

Vicarious Sacrifice: John States the Essentials of the Gospel & Salvation by Faith Alone; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s Article on Nineteen "Western Philosophical Schools and Doctrines": the Philosophy of Rationalism: Truth Is Established through Reason; the Philosophy of Empiricism: Truth Is Established through Experience

John 20:31 - but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

- Two essential objects of saving faith come next: (1) Jesus is the Christ and (2) He is the Son of God.
- An unbeliever might not, in all probability, be familiar with the term "hypostatic union," but, under the Holy Spirit's common-grace ministry and the content of John's Gospel, he may perceive through faith that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel while at the same time conclude that He is undiminished deity, the Son of God.
- Upon expressing positive volition to the gospel, the individual is saved by means of the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit.
- Salvation is the result of positive volition to the gospel and it has both a purpose and a result: (1) deliverance from the lake of fire and (2) the imputation of eternal life.
- The phrase "believing you may have life in His name" emphasizes the imperative of the unbeliever's free-will response in order to acquire eternal life.
- The verb "may have" is the present active subjunctive of the verb ἔχω (*échō*). The subjunctive indicates the contingency of human free will.
- Positive volition has the result of receiving the imputation of eternal life indicated by the noun ζωή (*zōē*): "life."
- This passage points out the encroaching danger of rationalism and empiricism that will challenge the gospel presentation once the Lord has ascended into heaven.
- **Rationalism** concludes that truth is affirmed through reason. Philosophers are rationalists.

Rationalism: a belief or theory that opinions and actions should be based on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response. *Philosophy*: the theory that reason rather than experience is the foundation of certainty in knowledge.¹

- More details about the rise of rationalism require us to wax esoteric as we mention several of the august minds that populate this area of philosophy. We will restrict our research to the subcategory of religious rationalism.

Stirrings of religious Rationalism were already felt in the Middle Ages regarding the Christian revelation. Thus the skeptical mind of [Pierre] Abelard 'a-bā-lar' (1079–1142) raised doubts by showing in his "Yes or No" many contradictions among the beliefs handed down as revealed truths by the Church Fathers. The greatest of the Medieval thinkers, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), was a Rationalist in the sense of believing that the larger part of revealed truth was intelligible to and demonstrable by reason. Religious rationalism did not come into its own until the 16th and 17th centuries. (p. 642)

¹ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. "rationalism."

Four waves of religious rationalism. Deists accepted the existence of God, but spurned supernatural revelation. The earliest member of this school, Lord [Edward] Herbert of Cherbury \cher'-b(e-)rè\ (1583–1648),² held that a just God would not reveal himself to a part of his creation only and that the true religion is thus a universal one, which archives its knowledge of God through common reason. The religious controversialist Thomas Woolston (1670–1733) urged that the New Testament miracles, as recorded, are incredible. Matthew Tindall (1657–1733), most learned of the English Deists, argued that the essential part of Christianity is its ethics, which, being clearly apparent to natural reason, leaves revelation superfluous.

The second wave of religious Rationalism ... was French. Its moving spirit was Voltaire³ (1694–1778), who had been impressed by some of the Deists during a stay in England. Like them, he thought that a rational man would believe in God but not in supernatural inspiration. In his *Candide* and in many other writings, he poured irreverent ridicule on the Christian scheme of salvation as incoherent and on the church hierarchy as cruel and oppressive. In these attitudes he had the support of Denis Diderot \dē-drō\ (1713–84), editor of the most widely read encyclopaedia that had appeared in Europe.

The Rationalism of these men and their followers, directed against both the religious and the political traditions of their time, did much to prepare the ground for the explosive French Revolution.

The [third] wave of religious Rationalism occurred in Germany. David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), published in 1835 a remarkable and influential three-volume work, *The Life of Jesus* (1846). Relying largely on internal inconsistencies in the Synoptic Gospels, Strauss undertook to prove these books to be unacceptable as revelation and unsatisfactory as history. He then sought to show how an imaginative people innocent of either history or science, convinced that a Messiah would appear, and deeply moved by a unique moral genius, inevitably wove myths about his birth and death, his miracles, and his divine communings.

The fourth wave occurred in Victorian England, following the publication in 1859 of [Charles] Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. This book was taken as a challenge to the authority of Scripture because there was a clear inconsistency between the Genesis account of creation and the biological account of man's slow emergence from lower forms of life.⁴ (p. 643)

- **Empiricism:** Truth is obtained through experience. Scientists are empiricists.

Empiricism: the theory that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience. Stimulated by the rise of experimental science, it developed in the 17th and 18th centuries, expounded in particular by John Locke and George Berkeley.⁵

- To elaborate on this philosophy, we return to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and excerpts from the article by Anthony M. Quinton:

Empiricism is the name applied to the attitude that beliefs are to be accepted and acted upon only if they first have been confirmed by actual experience—a definition that accords with the derivation of the name from the Greek word *empeiria* [ἐμπειρία], “experience.”

² “Author of *De Veritate* (*The Truth*, 1624); advanced an antiempirical theory of knowledge like that of the Cambridge Platonists and maintained that the common articles of all religions, apprehended by instinct, include existence of God, duty of worship and repentance, future rewards and punishment” (*Merriam Webster’s Biographical Dictionary* [Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster Publishers, 1995], 483–4).

³ Assumed name of François-Marie Arou-et \ar-we\.

⁴ Bland Blanshard, “Rationalism: Religious Rationalism,” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia* 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), 25:642–3

⁵ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “empiricism.”

Stressing experience, Empiricism is thus opposed to the claims of authority, intuition, imaginative conjecture, and abstract, theoretical, or systematic reasoning as sources of reliable belief. Its most fundamental antithesis is with the latter (*i.e.*, with Rationalism).

“Empiricism” may be used to describe a hard-headed refusal to be swayed by anything but the facts that the thinker has observed for himself, a blunt resistance to received opinion or precarious chains of abstract reasoning. (p. 608)

The most elaborate and influential presentation of Empiricism was made by John Locke (1632–1704), an early Enlightenment philosopher. All knowledge, he held, comes from sensation or from reflection, by which he meant the introspective awareness of the workings of man’s own mind.

Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753), a theistic Idealist and opponent of Materialism, applied Locke’s Empiricism about concepts to refute Locke’s account of man’s knowledge of the external world. He drew and embraced the inevitable conclusion that material things are simply collections of perceived ideas, a position that ultimately leads to phenomenalism; *i.e.*, to the view that reality is nothing but sensations. (p. 610)

In principle, all knowledge is demonstrable by pure reasoning, but in practice, because of man’s finite intellect, it is necessary to rely on experience to confirm propositions for which rational proof is beyond reach.⁶ (p. 611)

- Thomas was an empiricist who said if he did not personally witness the phenomena of Jesus’ resurrected body and its stigmata, he would not believe.
- After the ascension, there emerged a wide array of philosophies and rationales that sought to identify reality, none of which considered the revelation of Scripture as an acceptable source of truth.
- The two *Britannica* excerpts just quoted are among numerous philosophies discussed under the encyclopaedia’s major title, “Western Philosophical Schools and Doctrines.” They include Aristotelianism, Atomism, Eleaticism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Pythagoreanism, Realism, Scholasticism, Skepticism, Sophists, Existentialism, Idealism, Materialism, Phenomenology, Positivism, Pragmatism, and Utilitarianism.
- These are the humanistic philosophies, rationales, ideologies, and schools of thought that have emerged in Western culture since the ascension of Jesus Christ.

⁶ Anthony M. Quinton, “Empiricism,” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 25:608, 610–11.