Merging Believing Faith and Obedient Faith: Implications of the Semantic Scope of *Pistis* on the Integrative Conceptualization of the Term in the New Testament

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Abstract

Since the days of Augustine of Hippo, there is, in Christian circles, a general tendency to understand pistis exclusively in cognitive/fiduciary terms, that is, as faith/belief, trust (reliance), or doctrinal statements. This proclivity permeates most Christian conceptualizations of the term. Recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated in compelling ways that understanding pistis in sole cognitive/fiduciary terms is problematic. The reason is that pistis has a broad semantic field that includes such words as faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, pledge of loyalty, obedience, and many more. As such, delineating pistis in a way that does justice to the Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts of the New Testament (NT) in which the term was used, necessitates a conceptualization of the term in a way that takes into account its polysemy. To this end, this article argues for an integrative semantic perspective of pistis. It contends that a conceptualization of pistis that reflects the socio-cultural realities of the NT should integrate all the semantic nuances of the term in a single conceptual category.

Introduction

Pistis, the Greek term traditionally translated as faith or belief, is of strategic importance to Christianity. With hundreds of occurrences in the NT and its omnipresence in the earliest

Christian literature, the term has become a distinctly Christian word (Morgan, 2015, p. 2; Gupta, 2020, Loc. 163). Emphasizing its importance, Teresa Morgan (2015) notes that the "language of faith is central to Christianity as to no other religious tradition: without it, it is impossible to do justice to Christian understandings of the relationship between God and humanity" (p. 1). For David Bjork (2021), *pistis* is both central to and irreplaceable in Christianity (p. 165). Given this centrality, it is important to accurately conceptualize the term (recognize its nature, extent and operations) to enable a clearer delineation and practice of Christianity.

Unfortunately, such has not always been the case due to polarized, surface, assumed, and reductionist understandings of the term. Nijay Gupta (2020), for instance, laments that meanings and connotations have been attributed to *pistis* that "do not go back to the faith language of Scripture, or do not represent the depth and richness of that word (group)" (Loc. 163). Bjork (2021), likewise, complains that "few religious words are more exposed to misunderstandings, distortions, and problematic definitions than faith" (p. 21). It follows that, despite the deluge of discourses around the *pistis* lexicon among Christians, the term suffers from elusive use and, as a result, still needs elucidation

Although the semantic field of *pistis* is vast, often, definitions of the term are unilateral, leaning on a specific semantic aspect of the term. Most biblical theologians tend to understand *pistis* primarily in cognitive/fiduciary terms. That is, they are inclined towards defining *pistis* (1) as something that one knows/believes from doctrinal statements, and (2) as faith, belief, or trust, in the sense of reliance. Gupta (2020) observes in this respect that most English translators use faith as the "default translation of πίστις [*pistis*]" (Loc. 263). However, they often render the term as faithfulness when the referent is God. Gupta (2020) explains that "nearly all translators are prone to translate πίστις 'faithfulness' when it relates to the nature and activity of God" (Loc. 263). This proclivity towards

conceptualizing *pistis* in terms of faith/belief is what Gupta (2020) calls "believing faith" (Loc. 301-343).

However, contemporary scholars who examine the *pistis/fidei* literature surrounding the NT like Morgan (2015), Michael Gorman (2015), Mathew Bates (2017, 2019), Gupta (2020), and Bjork (2021), have provided compelling evidence that translating *pistis* exclusively as faith/belief is problematic. For example, British expert of Greco-Roman history, Morgan (2015), in her monumental monograph, *Roman and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches*, maintains that *pistis* in ancient Greco Roman societies was "neither a body of beliefs nor the function of the heart and mind," but primarily a relationship of trust, trustworthiness, and loyalty that creates a community (pp. 14, 28, 31). As a term used foremostly in contexts of relationships, *pistis'* semantic range also included such relational meanings as faithfulness, loyalty, and, even, obedience (Morgan, 2015, pp. 12, 15; Gupta, 2000, Loc. 284-296; Bates, 2017, pp. 3, 77-78; Dunn, 2000, Loc. 112; Gorman, 2015, 90-91). Gupta (2000) calls these semantic nuances of *pistis* "obedient faith" (Loc. 301-343). Sadly, these meanings are not often highlighted in most Christian depictions of *pistis*.

My contention in this article is that, since Jesus Christ prescribes *pistis* as a major response to the gospel in the NT, recovering the faithfulness/obedience dimension in the conceptualization of *pistis* is essential in enhancing a response to the gospel that, concomitantly, engages cognition and belief as well as faithful, loyal and committed submission to Christ. My purpose is to show that a healthy semantic approach to *pistis* that culminates in devoted followership of Christ is one that is inclusive, merging *pistis* as cognitive belief and *pistis* as faithfulness, loyalty or obedience in a single conceptual category. I describe this approach as the *integrative semantic perspective of pistis.*

The article builds on five points. The first surveys the vast semantic scope of *pistis*. The second explores the two poles of *pistis*, namely faith and faithfulness, and highlights the resulting semantic tension. The third examines the concept of the obedience of *pistis* that enlightens the faith-obedience relationship. The fourth clarifies the role of Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther in reducing *pistis* to internal cognitive and fiduciary categories. The last point studies implications of conceptualizing *pistis* with its full semantic range in view.

The Scope of *Pistis'* Semantic Field

Pistis, as used in the Greco-Roman contexts, is a complex and polysemic term. This means that *pistis* is an intricate, and polyvalent term, with a wide semantic field (it integrates multiple meanings). To draft the contours of *pistis'* semantic field and, for the sake of conceptualization, capture its intricate multivalence, Morgan (2015) proposes an investigative methodology that she terms the *sociology of pistis*. That methodology is intended to trace the varying shapes of *pistis* in social contexts of the Greco-Roman human-divine relationships and how the *pistis* language enabled the creation, development, and mediation of all sorts of social relationships (Morgan, 2015, p. 120; Gupta, 2020, Loc. 814).

The vast array of ideas incorporated in the term that the sociology of *pistis* has unearthed include (but is not limited to) the following: *belief/credence*, *faith*, *trust*, *trusteeship*, *legal trust*, *proof* or *demonstration* (in an argument), *persuasion*, *assurance*, *honesty*, *credibility*, *faithfulness*, *loyalty*, *fidelity*, *reliability*, *trustworthiness*, *confidence*, *endurance*, *commitment*, *vow*, *pledge of loyalty*, and *obedience* (Gupta, 2020, Loc. p. 184, 1017; Bates, 2017, pp. 3, 77-78; Morgan, 2015, pp. 7, 510; Bill, 2010; Gorman, 2015, 90-91). It is clear, from these variegated shades of meanings, that translating *pistis* exclusively as "belief" or "faith" suppresses its polyvalent nature, projects its cognitive/fiduciary dimension above other dimensions and

blurs the "true nature of Christian confession and life" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 184).

The Two Poles of *Pistis*: The Tension between Belief and Faithfulness/Obedience

The multiplicity of meanings included in the word *pistis* can be understood as ranging between two poles: the pole of belief (faith) at one extreme and that of faithfulness (loyalty, obedience) at the other extreme (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 301).[1] Other *pistis* related concepts modulate between the two poles. As such, a basic problem with translating *pistis* is to render the term such that it captures all its shades of meaning. Or, expressed interrogatively, how can *pistis* be translated such that it covers both the notion of belief (something essentially cognitive) and that of faithfulness ("something active and encompassing the whole person and blending into the concept of obedience") (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 301)? Several scholars have grappled with this translational tension. In this study, I focus on the reflections of NT scholar, Nijay Gupta, and Bible and early Christian literature expert, Matthew Bates, because, in my view, their perspectives appropriately portray the translational challenge related to the semantic tension between the two principal poles of *pistis*.

Gupta's Approach to *Pistis*

In translating *pistis*, the majority of biblical scholars often opt for the pole of faith. This predilection is most likely due to the influence of Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) and Martin Luther's (1483-1546) views on faith as I will clarify later. Gupta (2020), however, strongly recommends that, to translate *pistis*, both poles – faith and faithfulness, need to be taken into account. That is, *pistis* should be rendered such that *pistis as belief*,

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[1]For a deeper discussion of passages that tend towards belief (faith) and those that tends towards faithfulness (fidelity, loyalty, obedience), see Nijay Gupta, 2020, Loc. 248-343 (pp. 7-12).

which he calls "believing faith," and *pistis as faithfulnes*s which he identifies as "obeying faith" are reflected (Loc. 301-343). This means approaching *pistis* in terms of "both/and" (integrative or holistic categories) instead of "either/or" (dichotomist categories). It is therefore "helpful to think of the meaning of [*pistis*] not in isolated zones [semantic extremes], but rather along a kind of spectrum" that varies between faith as a cognition and faithfulness which is a socially active reality" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 348-358). Instead of conceiving *pistis* "in zone terms, we must consider that [its] meaning may modulate, moving across this spectrum according to [the] intended meaning [of an author]" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 358). The following figure explains *pistis* in terms of a spectrum between believing faith and obeying faith.

Faith (cognitive)   Faithfulness (socially active)

Figure 1: Gupta's spectrum between *believing faith* and *obeying faith* (see Gupta, 2020, Loc. 354).
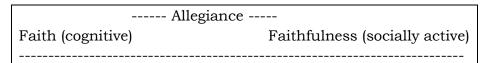
Gupta (2020), following Richard Hay, thinks that the term *trust* better encapsulates *pistis* as believing faith and *pistis* as obeying faith. He argues that, generally, "trust" represents *pistis* "precisely because it heals the breach, so to speak, between the cognitive aspects of the word's possible meaning and the active (behavioral/practical) valence of the word" (Loc. 358-368). That is, "trust" takes into account the multidimensional nature of *pistis* and "can carry at the same time the cognitive dimensions of choosing to think rightly about God as well as the covenantal dimensions of commitment to obedience" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 368). He calls *pistis as trust*, "trusting faith" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 368). To summarize, Gupta (2020) sees *pistis* as (1) *believing faith* which is cognitively active (not passive) since "believing is something you do with your mind. It is a function of thought" (Loc. 368); (2) *obeying faith*

which is relationally active given that "faithfulness is understood ... as an active form of loyalty and obedience" (Loc. 368); and both are summed up in (3) *trusting faith* which is volitionally active since the will represents "something proactive ("will to act") and is also sometimes [something] active in itself ("goodwill")" (Loc. 378). The figure below explains the merging dimension of trusting faith:

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        -------- Trust -------
Faith (cognitive)              Faithfulness (socially active)
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Figure 2: Gupta's merging dimension of *trusting faith* (see Gupta, 2020, Loc. 538)

Bates' Approach to *Pistis*

Bates shares much of Gupta's reasoning on *pistis* but has chosen a different word to express the semantic richness of *pistis*. Bates' all-inclusive word, capable of capturing all the dimensions and modulations of *pistis*, is *allegiance*. He argues that "when discussing salvation in generalized terms, allegiance is a better overarching English-language term for what Paul intends with his use of the *pistis* word group than the more customary faith, belief, and trust" (Bates, 2017, p. 78).

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      ------ Allegiance -----
Faith (cognitive)              Faithfulness (socially active)
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Figure 3: Bates' merging dimension of the richness of *pistis* in allegiance.

He builds his case for allegiance on four arguments: (1) "although *pistis* does not always mean allegiance, it certainly does carry this exact meaning sometimes in literature relevant to Paul's Letters and the rest of the New Testament"; (2) "since Paul regards Jesus above all else as the King (the Christ) or the

Lord, this is the most natural way for Paul to speak of how the people of God should relate to Jesus"; (3) "allegiance makes better sense of several otherwise puzzling matters in Paul's Letters"; and (4) the "proclamation 'Jesus is Lord' resonated with Greco-Roman imperial propaganda, so that *pistis* as allegiance fits into the broader cultural milieu of the New Testament world" (Bates, 2017, p. 87). I will focus on Bates' first argument because it is the most relevant for my discussion in this section.[2]

To substantiate his affirmation that allegiance is the best macro word for translating *pistis* in contexts of salvation and relationship with the Lord Jesus, one of the arguments that Bates summons is that *pistis* has often been used as allegiance in the literature produced around the NT era. In this regard, he cites several ancient texts where *pistis* is used as loyalty. One of such texts is 1 Maccabees 10:25-27. It reads:

> King Demetrius to the nation of the Jews, greetings. Since you have kept your agreement with us and have continued your friendship with us, and have not sided with our enemies, we have heard of it and rejoiced. Now continue still to keep faith [*pistis*] with us, and we will repay you with good for what you do for us. (NRSV)

In the text, Demetrius praises the Jews for maintaining their agreement with him instead of signing an alliance with his rival, Alexander. By the same token, he asks them to continue to show *pistis* to him promising them a reward. Bates (2017) correctly argues that what Demetrius is asking for in the text is not mere intellectual belief in him but loyalty or allegiance (p. 3). Another example comes from 3 Maccabees 3:2-4 where the Jews are said to continue to "maintain goodwill and *unswerving loyalty* [*pistis*] toward the dynasty" (NRSV, my emphasis). The dynasty mentioned here is that of King Ptolemy. Other examples

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[2]For details on Bates's four arguments, see Bates (2017, pp. 78-92).

relate to the Jewish historian Josephus (he wrote around AD 75–100), who uses *pistis* as allegiance or loyalty quite frequently in his writings. For instance, in *Antiquities* 12.47, King Ptolemy, in a letter, "speaks of Jews installed in positions requiring *pistis* in the royal court" (cited in Bates, 2017, p. 80). As in the above-mentioned cases, *pistis* here is not used as belief/faith but as loyalty or allegiance to the royal court. For other examples of this use of *pistis*, see Bates, 2017, pp. 78-80.[3]

From the above argument (and three others I do not explore in this study), Bates contends that, generally, in the context of salvation, *pistis* should be understood in the direction of loyalty or allegiance. In this, he agrees with Morgan's (2015) view that *pistis* in ancient Greco Roman societies was "neither a body of beliefs nor the function of the heart and mind," but principally a relationship of trust, trustworthiness and loyalty that forms and sustains a community (pp. 14, 28, 31). He further agrees with Pilgrim Bill (2010) who holds that *pistis* among the Greeks and Romans expressed "belief, trust, fidelity, [and] loyalty" (para. 16). It was "not merely an intellectual affirmation of truth, but deep-abiding dependence on something and tenacious loyalty to it" (Bill, 2010, para. 16). That said, in the ancient Greco-Roman world, *pistis* was predominantly not a cognitive or internal word but a relational and external term.

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[3]Bates (2017) notes that, in Antiquities 12.396, not only the noun *pistis*, but also its "related verb *pisteuo* are used with reference to matters of sworn allegiance, loyal commitment, and treason in battles" (p. 80). This dismisses the common argument that *pisteuo* always has a cognitive connotation and means "I believe" and "almost never 'I obey' or 'I show faithfulness'" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 301). Gorman (2015), echoing the works of Gordon Zerbe, argues that even the participial noun *pisteuontes* (frequently translated *believers*) that Paul uses in reference to those in Christ is polysemic, simultaneously embracing variegated connotations such as "those who are convinced, submit in trust, and declare loyalty" (p. 90). Thus, he argues that, in Pauline contexts, to capture its full significance, *pisteuontes* should, primarily, be translated "loyalists" (Gorman, 2015, p. 90).

Although Bates (2017) admits that (1) *pistis* can be translated as faith or belief in contexts of healings and miracles to express "confidence in Jesus's healing power and control over nature"; and (2) allegiance may not be the proper translation of *pistis* in every occurrence of the term, his overall argument is that "with regard to eternal salvation, rather than speaking of belief, trust, or faith in Jesus, we should speak instead of fidelity to Jesus as cosmic Lord or allegiance to Jesus, the king" (p. 5). And, what difference would this make, for instance, if one were to translate *pistis* in Ephesians 2:8 as "allegiance" instead of "faith"? The verse would read thus: "For it is by grace you are saved, through *allegiance*." The theological implications for Christian living would be far different from contemporary understandings of the place of *pistis* in salvation.

Based on biblical data and the illumination of NT era literature, Bates (2017) summarizes *pistis*, when understood as *saving allegiance*, in three basic dimensions: (1) *mental affirmation* or *intellectual agreement*, (2) *confession of loyalty* or *sworn fidelity*, and (3) *enacted loyalty* or *embodied fidelity* (pp. 5, 92). Intellectual agreement is the affirmation that the gospel is true. It requires the declaration of certain facts about Jesus Christ which, although not sufficient for salvation, are nevertheless necessary (Bates, 2017, p. 92). Confession of loyalty to Jesus Christ involves the open (public) recognition of his reign and lordship over the one making the confession. It is the pledge of loyalty made towards Christ (Bates, 2017, pp. 5, 92). Embodied (enacted) loyalty demands that, as a citizen of his kingdom, one translates the confession of loyalty into practical obedience to Jesus the King (Bates, 2017, p. 92) as is naturally required of subjects towards their king. This means that to be saved, intellectual agreement and public confession are necessary, but not enough. Because, according to Romans 1:5 and 16:26, the gospel aims at establishing the "obedience of *pistis*" (Bates, 2017, p. 98), manifesting *pistis* in concrete obedience to give expression to one's loyalty to Jesus the King is vital for salvation. The need to express *pistis* in concrete

obedience, in my perspective, is best captured in Paul's language of "the obedience of *pistis*."

The Obedience of *Pistis*

The expression "obedience of *pistis*" (*hupakoe pisteos*) is unique to Paul and exclusively found in Romans 1: 5 and 16: 26. These passages show how the Gentiles are to respond to the gospel for which Paul received grace and apostleship. The placement of the expression at the beginning and end of Romans on the one hand, and its inclusion in Paul's explanation of the gospel he preached (Romans 1:1-4) on the other hand, makes the phrase both central to the purpose of Romans and strategic to Paul's entire ministry. According to Don Garlington (1990), Romans 1:5 "can be looked upon as a programmatic statement of the main purpose of the Roman letter" while Romans 16:26, "is part of a well-known textual crux" to the epistle (p. 201). This means that "the obedience of *pistis*" sums well Paul's intention in this letter since as M. Black argues, "to win obedience from the Gentiles [is] the main purpose of the Epistle to the Romans" (cited in Garlington, 1990, p. 201). In this light, "the obedience of *pistis*" is a "phrase of no little importance for understanding the Pauline mission as a whole, both in its universal outreach and its ethical dimensions" (Garlington, 1990, p. 202).

Because *hupakoe   pisteos* is   deliberately   ambiguous (Garlington, 1991, p. 47), it has been the object of debate among scholars (Moo, 1996, p. 51; Garlington, 1990, p. 2002; Bates, 2017, p. 85). The debate revolves around the nature of the relationship between obedience and *pistis* and, in advanced theological circles, the understanding of the genitive *pisteos*.[4] In

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[4]Following in the steps of C. E. B Cranfield, Garlington (1990, pp. 205-207) outlines four views of *hupakoe pisteos* derived from the interpretation of the genitive *pisteos*. The first view upholds the *objective genitive*. It sees faith in the phrase as *the faith*, used in the sense of *fides quae creditur*, or the body of accepted doctrines. The obedience of faith, accordingly, is obedience to the faith, the authority of the faith or, to a lesser extent,

simple terms, the debate seeks to answer the question: "What is the relation of 'faith' [*pistis*] to 'obedience'?" (Garlington, 1990, p. 205) or, how does obedience relate to *pistis*? Several views seek to explain the nature of this relationship. I will first cite the four most prominent traditional views and, later, evoke one of the most current views as the fifth.

The Traditional Views

The first traditional view holds that obedience comes after *pistis* or as a result of *pistis*. It sees *pistis* as the source/fountainhead of obedience (Garlington, 1990, p. 206). It is post-conversion obedience. Douglas Moo (1996) states that this perspective presents "faith as the basis for, or motivating force of, obedience: 'obedience that springs from faith.' This rendering places emphasis on post-conversion commitment: the obedience of the Christian that is to follow and be the fruit of faith" (pp. 51-52). Holders of this view predominantly seek to comfort the Reformation theological stance of *sola fidei* (faith alone).

The second traditional view sees obedience as *pistis*. It is an "obedience which is directly identifiable with faith" (Garlington, 1990, p. 207) or "the obedience which consists in faith" (Garlington, 1990, p. 205). In the words of Moo (1996), this option "takes 'faith' as a definition of 'obedience'... [It is] 'the

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God's faithfulness. The second view upholds the *subjective genitive* also known as the *genitive of source*. In this sense, the obedience of faith is the obedience that comes from faith, the obedience that faith produces or the obedience required by faith. The third view supports the *adjectival genitive* which sees the obedience of faith as believing obedience (this, in my view, is the closest to Paul's intention. It is also the stance of some top scholars such as Douglas Moo (1996, pp. 51-52); Don Garlington, (1990); and Matthew Bates (2017, pp. 86-87). The fourth view is that of the *genitive of apposition* in which obedience defines faith or obedience consists in faith. Garlington (1990) in wrapping his analysis of the above views concludes that "the 'genitive of apposition' and 'genitive of source,' while not inappropriate in themselves, are to be rejected as too restrictive" (p. 224). As such, the translation "faith's obedience" or "believing obedience" perhaps much more than any translation better preserves the intention (and ambiguity) of the original *hupakoe pisteos* (p. 224).

obedience which is faith'" (p. 52). The peculiarity of this position is that it evaporates obedience into *pistis* thereby deemphasizing obedience in Romans and the ministry of Paul in general (Moo, 1996, p. 52).

The third traditional approach argues that *pistis* in *hupakoe pisteos* refers to the body of accepted or authoritative Scriptural doctrines. From this perspective, faith corresponds to *the faith* in the Augustinian sense of *fides quae* (the content to be believed). The obedience of faith, therefore, is obedience to *the faith* – the right doctrinal content. It is obedience to the authority of the faith, the entire *corpus* of Christian teachings.

The fourth traditional view maintains that obedience and *pistis* are inseparable and interdependent. The view does not subordinate obedience to *pistis* or make *pistis* subservient to obedience. It holds that *pistis* and obedience, although distinct are so intertwined that they cannot be divorced. This means that *pistis* and obedience are mutually interpreting because "obedience always involves faith, and faith always involve obedience" (Moo, 1996, p. 52); to "speak of faith is to speak of obedience" (Garlington, 1990, p. 210); and "faith and obedience are one action" (Young, cited in Garlington, 1990, p. 210). Accordingly, obedience and *pistis* "should not be equated, compartmentalized, or categorized into separate stages of Christian experience" since "Paul called men and women to faith that was always inseparable from obedience – for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than Lord - and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith - for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith" (Moo, 1996, p. 52-53). The hard distinction that many readers of Paul generally make between *pistis* and obedience corresponds more to a Western dualistic mindset than to Paul's thinking especially in this text. Gupta (2020) correctly notes that "obedience and faith are not as neatly separable human operations as some interpreters of Paul presume them to be" (Loc. 287).

Garlington (1990) is therefore justified in describing "the obedience of faith" as "believing obedience" (p. 224). The same observation may be made of Christopher Ash's (2009) depiction of "the obedience of faith" as "trusting submission" (para. 9); or Gorman's (2015) affirmation that: "The connection between 'belief and 'obedience' suggest that, for Paul, faith is a posture of both heartfelt devotion and concrete commitment, as was the case for Israel in relation to YHWH" (p. 91). Because Paul presents Jesus Christ who has been appointed the "Son of God in Power" as "Lord" in Romans 1:4b and affirms that his call is to bring Gentiles to "the obedience of *pistis*," it is contextually evident that "Paul saw his task as calling men and women to submission to the lordship of Christ" (Moo, 1996, p. 52).

This call for submission is not merely that of post-conversion. It is a submission that begins at conversion and continues in a "deepening, lifelong commitment" (Moo, 1990, p. 52; also see Ash, 2009, para. 10 and Gorman, 2015, p. 91). In this light, "obedience to Christ as Lord is always closely related to faith, both as an initial, decisive step of faith and as a continuing 'faith' relationship with Christ" (Moo, 1996, p. 52). By using the phrase, "the obedience of faith," Paul shows his preoccupation (like James) in maintaining an "organic relationship between a faith which justifies and a faith which works" (Garlington, 1990, p. 212) since "true faith by its very nature includes in itself the sincere desire and will to obey God in all things" (Cranfield cited in Garlington, 1990, p. 208). Paul's use of "obedience of *pistis*" further shows that he "seems unable to disjoin faith and obedience when he thinks of the proclamation of the gospel" (Gorman, 2015, p. 90).

The biblical concept of *pistis* always incorporates the notion of obedience. "In fact," as Hendrickson argues, "so very closely are faith and obedience connected that they may be compared to inseparable identical twins. When you see the one, you see the other. A person cannot have genuine faith without having obedience, nor vice versa" (cited in Garlington, 1990, pp. 208-209). Therefore, there is no true biblical *pistis* that does not

integrate the idea of obedience and genuine obedience that does not include *pistis*. Biblical *pistis* is always obedient *pistis* (or believing obedience) such that one cannot talk of true biblical *pistis* without obedience, or mention obedience without *pistis*. *Pistis* and obedience are like two sides of the same coin. One cannot have one without the other. Accordingly, I will depict the "obedience of *pistis*" in Christopher Ash's (2009) words as "bowing the knee in trusting submission to Jesus the Lord, both at the start [initial *pistis*] and in the continuation [continuing *pistis*] of the Christian life" (para. 8). It is an "initial and ongoing surrender" to the Lord Jesus (Ash, 2009, para. 10). In the words of Gorman (2015), "it is not only the initial response of a person to the gospel … but also a person's ongoing posture and commitment" (p. 91) to the Lord Jesus both in this life and one to come.

This Pauline perception of *pistis* and obedience draws from the Old Testament (OT) understanding of *emunah*, one of the main Hebrew words translated as *pistis* in the Septuagint. *Emunah* includes notions of faithfulness, loyalty, firmness, reliability, reliance or trust (Perry, 1953, p. 252; Kellner, 2021, Gupta, 2020, Loc. 232; Morgan, 2015, p. 9). *Emunah* in the OT is "not merely belief in or assent to a given set of propositions" (Garlington, 1991b, p. 10). It is rather a two-sided concept which involves trust and a commitment to God's covenant (Garlington, 1990, p. 209). *Emunah* and OT faith language in general "is everywhere associated with covenant relationship" such that "faith has less to do with theological ideas *per se* than with the nature and integrity of a relationship of trust" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 232-248). This means that Israel's obligation to have *emunah* in God was "precisely an undertaking to remain faithful to the covenant" (Pathrapankal, 1971, p. 77), which essentially builds on obedience given that "faithfulness is obedience" (Bultmann, cited in Garlington, 1990, p. 209). In this sense, "in the OT … faith and obedience are virtually synonymous" (Garlington, 1990, p. 209) and, on this basis, "it is artificial to distinguish between faith and obedience"

(Garlington, 1991b, p. 10). Walter Brueggemann (2002) corroborates by noting that OT faith "concerns attentive engagement in a promissory relationship. [It] is a practice that entails obedience to the *Torah* [the law] and its specific requirements. Israel's fidelity to Yahweh, not unlike fidelity in marriage, thus consists of concrete acts that take the other party with defining seriousness" (p. 78). This implies that "When one trusts in God one obeys God; faith and works are inextricably woven together in the response of trusting faith!" (Nanos, 1996, p. 233). As Edmund Perry (1953) explains:

> ... The Old Testament does not set trust [*emunah*] and obedience in contrast to each other as separate ways of satisfying the demands of God. *Emunah* comprehends the totality of what we commonly mean in the familiar expression "faith and works." Obedience without trust ... is not the obedience God requires ... Conversely, trust inevitably expresses itself in action. "Trust in the Lord and do good" are two aspects of the same act of will by which man is declared righteous. (pp. 255-256)

It may be argued that Paul never carried the OT understanding of *emunah* into his conception of *pistis* in the NT. However, studies have shown that the definition of *pistis* was not his point of contention with the Judaizers. Paul nowhere argued the definition of *pistis* with his opponents. This means that, in general, he conceived *pistis* in OT terms (Nanos, 1996, Loc. 77; Garlington, 1990, p. 210, Gupta, 2020, Loc. 221). His point of departure with Judaism was the object of *pistis* and obedience which, for him, was Christ rather than the notions of *pistis* and obedience themselves (Garlington, 1990, p. 210; Nanos, 1996, Loc. 77). As Garlington (1990) maintains, "What is radical about Paul, however, is faith's object – Christ" (p. 211). The object of *pistis* rather than the understanding of *pistis* demarcated Paul's conception of *pistis* from that of Judaism. While in Judaism the object of faithful obedience is the Law, the object of the

Christian obedience of faith is Christ. Black's observation in this regard is pertinent: "The whole inspiration of Jewish life was the Law and obedience to it; the inspiration of Christian living is Christ, apprehended by faith and obedience to the Risen Lord" (cited in Garlington, 1990, p. 202).

As such, it cannot be denied that Paul's understanding of *pistis* originated from the OT, drawing especially from his acquaintance with the Septuagint. Gupta (2020) is unequivocal: "His [Paul's] own understanding of faith was highly (though not exclusively) influenced by the Septuagint … that was, for all intents and purposes, what Paul read as Scripture" (Loc. 221). He adds that "in order to make the most sense of what Paul meant when he used the language of πίστις, it is necessary to investigate how the Septuagint translators used this word, especially in view of Hebrew/Aramaic terms and ideas" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 221).

Matthew Bates' Recent View

The fifth and most recent view comes from Bates (2017) who argues that, by the obedience of *pistis* (obedient allegiance), Paul means that the purpose of the gospel for which he has received grace and apostleship is to bring about among nations "practical obedience characteristic of allegiance to a king" (p. 86). He terms this kind of allegiance "enacted allegiance, embodied allegiance, obedience that is characterized by *pistis*, faithful obedience, or allegiant *pistis* (Bates, 2017, p. 86; Bates, 2019, 70). This perspective that is compatible with the fourth traditional view of the obedience of *pistis* (believing obedience) but takes it a step further, stands on two main pillars: (1) a recognition that *pistis* is predominately an allegiance rather than a mere belief or an intellectual assent; and (2) a recognition that, because the enthronement of Jesus Christ is the climax of the gospel, allegiance is the proper response to Jesus as King (p. 85). Thus, in responding to the gospel, the obedience of *pistis*, from initial confession of Christ, should permeate the entire Christian life.

In sync with this, Paul's point in using the phrase "the obedience of *pistis*" is "not that once we have a pre-established trust in Jesus' power to forgive our sins, then we are set free to do good works [a perspective that is meant to read *faith alone* in texts where it is not]; rather it is that the gospel is that Jesus has been enthroned, so the only proper response is obedient allegiance to him as the king" (Bates, 2017, p. 86). Confessing *pistis* in Christ therefore means a declaration of allegiance which results in forgiveness of sins and salvation. This initial allegiance to the lordship of Christ is maintained through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as Christ-followers continue to deepen their relation with Jesus the Christ. From this standpoint the "purpose of the gospel proclamation is to cultivate obedient allegiance to Jesus the king among the nations" (Bates, p. 86). This, however, is not synonymous to being saved by works. As Bates (2017) explains, this "is not an attempt to establish self-righteousness but a posture of servant-minded loyalty" (p. 87).

The Reduction of *Pistis* to Cognitive/Fiduciary Categories Only:

The Role of Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther

Due to overuse, even important terms that glowed with significance could be de-contextualized, de-substantiated, devitalized, and, subsequently, flattened. *Pistis* is a case in point. One of the flattened approaches of *pistis* concerns its pervading understanding in purely cognitive or intellectual terms, that is, as *belief* only or something that happens exclusively in the mind. Another such approach is to perceive *pistis* as statements of faith (doctrinal statements). These faith statements, generally found in Creeds, start with "I believe" (Latin, *credo in*), almost equating faith to the language of doctrine. This perspective of faith which may find a faint echo in passages such as 1 Timothy 4:6 is also known as *propositional faith*. In church history, Augustine of Hippo, (to a lesser extent, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and Martin Luther

are recognized as minds who heavily oriented the meaning of *pistis* in the direction of something purely intellectual or doctrinal (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 881-892).

The cognitive/fiduciary and propositional views of *pistis* primarily developed from the way Augustine understood the term. Augustine saw *pistis* principally as something that happens in the mind. He conceptualized *pistis* at two levels: *fides qua* and *fides quae*. *Fides qua* refers to the "personal act of faith, the faith with which I believe/we believe" while *fides quae* "indicates the doctrinal content that I believe/we believe" or profess to be true (Gagliardi, 2011, para. 4; also see Morgan, 2015, p. 11-12). For Augustine, faith is both personal belief (*fides qua*) and the doctrinal content (taken as true) in which one believes (*fides quae*). That said, as Gagliardi (2011) explains, in Augustine's thinking "it is not sufficient to simply know the doctrines in order to believe [*fides quae*], because it is also necessary to have the free act of professing these doctrines as true [*fides qua*]" (para. 4).

However, it must be noted that both *fides qua* and *fides quae* belong to the cognitive/mental dimension, implying Augustine's emphasis on intellectual faith. Unlike his predecessors, the apostolic fathers such as Clement of Rome who used *pistis* in a broad sense like Paul did (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 881), Augustine emphasized faith mostly as something the mind believes. In this light, he is more or less one of the principal culprits for shifting *pistis* in the sole cognitive/fiduciary direction. As Gupta (2020) correctly writes, "With Augustine, we see evidence of the beginnings of a shift toward a more cognitive use of faith language, emphasizing what the mind believes ... [He also dwelled] on the friction between a faith approach to God and a works approach" (Loc. 881).

Augustine's division of faith into *fides qua* and *fides quae* has deeply shaped subsequent theological and Christian reflections on *pistis* and "dominated western thinking since the fifth

century" (Morgan, 2015, p. 12). For Teresa Morgan (2015), "One thing almost all studies of New Testament *pistis*, and Christian faith in general, have in common is that they are deeply influenced by Augustine of Hippo" (p. 11). Aquinas is among the minds that the Augustinian understanding of faith molded. Gupta (2020) says of him that he "was even more narrowly interested in the cognitive and epistemological dimensions of faith" than Augustine was (Loc. 881).

Martin Luther drew heavy inspiration from Augustine. Regarding his conceptualization of faith, Luther and his acolytes closely followed the path of Augustine seeing *pistis* mostly in terms of belief. Luther outlined "faith as the illumination of the mind and heart by God to instill cognition and belief" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 881). He also drew a strong demarcation between faith and works to highlight justification by faith apart from works – this has been known as *sola fidei* (faith alone). Since then, Luther's *partitionist language* of faith (the separation between faith and works) has shown tacit resilience and influenced much of Protestant and Evangelical theology till date (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 892).

Because of his hard distinction between works and faith, Luther was accused of easy-believism. In response, he identified the faith he taught which, he believed saves, as *fides viva* (living or vital faith) to differentiate it from mere intellectual faith (Sproul, 2010, p. 48). Later, in his book *Loci Communes Theologici*, Luther's follower, Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), sought to shed light on *fides viva* by explaining the concept in three dimensions: faith as *notitia*, faith as *assensus*, and faith as *fiducia*. *Notitia* refers to the cognitive content (information) to be believed. It is the "content of faith that is apprehended by the mind" (Sproul, 2010, p. 48). *Assensus* points to believing the content (the information) that is given as being true or factual. It is the "intellectual assent to the truth of the data or content of the gospel" (Sproul, 2010, p. 49). *Fiducia* underlines trust in or reliance on the information given. According to Sproul (2010), *fiducia* "involves personal trust. This is usually

understood as involving something in addition to the cognitive or purely intellectual element. It involves volitional and affective elements" (p. 49). The Augustinian *fides qua* and *fides quae* is clearly perceptible in the Lutheran Reformers' conceptualization of *pistis*, with the addition of another internal activity which is trust (reliance).

Despite the Lutheran segmentation of faith in *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*, it nevertheless remains that their conception of *pistis*, like that of Augustine, reduced faith to something that only happens within a person without any outward practical manifestation of obedience.[5] Both Augustine and Luther focused on the interiority of *pistis* and object of *pistis* (doctrinal truth), excluding the fact that *pistis* manifests outwardly in a context of social relationships of trust, trustworthiness and loyalty (Morgan, 2015, pp. 28, 31). This is precisely where the danger of perceiving *pistis* exclusively as something that happens in the mind or, internally, in the heart, lies. Although faith has a cognitive/fiduciary aspect, the danger with this "kind of thinking, where faith equals doctrine, [is that faith] could degenerate into a kind of checklist mentality" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 184). Together with the cognitive understanding of *pistis* (faith as belief), these approaches have the potential to "turn faith into something sterile, purely cerebral, and even gnostic" (Gupta, 2020, Loc. 184) without any impact on behavior. The effect of keeping exclusively to an intellectual or doctrinal faith is that it creates an understanding of *pistis* that is divorced from practical action or the obedience dimension attached to submitting to Christ's lordship. Another danger is that faith is generally taken passively, and not viewed actively

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[5]Because of this lack, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) canvassed a twofold model of *fides qua* involving conversion, on one hand, and a life in faith, on the other hand, characterized by obedience (Morgan, 2015, p. 12). From Bultmann's advocacy, Morgan (2015) argues that the "aspect of obedience in *pistis* has subsequently come to play a great part in discussions about the semantic range of the lexicon in the New Testament" (p. 12).

(faith that works). Hence, an approach to *pistis* that federates its entire semantic range is vital to its conceptualization.

Implications of Conceptualizing *Pistis* Taking into Consideration its Semantic Field

As earlier discussed, outlining the contours of *pistis* taking into cognizance its polysemy is essential in restoring the full neo-testamental meaning of the term. To achieve this, in my perspective, requires a couple of conceptual and epistemological shifts regarding contemporary understandings of *pistis*. I suggest that conceptualizing *pistis* and constructing a fideistic theology that reflects the socio-cultural realities of the NT world requires the following shifts:

It requires the adoption of an inclusive understanding of *pistis.*

This perspective that I have described as integrative semantic perspective of *pistis* merges faith and obedience/faithfulness in a single conceptual category. Scriptures are clear that faith demands obedience/faithfulness and obedience/faithfulness demands faith. Both concepts are encapsulated in *pistis.* Theological reflections around *pistis* need to keep this reality in dynamic tension and come to terms with the truth that *pistis* means "both faith and faithfulness" (Gorman, 2015, p. 111). In keeping with this, Dunn (2020) warns of the danger of treating the believing faith pole and the obedience/faithfulness pole of *pistis* "in an in either-or way, whereas in the Greek the one merges into the other" (Location 112).

An essential advantage of adopting an integrative semantic perspective of *pistis* is that it prevents a reductionist conceptualization of the term. Reductionism occurs when a complex system (made of various interrelated components) is defined by reducing the system to one of its aspects rather than integrating all its interconnected parts. *Pistis* is polysemic.

Therefore, it should be rendered taking into account its complexity, ambiguity, and multivalence. Reducing the term to one or some of its part flattens and de-substantiates it. Accordingly, the inclusive semantic integration of the term is vital in its conceptualization since, as Dunn (2020) argues, "faith, trust, and faithfulness/loyalty [are] all bound up in πίστις" (Loc. 122). Semantic integration should also be advocated for several other NT concepts that have been unduly dichotomized through Western dualistic thought patterns reflected in much theological reflections produced in Western contexts. Jeremy Treat (2014), in his book, *The Crucified King*, indicts this false dichotomist penchant that has resulted, for instance, in the "kingdom-cross divide", the severance of the *Christus victor* and penal substitution approaches to atonement, and a host of other such divides (Loc. 459-603).

The task of *Bible* scholars is, therefore, that of finding a word that encompasses the various nuances of *pistis*. Bates (2017) and Gorman (2015) have suggested words/phrases that, in my view, appropriately integrate the semantic multidimensionality of term. For Bates (2017), allegiance is that word. The reason being that the term "is a larger category capable of subsuming the notion of mental assent to the reliability of God's testimony (belief) or of God's promises (trust), while also foregrounding the idea that genuine mental assent goes hand in hand with an allegiant or faithful (*pistis-full*) living out of that assent" (p. 90). This implies that although Paul and other NT authors call people to believe or trust, these concepts "are best adjusted and subsumed within the richer category of allegiance. Consistent trust in situations of duress over a lengthy period of time is allegiance" (Bates, 2017, p. 90). Gorman (2015) who is convinced that *pistis* is more than intellectual assent and that no single word can comprehensively account for *pistis* word group in the NT, advocates that phrases such as "believing allegiance," "faithful allegiance," or "trusting loyalty" come close to communicating its core meaning in many instances (p. 90). Contemporary Christian theologians can draw from these

recommendations as triggers for further reflections on the nature, scope and operations of *pistis*.

It requires the rethinking of epistemological presuppositions that underlie evangelical conceptualizations of *pistis*.

Most Christian presuppositions (especially those of Evangelicals) that underlie the understanding of *pistis* primarily lean on Luther's *viva fidei* which, itself, is informed by Augustinian *fides qua* and *fides quae*. As discussed earlier, they are characterized by a cognitive/fiduciary polarization of *pistis* which establishes an understanding of the concept that is reductionistic in nature. In as much as this cognitive/fiduciary dimension is included in *pistis*, the term covers a broader semantic field. An integrative reconceptualization of *pistis* that merges believing faith and obedient into a single conceptual frame and transcends the Reformation's dichotomist theorization of *pistis* is, therefore, vital. This calls for a rethinking of the extant evangelical paradigm of *pistis* that, for over 500 years (since Reformation), has dominated Evangelicals' discourse on the subject. *Pistis* does not only pertain to internal categories of human existence. The meaning of *pistis* is more than solely fiduciary/cognitive. It includes faithfulness, loyalty, and obedience. Evangelicals need to come to terms with this and conceptualize the term "taking into careful consideration the historical, cultural, and literary context in determining the precise meaning of *pistis*, rather than projecting our unexamined presuppositions on this most important biblical notion" (Bjork, 2021, p. 166).

It *may* require leaving the *pistis* family words untranslated.

Because of layers of uncritical assumptions that have, for centuries, sedimented on understandings of *pistis*, it may be judicious, in the process of its semantic recovery, to leave the

word untranslated. "Undressing" *pistis* may serve the purpose of scraping off misguided, reduced, wholesale, and assumed conceptions that have overlaid, disfigured, and de-substantiated the term. Once the word is freed from semantic impositions, a new integrative semantic content that merges the two poles of *pistis* can be put into it anytime the word is taught, and hence, trigger the process of its semantic recuperation. This semantic recuperation may, therefore, demand a de-conceptualization of the term (leaving it untranslated) and its re-conceptualization. It should be noted that leaving words untranslated is not new to Bible translators. Terms such as "amen", "hallelujah", "maranatha" are glaring examples. *Pistis*, for the sake of semantic accuracy and clarity, could be treated in a similar way.

Conclusion

This article explored the impact of the semantic range of *pistis* on the conceptualization of the term. It hinged on five points. First, it investigated the semantic range of *pistis*. Second, it examined the tension between the believing and faithfulness/obedience poles of *pistis*. Third, it studied the obedience of *pistis* to elucidate the relationship between obedience and *pistis*. Fourth, it highlighted Augustine and Luther's role in reducing *pistis* to its cognitive/fiduciary dimensions. Finally, it outlined few implications of conceptualizing *pistis* having in mind its full semantic range.

From the findings, it is evident that, due to its semantic multivalence, conceiving *pistis* wholly in cognitive/fiduciary terms, as is generally the case, obscures its rich semantic variety, reduces its semantic force, and favors a polarized portrayal of the term. A healthy perspective of *pistis* should *always* be integrative, merging both its believing and faithfulness/obedience poles. Given *pistis'* centrality to Christianity and its mission of announcing Christ's redemptive rule as the King who saves in the nations, a semantic recovery of *pistis* is urgent in that it enables a *pistis-ful* response to the

gospel that fuses a mental affirmation of Christ's lordship that brings about salvation and an unreserved devotion to that lordship that translates in concrete commitment. This recovery demands both a disposition to question wholesale inherited assumptions that, in general, have undergirded conceptualization of *pistis* and a willingness to adopt an integrative understanding of the term.

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