculum.

8 Major Objections and Model Revisions

8.1 The benchmark is modern and anachronistic

The objection succeeds against any demand for Bayesian notation, laboratory psychology, or individualistic autonomy. It does not defeat the modest functional benchmark. The canon's own witness rules, cross-examination sayings, prophetic disputes, and stories of corrected judgment show that error checks were culturally available. The proposal asks why those resources are not linked and generalized more explicitly, not why ancient authors failed to anticipate modern textbooks.

Ancient pedagogy nevertheless lowers confidence in a negative verdict. A procedure may be encoded narratively or ritually in ways a modern philosophical scan misses. That is why the argument focuses on salience, recurrence, and cross-domain integration rather than on the absence of favored vocabulary.

8.2 The Bible forms faithful persons, not neutral inquirers

This is the strongest purpose-based objection. A canon can aim at worship, covenant fidelity, moral transformation, and communion with the deity its community worships rather than epistemic neutrality. Excessive proceduralism may even obstruct trust or reduce wisdom to technique.

The argument does not require neutrality between every possibility. Inquiry always begins with background commitments, and rational belief does not forbid commitment or action under uncertainty. It requires the confidence placed in those commitments to remain responsive to relevant evidence and correction proportionate to their stakes. Relationship and correction are compatible: trusted communities often become more trustworthy by making dissent, audit, and revision possible. If evidence-proportioned confidence is not an intended canonical aim, however, the objection substantially weakens the inference by rejecting the strong model's purpose clause.

8.3 Faith is trust, not evidentially deficient assent

Historical work on *pistis* and *fides* shows that early Christian faith language often concerns trust, trustworthiness, loyalty, and relationship, not merely assent without evidence (Morgan, 2015, 2022). Bishop likewise develops faith as a doxastic venture under ambiguity rather than simple contempt for evidence (Bishop, 2007). Any critique that defines biblical faith as irrational by stipulation fails.

Yet trust has epistemic conditions. Competence, honesty, access, incentives, independence, and track record are relevant evidence about a source and should affect the degree of trust placed in it. Carter's survey of contemporary social epistemology highlights both the importance of trust and the harms of bad trusting and untrustworthiness (Carter, 2025). Recasting faith as trust therefore improves the analysis: rational trust is not absent trust, but reliance whose strength maps to the evidence of trustworthiness.

8.4 Community supplies what the text omits

No finite text can encode every safeguard. Jewish and Christian traditions develop councils, commentaries, legal reasoning, confessions, scholarship, liturgies, and disciplines of discernment. Ancient scripture itself belonged to educational communities rather than to isolated private readers (Carr, 2005). The relevant epistemic unit may be canon-plus-community.

This response has real force. Communities can make the relation between evidence and confidence explicit even when a finite text does not. It also creates a new comparative question. Communities transmit knowledge, but they amplify conformity, correlate testimony, protect authority, and reinterpret failure. Traditions disagree about which extra-canonical authorities and methods are legitimate. A strong divine-pedagogy model extended to institutions should therefore predict recognizable advantages in sustaining rational belief and correcting in-group error. If

later communal procedures are historically ordinary and mutually incompatible, relocating the missing pedagogy does not by itself establish divine superintendence.

8.5 The canon already offers a biblical epistemology

Johnson's work is a direct challenge to the omission thesis because it reconstructs a scriptural epistemology centered on attention, authoritative guidance, embodiment, and learned recognition of error (Johnson, 2013). The positive cases in this paper support part of that reconstruction. Biblical knowing is not exhausted by propositional credence.

The disagreement concerns sufficiency for a public provenance test and for rational belief about the guide itself. A rich internal epistemology can form competent participants while leaving unresolved how an outsider should compare rival authoritative practices. The stronger the claim that proper knowing begins by following the right guide, the more important the antecedent question becomes: which guide is right, what evidence supports that degree of confidence, and what defeats a mistaken identification? Biblical epistemology may therefore answer how knowing works within the covenantal framework without fully answering how confidence in that framework should map to publicly relevant evidence.

8.6 Internal divine warrant makes public method secondary

Plantinga argues that Christian belief could be warranted through properly functioning cognitive faculties and the internal work of the Holy Spirit without being inferred from publicly shared premises (Plantinga, 2000). If internal divine experience or warrant is itself relevant evidence for the subject, it may rationally support a high degree of belief even when that support is not publicly shared. On that model, textual omission may have little bearing on whether particular believers know.

The response narrows rather than refutes the argument. Internal warrant supplies a possible kind of relevant evidence not visible in the text, but it gives less public leverage for comparing Christian confidence with analogous confidence in rival traditions. It also does not show why a deity providing internal warrant would lack reason to teach calibration for historical, institutional, and interpretive claims surrounding religious life. The objection therefore weakens the canon's role in public discrimination while leaving ordinary error-correction needs intact.

8.7 Accommodation and participatory revelation predict the mixture

A deity may accommodate human limitations or intentionally share authorship with a community. On Sommer's participatory model, human interpretation and response are not defects to be filtered out; they are part of revelation's character (Sommer, 2015). On Wolterstorff's account, divine discourse can work through the illocutionary acts of human speakers (Wolterstorff, 1995). These models fit textual plurality better than a simple dictation model.

They also reduce the paper's evidential reach, as they should. The cost is reduced public distinguishability from ordinary historical development. Accommodation becomes explanatorily substantive when it yields independent expectations: where clarity should remain, which kinds of error should be corrected, how human response is constrained, and what marks divine pedagogical success. Without such constraints, flexibility risks becoming retrospective accommodation of any textual profile.

9 Limitations, Defeaters, and a Research Program

The present inference has several limitations.

First, the object called "the Bible" is not textually or canonically uniform. Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant communities receive different collections and organize authority differently. This paper discusses

recurrent materials in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, not every canonical form. A stronger study would specify corpora and repeat the analysis across them.

Second, the assessment is conceptual and illustrative rather than a preregistered corpus study. It identifies representative passages and an architectural pattern; it does not count every imperative, narrative revision, or epistemic term. That makes the analysis vulnerable to selection effects. A defender may produce neglected texts or intertextual syntheses that satisfy the proposed criteria.

Third, reception may matter as much as inscription. A teaching can be implicit yet reliably drawn out by communities. Conversely, an explicit norm can be ignored. The historical effects of canonical pedagogy therefore require reception history, not textual analysis alone.

Fourth, both evidential relevance and divine intentions are underdetermined. People may reasonably disagree about which evidence bears on a claim, how independent sources are, and how strongly a consideration discriminates among alternatives. Claims about what an ideal communicator would do are also sensitive to background theology. Goods such as noncoercion, dependence, trust, moral formation, cultural particularity, or progressive interpretation may compete with maximal clarity and portability. The argument is only as strong as the independent case for its evidential judgments and for the strong model's priority ordering.

These limitations identify potential defeaters rather than merely insulating caveats. The inference would be weakened by:

- a pervasive canonical pattern that explicitly links degrees of confidence to degrees of relevant evidence through independent testimony, defeater search, rival explanations, and institutional revision;
- evidence that intended ancient audiences reliably learned such a pattern through narrative, ritual, and oral instruction;
- an independently supported theology on which portable public error correction is not a significant divine aim;
- a well-specified canon-plus-community model whose institutions display distinctive and durable correction of in-group error; or
- an independently warranted account of internal divine guidance that explains both reliable belief and principled discrimination among rival experiences.

A fuller research program could convert the qualitative argument into a more disciplined comparative study without pretending to numerical precision. Researchers could preregister criteria for passages that connect evidence to confidence, use independent coders from different interpretive traditions, distinguish explicit rules from narrative exemplars, and compare multiple corpora. They could separately assess whether texts identify relevant evidence, represent degrees of belief, require confidence revision, and apply those requirements portably and symmetrically. Reception research could then ask whether actual communities learned to proportion belief to evidence. Comparison with ancient legal, philosophical, medical, and religious pedagogies would help determine what kinds of instruction were historically feasible. The aim would not be a mechanized verdict on divine authorship, but a transparent account of which judgments drive the inference.

10 A Counterfactual Epistemic Charter

The counterfactual benchmark need not be a treatise. Its governing principle is simple: rational belief is a degree of belief that maps to the degree of the relevant evidence. A brief charter applying that principle could fit biblical genres and ancient audiences:

1. Let confidence rise or fall with the strength of the relevant evidence, and do not equate admitted uncertainty with disloyalty.

2. Ask whether witnesses have relevant access, competence, incentives, and genuine independence.
3. Seek the strongest evidence against the judgment or authority you prefer.
4. Compare rival explanations by standards that apply equally to insiders and outsiders.
5. Record important expectations before outcomes and preserve disconfirming cases.
6. Revise personal and institutional confidence when expectations repeatedly fail.
7. Distinguish faithful action under uncertainty from certainty about every associated claim.

The charter organizes resources already partly present in scripture. It does not replace trust, testimony, wisdom, ritual, or moral formation. It makes their epistemic role explicit: each practice should help a person's degree of belief better match the degree of relevant evidence. It also adds three connections: between local tests and general inquiry, between in-group and out-group standards, and between personal correction and institutional memory. Rationality research similarly treats resistance to biased thinking as a family of dispositions and skills rather than one formula (Stanovich et al., 2016).

This counterfactual clarifies the inference's scope. A canon could omit these exact sentences and still satisfy the prediction through functional equivalents. Conversely, the mere presence of words such as "test," "witness," or "wisdom" does not satisfy it. What matters is whether the canon makes a self-applying architecture salient enough to guide communities when identity, authority, and costly commitment pressure judgment.

11 Conclusion

Rational belief is a degree of belief that maps to the degree of the relevant evidence. The Bible supplies genuine resources for such belief: legal scrutiny, prophetic tests, evidential appeals, counsel, correction, reasoned dispute, and candid depictions of failure. The narrower concern is that these goods are not clearly integrated into a portable, symmetric, and self-applying discipline for keeping confidence proportioned to evidence, especially when favored authorities are under examination.

That omission matters only relative to a model. It is moderately surprising if an omniscient, communicatively capable deity decisively authorized the canon to cultivate resilient public truth-seeking across communities and eras; it is readily intelligible as the product of diverse historical communities and educational practices. It is not a deductive disproof, and it bears less strongly against embodied, participatory, accommodated, communal, or internally warranted models of revelation. Those models nevertheless retain a public question: what distinguishes divine participation from ordinary historical development?

The calibrated conclusion is therefore modest. The canonical profile counts against the strong divine-pedagogy model to the extent that evidence-proportioned belief was antecedently expected, feasible, preservable, and intended. Its weight depends on a fuller textual and reception-historical study and on independent judgments about divine aims. The practical norm is simpler: trust where evidence supports trust, remain uncertain where evidence is limited, and revise when evidence changes.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

The central inference is comparative and defeasible. Its deductive skeleton can be stated conditionally without turning the paper's model-relative conclusion into a disproof of divine authorship.

1. **Premise 1.** If the strong divine-pedagogy model is correct, a canon decisively authorized for high-stakes truth guidance should make a portable, symmetric, and self-applying method of evidence-sensitive belief revision salient across its teaching.
2. **Premise 2.** The Bible contains substantial local practices of testimony, testing, counsel, correction, and deliberation, but does not clearly integrate them into that portable method, especially when the canon's own authority is under examination.
3. **Premise 3.** Given the substantial positive repertoire and the study's limits, this mixture of local epistemic goods and incomplete cross-domain integration is more expected under a historical-human model of diverse communities and genres than under the strong divine-pedagogy model, by a degree that warrants moderate rather than decisive support.
4. **Premise 4.** When an observed profile is more expected under one model than under a comparator, that profile is comparative evidence favoring the former over the latter, with its strength limited by uncertainty in the model expectations.
5. **Conclusion.** Therefore, within the stated scope, the Bible's epistemic-pedagogical profile moderately favors historical-human development over the strong divine-pedagogy model. It counts against that strong model, not against every model of inspiration, mediated revelation, or theism.

Validity. If the four premises are granted, the conclusion follows: Premises 1–3 establish the model-relative expectation and observed contrast, and Premise 4 supplies the comparative-evidence bridge. The inference is deductively valid as a conditional reconstruction; validity alone does not establish that its empirical and interpretive premises are true.

Premise support. Premise 1 depends on the independently motivated aims assigned to the strong model. Premise 2 is supported by the textual examples surveyed here but remains defeasible because this paper is illustrative rather than a complete corpus study. Premise 3 draws support from the canon's historical and generic diversity, while mediated and participatory revelation models reduce the contrast. Premise 4 is a standard comparative principle of evidence. The resulting conclusion is therefore bounded and defeasible rather than a deductive disproof of divine authorship.

B Selected Companion Papers on Credencing

The following papers develop the credencing framework used in this essay. They were selected from the broader Insights catalogue and the research spine at Credencing for their direct relevance to evidence-proportioned belief, teachable calibration, warranted uncertainty, and institutional correction. The list is a guide to companion work, not an additional premise in the argument.

1. *Evidence-Proportioned Belief: A Credence-First Reframing of Faith and Rationality*. Presents the core norm in its simplest form: rational belief is graded confidence scaled to evidence, not a binary status or a performance of conviction.
2. *Core Rationality*. Distinguishes skill at logic, probability, and evidence processing from the willingness to let assigned confidence follow perceived evidence. This distinction explains why rational pedagogy cannot be reduced to technical instruction.
3. *The Two-Gap Theory of Irrationality: Evidence Perception, Belief Integrity, and Diagnostic Repair*. Separates failures in perceiving or processing evidence from failures in assigning confidence. The distinction permits different remedies for ignorance, error, motivated override, and update resistance.
4. *Warranted Uncertainty: The Discipline of Not Knowing in a Credence-First Epistemology*. Defends confidence bands and acknowledged ignorance when evidence is incomplete, noisy, ambiguous, or model-dependent, preventing calibration from becoming false precision.
5. *The Grammar of Credence: Evidential Alignment, Linguistic Modifiers, and the Gradient Hidden in Ordinary Belief*. Shows how ordinary modifiers such as “maybe,” “likely,” and “certainly” can express graded belief, making evidence-sensitive confidence teachable without mathematical notation.
6. *Credence Grammar: The Public Language of Partial Belief*. Develops a public vocabulary of confidence bands, source-status markers, live alternatives, defeaters, update conditions, and action thresholds. It closely parallels the counterfactual charter proposed here.
7. *Institutional Credencing: Official Confidence, Evidence Pipelines, and Organizational Belief Integrity*. Extends credencing to organizations through evidence pipelines, public confidence, dissent channels, source traceability, and update trails. It develops the institutional dimension of self-correcting pedagogy.
8. *Against Epistemic Exceptionalism in Plantinga’s Warrant Theory: Credence, Proper Function, and the Public Calibration of Theistic Belief*. Applies evidence-proportioned confidence to internal-warrant epistemology and asks how theistic belief can be calibrated and compared publicly rather than exempted from ordinary evidential standards.

References

- Barton, J. (2019). *A history of the Bible: The book and its faiths*. Allen Lane. <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/258551/a-history-of-the-bible-by-john-barton/9780141978512>
- Bishop, J. (2007). *Believing by faith: An essay in the epistemology and ethics of religious belief*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199205547.001.0001>
- Brettler, M. Z., Enns, P., & Harrington, D. J. (2012). *The Bible and the believer: How to read the Bible critically and religiously*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199863006.001.0001>
- Carr, D. M. (2005). *Writing on the tablet of the heart: Origins of Scripture and literature*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195172973.001.0001>
- Carter, J. A. (2025). Trust and its significance in social epistemology. In J. Lackey & A. McGlynn (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of social epistemology* (pp. 182–200). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhob/9780190949945.013.9>
- Coady, C. A. J. (1994). *Testimony: A philosophical study*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198235518.001.0001>
- Feldman, R., & Conee, E. (1985). Evidentialism. *Philosophical Studies*, 48(1), 15–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00372404>
- Johnson, D. (2013). *Biblical knowing: A scriptural epistemology of error*. Cascade Books. <https://wipfandstock.com/9781610977265/biblical-knowing/>
- Joyce, J. M. (1998). A nonpragmatic vindication of probabilism. *Philosophy of Science*, 65(4), 575–603. <https://doi.org/10.1086/392661>
- Lackey, J. (2008). *Learning from words: Testimony as a source of knowledge*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199219162.001.0001>
- Maher, P. (2002). Joyce’s argument for probabilism. *Philosophy of Science*, 69(1), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.1086/338941>
- Mellers, B., Ungar, L., Baron, J., Ramos, J., Gurcay, B., Fincher, K., Scott, S. E., Moore, D., Atanasov, P., Swift, S. A., Murray, T., Stone, E., & Tetlock, P. E. (2014). Psychological strategies for winning a geopolitical forecasting tournament. *Psychological Science*, 25(5), 1106–1115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614524255>
- Morgan, T. (2015). *Roman faith and Christian faith: Pistis and Fides in the early Roman empire and early churches*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198724148.001.0001>
- Morgan, T. (2022). *The New Testament and the theology of trust: “this rich trust”*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192859587.001.0001>
- Pennycook, G., Epstein, Z., Mosleh, M., Arechar, A. A., Eckles, D., & Rand, D. G. (2021). Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. *Nature*, 592, 590–595. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2>
- Pettigrew, R. (2016). *Accuracy and the laws of credence*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198732716.001.0001>
- Plantinga, A. (2000). *Warranted Christian belief*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195131932.001.0001>
- Roozenbeek, J., van der Linden, S., Goldberg, B., Rathje, S., & Lewandowsky, S. (2022). Psychological inoculation improves resilience against misinformation on social media. *Science Advances*, 8(34), eabo6254. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo6254>
- Sedlmeier, P., & Gigerenzer, G. (2001). Teaching Bayesian reasoning in less than two hours. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 130(3), 380–400. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.130.3.380>
- Sober, E. (2009). Absence of evidence and evidence of absence: Evidential transitivity in connection with fossils, fishing, fine-tuning, and firing squads. *Philosophical Studies*, 143(1), 63–90. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-008-9315-0>
- Sommer, B. D. (2015). *Revelation and authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and tradition*. Yale University Press. <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300158953/revelation-and-authority/>
- Stanovich, K. E., West, R. F., & Toplak, M. E. (2016). *The rationality quotient: Toward a test of rational thinking*. MIT Press. <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262034845/the-rationality-quotient/>
- Wolterstorff, N. (1995). *Divine discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511598074>