

The Doubting Apostle 'Didymus' – Saint Thomas: theological, psychological and historical perspectives

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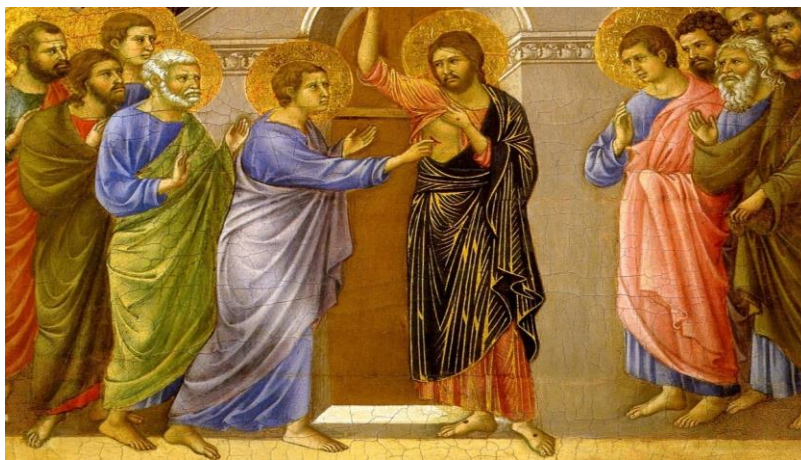
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Abstract

Very little information is documented on Saint Thomas the Apostle, however the Gospel according to Saint John gives us a very good indication of his character. Saint Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared amongst his disciples the first time after His resurrection in the Upper Room. He would not accept as true, the numerous eye-witness reports concerning the risen Christ and stated that: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). He is thus termed 'Doubting Thomas', and his doubt was a distinct failure to believe in things he had not personally witnessed but that were attested to by others. Thomas' primary significance thus arises from his position as a "doubter" and one lacking in requisite faith who found it necessary to have proof that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. His doubt is important as it illustrates a profound denial of the Lord and a duplicity of the supremacy and indeed the very truth of what it means to possess proper faith. This paper argues that Thomas' doubt (and his behaviour during the crucifixion of Jesus) has an internal disposition side, in other words his personality traits and cognition, as well as the external environment (the situation, including the abnormality of it, the nature of the communication and the group [the disciples]). The latter is often left out in the criticism of Thomas, resulting in him being portrayed as the symbol of the unfaithful and doubting individual. His behaviour could thus be evaluated in accordance with the attribution theory. Thomas clearly affirms the depth of his belief in his missionary activities, in especially India.

Key words: faith, resurrection, doubt, truth, attribution theory, psychology, history, Thomas.



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Introduction

It was at the Last Supper, where Jesus stated: "I go to prepare a place for you.... And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know". And it was the apostle Thomas who replied: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" In this Thomas shows a lack of spiritual depth in understanding to what Jesus had taught the apostles and this came from an unwillingness to believe (McBirnie, 2008).

Jesus replied: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:1-6). Thomas is again referred to in John 21 where he is one of seven disciples who were out fishing on the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) when the Risen Jesus appeared to them. The incident of the apostle Thomas and his meeting with the risen Jesus transpires in a part of John's Gospel which is termed the 'Book of Glory' (John 13:1-20:31). Most scholars agree that this segment of the Gospel is additionally divided into three other sub-sections namely the Last Discourse in John 13:1-17:26; the Passion in John: 18:1-19:42; and finally the Resurrection in John 20:1-29. The fact that the Thomas 'incident' is at the tail end of the Gospel highlights the fact that narrative is not focused on emphasizing the doubt of Thomas but in fact demonstrating the glorious revelation of Jesus as the conqueror of death and as Lord of Lords'. Thomas is the key character, other than of course Jesus Christ. One of the twelve disciples, Thomas, is called 'Didymus' (Greek meaning 'twin') by the Evangelist John He is generally accepted as having been the twin brother of Saint Matthew who is known in his original Aramaic name, as *Tau'ma* (Nicholl, 2012: 39). He is called Didymus on each of the three occasions he appears in the Gospel of John. He also appears in each of the other three synoptic gospels, namely Matthew, Mark and Luke (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6) as well as in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts, 1:13). He was initially referred to as Jude the son of James and as the grandson of Alpheus. There are certain texts which state that Thomas is the twin of James and not of Matthew. In reality, we thus know very little of Thomas.

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, each contain in their narratives a succession of occurrences associated with the appearances of the risen Jesus Christ to his adherents. In each of these narratives the disciples momentarily endure a period of unbelief, disbelief, bewilderment and even amazement, but conclude and believe fervently that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Thomas was given the particular nickname of "Doubting Thomas" because he continually sought the worst in everything according to certain theologians. He is characterized by many as a person who doubts, wavers and is skeptical. However, there are numerous cases where we see another side of his character. For example, when Lazarus died, Jesus said He was going to Bethany but as Bethany was in close proximity to Jerusalem it was a realistic possibility that the religious leaders might find Him and kill Him. When Jesus proclaimed His intention to return to Judea to visit Lazarus, Thomas shows his character by saying to his fellow disciples: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). This shows us the loyalty and trust in Jesus of Thomas even before the Lord's resurrection. There is no doubt here in his belief in Jesus since he is even prepared to die on His behalf.

From John 11:14 onwards we read:

*"Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. 15.
And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the
intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. 16.*

Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him."

It is clear that Thomas failed to comprehend the essence of what Jesus was uttering when he spoke of his impending death and imminent resurrection, Jesus however uses the opportunity to emphasize and teach what he is in fact saying as is evidenced in John 14:3-7 when he states:

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. 4. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. 5. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? 6. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. 7. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him."

Thomas again during the conversation before the Last Supper raises a protestation: "Thomas saith to him: Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5).

Thomas is not spoken of much at all in either of the gospels of Matthew, Mark or Luke, but becomes a very important contributor in John, especially at the end (John 20:24-29). He is initially seen as a strong person who inspires the other disciples to go with Jesus to Judea. He does however later harbor doubts about following Jesus. Post resurrection he is viewed by readers as the "doubting apostle Thomas" who repudiated the return of Jesus right up until he personally viewed the scars on Jesus body and placed his fingers in Jesus' side. In John 20:24-29 we read:

"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe". Eight days later, His disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing". Thomas answered Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." (John 20: 24-29)

Faith issues

Saint John the Evangelist's core reason for relating the Thomas story is to inform people of the gloriously resurrected Lord and to lead them to having a deep faith that does not rely on visual sighting for corroboration or evidence provision. While certain theologians may have classified Thomas as a doubter, he eventually travelled to India to proclaim the resurrection of his Lord and God thus demonstrating his deep faith. It is sadly a fact

of human nature that many people believe only once they see something for themselves or have close friends whom they regard as reliable witnesses to an event. Although Thomas initially doubted, once he saw evidence for himself, he proved his utter devotion and faithfulness to an extent that exceeded any other person. Thomas is thus famous for his skepticism when the Apostles declared Christ's Resurrection to him as he was missing from the Upper Room at the time Jesus manifested himself to the disciples. Thomas was resolute in his stance of unbelief and sought greater confirmation. Consequently, he demonstrates his faith eight days later, and is reproached by Jesus: "Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed" (John 20:29). John narrates the story to bring to us a deeper understanding of the importance of the notion of believing after, or as a result of, having seen the resurrected Christ, and of believing without having seen him as was the case for many others. When Thomas fails to believe, he is failing to essentially believing what all the disciples were expected to believe in terms of their faith. When one disbelieves, their faith is in vain according to the Apostle Paul who provides us with a definition of faith in Hebrews (11:1) "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not."

The act of Faith originates in God, since God first acts in us, or we would have no Faith. In Ephesians: 2:8 we read "For by grace you are saved through faith: and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God." Faith is thus a gift of God but our faith is then dependent on us and so it is an action we perform. James states that, "Faith without works is dead". Thomas thus lacks true faith as there is no action of faith by him initially. Faith is then quintessentially an act of the heart and an accomplishment of understanding. Thomas's doubt is understandable since the mystery of God and what He is capable of is superlatively immense and infinite. Like Thomas, our limited intellect sees God and cannot grasp Him entirely. Paul tells us, "We see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity" (1Corinthians 13:12-13). Thomas as a doubter, prompts us to have a deeper understanding that faith does not necessarily eliminate doubt and often seeks questions to be answered. Faith is not something that is clear-cut and unimpeded. Jesus teaches us however to believe when we are faced with uncertainties. Faith thus leads us to assurance, but not necessarily the contented conviction of reason and precise proof. It does make us however confident as believers in God's word.

Interrogating John 20: 19-23

Jesus manifestation to His disciples in the Upper Room when Thomas was absent-according to the Gospel of John (20:19-23), was an important moment in which Jesus showed them his hands and his side:

19 Οὔσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ τῇ [a]μιᾶ σαββάτων, καὶ τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων ὅπου ἦσαν οἱ [b]μαθηταὶ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. 20 καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν [c]ἔδειξεν τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν [d]αὐτοῖς. ἐχάρησαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες τὸν κύριον. 21 εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς [e]ὁ Ἰησοῦς πάλιν· Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν· καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς. 22 καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· Λάβετε

πνεῦμα ἅγιον· 23 ἂν τινων ἀφήτε τὰς ἀμαρτίας [f]ἀφέωνται αὐτοῖς· ἂν τινων κρατῆτε κεκράτηνται.

“19. Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side (ἔδειξεν τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν [d]αὐτοῖς). Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord (ἰδόντες τὸν κύριον).

21. So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” 22. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The disciples were very pleased to see their Lord and what is stressed is the observable aspect of His presence. Of significance and particular importance as a tangible sign is the explicit declaration concerning the hands and of the side of Jesus.

In John 20:24, we read:

24 Θωμᾶς δὲ εἶς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα, ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος, οὐκ ἦν μετ' αὐτῶν ὅτε [a]ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς. 25 ἔλεγον οὖν αὐτῶ οἱ ἄλλοι μαθηταί· Ἐώρακαμεν τὸν κύριον. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω ἐν ταῖς χερσίν αὐτοῦ τὸν τύπον τῶν ἥλων καὶ βάλω τὸν δάκτυλόν μου εἰς τὸν τύπον τῶν ἥλων καὶ βάλω [b]μου τὴν χεῖρα εἰς τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῦ, οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω.

Thomas is stated as being one of the twelve disciples (εἶς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα). Directly after this in John's gospel, the disciples convey to Thomas that, “We have seen the Lord” (Ἐώρακαμεν τὸν κύριον) (John 20:25). This again emphasizes the importance of seeing as an aspect of faith, as far as the disciples are concerned. Thomas thus expresses his doubt and states “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails...I will not believe” (Ἐὰν μὴ ἴδω...οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω) (John 20:25). Brown (1970) asserts that Thomas is unreasonable in his expression of doubt since the other disciples are expected to accept what they have witnessed. Thomas wants to both see and touch Jesus on His crucifixion wounds. For him, nothing less will do than seeing for himself. He will not trust what the other disciples have to say and seeks clear and unambiguous corroboration of what he is told. His resolute stance is according to Damalas (1940) a direct result of his notion that since he too is a disciple of Jesus, he is entitled to a personal manifestation of the resurrected Lord. This idea is however not in line with what will follow. In any event we see another side of Thomas when Jesus shows Himself to seven of the apostles by the Sea of Tiberias and when he instructs them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat (John 21:6), because they had caught nothing all night. John tells us that they. Including Thomas, instantly obeyed him. Thomas' actions demonstrate then as well as during his encounter with Jesus eight days after the Resurrection, that he is in fact a man of who has deep faith in Jesus Christ and who he acknowledges to be his Lord and God. There is however an opinion shared by some that Thomas doubted the notion of anyone at all

rising from the dead as stated by Saint John Chrysostom: "It was not so much a refusal to believe the other apostles as it was more a conviction that resurrection from the dead is an impossible thing" (Commentary on John, PG 59,473).

Jesus appears to Thomas

It should be noted that the 'eighth' day was an important day in Hebrew theology since it was the start of a new reality in terms of spiritual importance. John states that it was eight days after Jesus initial post-resurrection presence with the other disciples, that they were once again gathered, except now with Thomas present in the house and they were behind closed doors. Again Christ *came and stood among them* (καὶ ἕστη εἰς τὸ μέσον) (John 20:27). Jesus greets them by saying "Peace be with you," (*Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν*). He then immediately says to Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side, and do not be unbelieving but believing" (καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός) (John 20:27). Jesus thus invites Thomas to see for himself but Thomas immediately shifts his stance of unbelief to one of total belief. His is immediately convinced of the presence of the Lord and acknowledges what he sees: 'My Lord and my God' (*Ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου*) (John 20:28). Thomas statement is essentially a closing statement in the sense that in the beginning of the John's gospel, the divine Logos, the Word incarnate is proclaimed as our God (John 1:2). Now we hear that profound truth expressed about Jesus who has been crucified, resurrected and glorified. Jesus is fact and not metaphysic in any sense (Marsh,1977:648).

Thomas's affirmation of faith is exceptional none of the other disciples expressed such deep faith in Christ who Thomas acknowledges as his Lord and God. By making such an expression of faith, Thomas ascribes to Jesus the characteristics of Yahweh as 'Lord and God' as employed during the Old Testament period (Bultmann, 1971:538). This also shows us his unconditional acceptance of the Lord so that the story is not one in which faith is lacking but rather one in which Thomas desires a more personal encounter with Jesus. He wishes to see for himself the Jesus he would die for in John 11:16 "*εἶπεν οὖν Θωμᾶς ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος τοῖς συμμαθηταῖς· Ἄγωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἀποθάνωμεν μετ' αὐτοῦ*".

Viewed from a Christological perspective in this periscope, when Thomas utters the short statement 'My Lord and my God' he is making a huge declaration which supports John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God". Jesus responds to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and (yet) have believed" (*29 λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ὅτι ἐώρακάς με πεπίστευκας; μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες*) (John. 20:29). This statement is in itself a significant beatitude in line with the eight blessings in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. It is in essence a proverb-like proclamation that is without a narrative, yet mysterious, precise, and replete with meaning on a topic that forms a major biblical theme, namely, 'faith'. This beatitude thus shows a different kind of faith, namely one which does not need to be influenced by what one perceives. Jesus is articulating with Thomas on faith which is the result of his visual experience. Those who have not seen and believe, probably refers to the other disciples who have not had the privilege of witnessing for themselves the resurrected Lord, but nonetheless believe. They are blessed as they believe without the need for further visual evidence.

Thomas's experience prompts us to understand that our faith is a deep personal conviction and it is entrenched in our own unique experience of God and yet, we can also obtain faith via our social networks. It is interesting to note that hearing is just as important as seeing when it comes to faith.

When Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18), is in the garden where Jesus is in a tomb she "turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus" (*"ταῦτα εἰποῦσα ἐστράφη εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω, καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα, καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν"*). (John 20:14). It is only when Jesus calls her with the tone of His voice that she accepts it is He (John. 20:16). Later Mary Magdalene proclaims, (*ἀγγέλουσα*), "I have seen the Lord" (*Ἐώρακα τὸν κύριον*) (John. 20:18). Once again a visual sighting is mentioned as an important aspect and yet she recognized Him by His voice. Seeing is then an important aspect of belief.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul alludes to the importance of seeing as way of believing when he uses for the resurrected Jesus the verb "*of the*" (he was seen), which is the basic verb for seeing. He thus considers visual direct evidence as an indispensable constituent of the Gospel and faith. Ignatius of Antioch (AD 35 or 50 – 98 to 117) (Farmer, 1987), the Apostolic Father and student of John the Apostle and was the third bishop of Antioch. In his *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (3:1-3), Ignatius refers to the Gospel of John by making an explicit mention of the resurrection of Jesus (Löhr, 2010), which shows us the importance attached to verification through sight and/or hearing and/or touching when it comes to teaching the truth about Jesus:

"For I know and I believe that he (i.e. Jesus) was in the flesh even after his resurrection. And when he came to those about Peter, he said to them: 'Take, handle me and see that I am not a bodiless demon.' And immediately they touched him and believed ... And after the resurrection he ate and drank with them as a being of flesh, although spiritually united with the Father."

"For many today, compounded more of doubt than of belief, he seems the most admirable, or anyway the most sympathetic, of the disciples. We recognise him as someone not unlike ourselves" (Nicholl, 2012:40). The act of witnessing as being important to belief is a key aspect in John 20:24-29. This is important given that the Gospel of John was written during the last decade of the first century BCE and consequently very few of the original eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were still alive and most of the believers would have not seen Jesus in the flesh. John thus writes about Thomas for the sake of emphasizing the resurrection of Jesus for generations to come (Cyril, PG 74,724,732)

What was important to them was the testimony of earlier generations and the apostolic tradition that existed (Most, 2005). Believers would need to totally accede to what apostolic tradition stated if they were to be adherents in totality. The Thomas issue served as an encouragement to future believers to believe and have faith in the fact of the resurrection of Jesus (Marrow, 1995). Thomas did not actually touch Jesus before he uttered 'My Lord and my God' according to what the Evangelist John has written. Marrow (1995) concurs when he states that Thomas' confession of faith "is not a reaction to a conclusive and successful scientific experiment." Yet paradoxically, some

of the exegetes such as Cyril of Alexandria (PG 74,728), and Origen (Commentary on John, Vol.13, 30) write as though they believe Thomas did touch Jesus and then believed. When Jesus says "Have you believed because you have seen me?" the word 'believed' is used in an absolute sense and cannot mean anything else but serves as an indication of total belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Such belief was not guaranteed even by sighting Jesus in His glorified body but only by the inward workings of the promised Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. Thomas is thus in a sense a link between the Apostles and contemporary believers.

In any event, for Thomas, acquiring a strong faith was not a modest acquiescence with any doctrine. He moved from being an unbeliever to being a believer and not through merely seeing but through in relying on apostolic eye-witnesses and this in itself suggests a greater faith than most (Chrysostom, PG 59). Not seeing yet believing, involves greater willingness and decisiveness, and perhaps shows a greater inclination for exposure to truth. Thomas does not necessarily reach the ultimate climax of Christian blessedness since his faith hinges on perception and actual sighting but this does not mean that many generations of Christians who do not see Jesus as Thomas did, will believe on the basis of only apostolic testimony. Their faith is not the sort of faith that rests on signs and wonders, but rather holds on to the word of Christ alone (Black and Rowley, 1980:866-867)

Thomas and the Holy Eucharist

The words recorded in John's gospel, "Blessed are those who have not seen and (yet) believe" undoubtedly also possesses a significant eucharistic and liturgical aspect. At the Last Supper John states:

"So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me'" (John. 6:53-57).

John is aware that believers form part of liturgical community who are already believers and who partake of the eucharist as part of their belief. The Holy Eucharist is a mystery for them but is an important one since it is placed by God into the very visible continuity of history. Christ did not say the bread and wine represented His body and blood, but He said "This is...". Thus a trans-substantiation occurs in that the divine act in which the substance of a religion sign is transformed in the personal revelation of God. The ritual has a deep inner meaning and power and it is the celebration of the salvific reality of the Risen Lord, and the gift of redemption and worship from His Father (Powers, 1967:172). They thus experience Jesus through the communion of His Body and Blood and need no other proof of Him such as a physical sighting and of course they are blessed since: "Blessed are those who have not seen and (yet) believed". The reality of Christ's trans-substantiation demands His presence and real conversion of bread and wine into Body and blood. "The real bond is in the fact that Jesus performs the same action now which He did then, interiorly transforming the worship of a community and the community itself in its worship" (Powers, 1967:175). Christ states very clearly: "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides

in me, and I in him” (John 6:55-56). The theological interpretation of Thomas’s actions has tended to focus on it as a confirmation of the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. However in the writings of saints John Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria during the 4th and 5th centuries respectively, it was afforded a highly sacramental and eucharistic construal, in which it was viewed as an allegorical aspect of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Thomas faith was an individual retort and his story is related by John to demonstrate the relationship between perceiving and believing. Thomas does meet Jesus face to face and has the confirmation he desired. Thomas like the other apostles had the opportunity to witness the risen Lord in order to believe and he could have also touched Him if he so wished. He however immediately acknowledges his Lord, to which Jesus clearly affirms that the formerly unbelieving disciple has now seen him for himself and, has thus believed. John thus uses Thomas to establish for posterity the fact of Christ’s resurrection as a basic truth and it is undeniably a reality. For Thomas the issue of faith was a means of demonstrating utter faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus. It was also a fundamental act of trust and he demonstrated a very personal and deep commitment to Jesus for the remainder of his life. The Apostle Thomas should thus be considered not merely as "Doubting Thomas", but rather, as someone whose faith did hesitate at one decisive moment, yet through the divine grace of Christ, his wavering was reversed into an opportunity for the demonstration of the actual bodily resurrection of the Lord, and for the concomitant scriptural refutation of Docetism and the Gnostic heresy (http://orthodoxwiki.org/Apostle_Thomas). Thomas story pushes us to expand our faith and trust in Jesus despite never having seen him personally except in His Eucharistic celebration.

Assessing Thomas from a psychological perspective

There are many ways to analyse and to understand Thomas as well as his actions and behaviour as described in the New Testament, with specific reference to his doubt in the resurrection of Jesus. In this paper, one such approach is from a social cognition perspective. It is attempted with this approach to analyse Thomas’ social world (with very limited information), and to attempt to understand it within the context that his reported behaviour in the Script. Firstly, Thomas’s behaviour is explained based in accordance with the attribution theory (to explain an individual’s behaviour by attributing it to both his internal dispositions [traits, motives, etc.] as well as the external environment), in other words inclusive of both the dispositional and situational attribution (Meyrs, 2013). Thomas is one of the characters in the Bible that are stigmatized based on his “doubtful / suspicious” nature, without the contextualization of the demonstrated behaviour. Hollway, Lucey and Phoenix (2007) refer to it as internal and external attributes of causality respectively. Ignorance of both aspects is referred to as the fundamental attribution error, which is defined as “a tendency to underestimate situational influences and overestimate dispositional influences on individuals’ behaviour” (Myers, 2013: 103).

In terms of the internal disposition of Thomas is it important to look at his psychological state as well as his personality characteristics evident from the Scrip. One way of looking at it is through the social judgement lens, which involves efficient information processing, it also involves our emotions and moods. Meyrs (2013) postulates that individuals that are bereaved or depressed will be motivated to search and seek information that makes

one's environment more understandable and controllable, through intense thinking. Happy people are by contrast more trusting. A bad mood according to Meyers (2013) also primes an individual's recollection of negative events, and other's behaviour seems more sinister. Hollway, Lucey, and Phoenix (2007) are of the opinion that a mood or emotion requires that an individual perceives an event as relevant to things he /she wants or not want, and must be regarded as personally significant. The explanation is based on two basic premises, that individuals differ from each other, and that the environment and context plays an important role is an individual's congestion and subsequent behaviour.

A further aspect related to Thomas's internal disposition, is his cognitive processes, also an element that differ between individuals, and often dependent on situational influences. Reaction to the outer world is mostly guided by an individual's cognitive framework acquired through past experiences. Based on this past experience, decisions and actions very often occur automatically, based on these entrenched cognitive frameworks. This is a central theme in the social psychology, but it also has its exceptions. There are instances when an individual takes time to logically think about a decision or an act, without being in the so-called "automatic mode" (Meyers, 2013). This is called controlled processing, and according to Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008) this tends to happen when an individual is exposed to something unexpected.

When it occurs, an individual will often fall back on his/her cognitive schema, which is the mental framework utilized to organize a large amount or complex information. This is to a large extent empiricist (the truth is found by looking at the hard facts) and critical rationalism (the truth eludes us – our task is to avoid falsity) in nature according to Higgs and Smith (2007). These schemas vary from one person to the next, reflecting unique life experiences, impacting on the way an individual interprets information, and ultimately reacts to the situation. It was therefore Thomas' truth, which has been defined by James (2004: 59) the individual's agreement with "reality", and through the pragmatic question of "how can it be assimilated, validated, corroborated and verified". Truth's validity is a process through validation – searching of agreement between our beliefs and the reality. According to Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008), schemas influence all aspects of social cognition and specifically information that does not agree with our expectations in a given situation. This often leads to individuals ignoring or questioning the information. A further very important aspect in the field of social cognition, and relevant to Thomas, is priming, which is the transitory increase in each of the schema activation based on recent and relevant experiences, in the case of Thomas, the crucifixion and death of Jesus. The primer in this case, is the witnessing of the death of Jesus.

In summary, Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008) states that schemas often persist even in the face of disconfirming information, in the case of Thomas, the message that Jesus is alive received from his fellow disciples.

As the attribution theory is to explain Thomas' behaviour, it is also important to analyse the external environment and the actual situation itself. The first aspect that, in terms of his situation needs some scrutiny, is the message received by Thomas, from his fellow disciples. According to Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008), attitudes guide behaviour, in Thomas' situation the acceptance of the message of the fellow disciples, and is directly based on personal experience of the events contained in he message – something that is missing for Thomas (he was just told about Jesus being alive, and did not see Him as was the case with the other disciples). The acceptance of the message according to Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008) is determined by two basic aspects,

namely credibility of the communicators as well as the content of the message but it deems necessary to add a third to the Thomas situation, namely the context within which the communication took place. Meyrs (2013) also indicate that a communicator(s) that proclaims and uncomfortable message may be discredited. A further powerful influence on the persuasive value of a message is negative bias, and in terms of our social thought will vary in different situations. Negative information / experiences (in this case the death of Jesus) reflects features of the external world that potentially be experienced as threatening to the individual's (Thomas) safety, therefore his reaction on the message.

A further situational aspect that needs some elaboration is the fact that it was an abnormal situation, and the impact of it on the relationship between the parties, specifically in terms of the communication between them. The abnormality of the situation might have influenced the relationship between the disciples, impacting on the credibility of the communicator(s). This credibility is impacted on by the perception that might exist of self-interest. Although self-interest has not been documented as such, it could have existed. A further aspect that might have an impact on the message is fear / threat with the recipient reacting in a defensive manner, which is a typical reaction according to Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2008) when the evidence isn't that strong (evidence that is totally absent with Thomas). In accordance with the elaboration likelihood model, an individual can be persuaded through careful, systematic and evidence based information, once again something that is absent from the Thomas case. Meyrs (2013) postulates that active experience is very important for the processing of information. Further, it is well documented that when a message has high relevance (as this message to Thomas), it is human nature to process the message more systematically based in facts and within the preferred social cognitive schema. In contrast with this (when the relevance is low), a more heuristic approach will be followed (automatic or cognitive shortcuts) (Myers, 2013). Thomas most probably remained within his natural schema, which is factual and systematic, regardless of the context (the traumatic experience). Faith, as we know it and live it today (with the evidence in writing – the Bible) is generally an automatic action or predisposition (heuristic in the social psychology) (Kézdy and Boland, 2009).

A further situational aspect that could have influenced Thomas' behaviour, is related to the group characteristics after the traumatic event? The issue of the perceived in-group out-group, with the in-group witnessed the resurrected Jesus, and Thomas, being part of the perceived out-group (perhaps only him and Judas) who did not see the resurrected Jesus. Hollway, Lucey, and Phoenix (2007) are of the opinion that explanations of non—conformity out-group behaviour (in this case, the doubt expressed by Thomas) are mainly attributed to internal causality (dispositional attribution) by the in-group (the rest of the disciples), and has been reported as such in the New Testament.

To summarize, one can easily accuse Thomas of being unfaithful, but his behaviour should be evaluated in accordance with the attribution theory. This paper argues that Thomas' doubt (and his behaviour during the crucifixion of Jesus) has an internal disposition side, in other words his personality traits and cognition, as well as the external environment (the situation, including the abnormality of it, the nature of the communication and the group [the disciples]). The latter is often left out in the criticism of Thomas, resulting in him being portrayed as the symbol of the unfaithful and doubting individual.

Affirming Thomas's faith through his works

If belief is the only criteria used for evaluating the faith and genuineness of the apostle Thomas, then we are confronted by an even bigger dilemma. The Bible recounts the following episode involving the apostle Phillip when he said to Christ

"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us". Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Phillip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves." (John 14:8-11 NIV)

The implications of the words of both Phillip and Jesus in this account are overwhelming and have far reaching implications for the discussion concerning belief and doubt. It should be noted that the identity and person of Jesus is central to the doctrine of the deity of Christ and as such, the very foundation of the Christian faith. As indicated in the narrative, Phillip demands evidence by asking *"show us the Father, and it is enough for us"* (John 14:8). The words of Phillip afford a glimpse of his scepticism and doubt concerning the identity and person of Jesus. Jesus on the other hand responded by saying *"Don't you know me, Phillip, even after I have been among you such a long time... How can you say, show us the Father?"* (John 14:9) and goes on to say *"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me"* (John 14:11). Jesus in effect hereby claims that He is the very essence of God. While Thomas, who requested evidence, is only remembered for questioning the resurrection of Christ, many often overlook the even greater seriousness of Phillip's doubt when he demanded evidence by bringing into question the deity of Christ. It is also interesting to note that the apostle Peter acknowledged Jesus on a different occasion as only *"the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* (Mathew 16:16). One should therefore be reminded of the depth and significance of Thomas' profound statement at the time when he said of Jesus *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28). This proclamation on the part of Thomas is in sharp contrast to that of Phillip and Peter and is more resonant with the claim Jesus makes concerning His deity. It can therefore be argued that the belief of Thomas may have been slow and late, but it was undoubtedly sure and certain. It is also more difficult to accept Thomas being singled out as the doubter among the twelve apostles. In fact, they were all ordinary men, different from each other and certainly not perfect, who each must have endured a brief moment of unbelief at some time but eventually experienced ultimate amazement when they encountered Jesus and understood the true meaning and nature of His ministry. These were the type of men Jesus seeked and fashioned to become His disciples and ultimately selected to proclaim His Gospel to the world.

The Biblical record further shows evidence that Thomas was among the apostles who were anointed and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit:

*"For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth... When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Phillip and **Thomas**..."* (Acts 1:5-13 NIV)

*“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting... **All of them** were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4 NIV).*

The Biblical account is clear, Thomas is mentioned by name and numbered among the apostles who arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13). He also gathered with them in the upper room where they were staying, *“**all of one mind and devoting themselves to prayer**”* (Acts 1:14 NAS). Then, on the faithful Day of Pentecost, the scripture says that *“**All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit**”* (Acts 2:4). It is evident that Thomas was of one mind with the rest of the apostles. This dispels the notion of a doubting Thomas. He also received the Holy Spirit. The commission as outlined in Acts 1:5-8 is in line with the promise of baptism by the Holy Spirit and when Jesus commissioned His disciples and said to them, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation... and these signs will accompany those who believe...”* (Mark 16:15-17). It is evident that Thomas was anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfil the epic mission of being a witness for Jesus, not only in Jerusalem, but even to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

While the missionary tours of the other apostles following Pentecost are well documented, very little is recorded of Thomas' missionary travels. The geographical direction of his missionary tour would have removed him from the western influences of Greece and Rome where the histories of the early church were largely well documented (James, 2011). Hence, it is expected that very little is known in this day and age concerning the travels and missionary work of Thomas. It is worthwhile to further explore his missionary tours and witness for Jesus.

While there are many contradicting traditions about his travels (James, 2011), many historians believe that Thomas started his missionary tour by going east. According to the record of Eusebius the historian, as contained in Mydlecott (2005: 136, 250), when the apostles divided the countries of the known world according to their labour, India fell to the lot of Thomas. He was first assigned to Parthia (believed to be common day Syria and Iran). Another historian, J.M. Neale, as cited in Wilkinson (2004), stated that his travels from Parthia continued to the island of Socotra and eventually to Cranganor, a town situated to the north of Cochin on the west coast of India. As to when exactly the apostle brought Christianity to India is not clearly known, but it is estimated to be between the years 52-55 A.D. It is a commonly held belief that he first preached the gospel at Cranganor where he also performed many signs and miracles (Wilkinson, 2004: 292). Thomas is also widely known for establishing the first Christian church in India at Palayur in 52 A.D. He is reported to have established six other churches in the Kerala region. These churches, collectively known as the Seven Churches of St. Thomas were: *Palayur, Kodungalloor, Paravur, Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Nilackal and Kollam* (Fahlbusch, 1998).

Thomas also undertook several journeys to Mylapore and Chennai (Madras) along the Choromandel Coast. Tradition locates Thomas' main missionary activities between the states of Kerala on the western coast and Tamil Nadu on the eastern coast of southern India. He moved back and forth between these two centres along the trade routes in India and spent about twenty years preaching the gospel there. Thomas the beloved “Apostle of India” is said to have been speared by a Brahmin (Hindu) priest while in prayer and attained martyrdom on the 3rd day of July 72 A.D. (Anthonysamy 2004: 89).

India during apostolic times was a centre of trade for spices and very well established along the major trade routes to the east. According to Cheriyan (1973: 27), “Arabs,

Assyrians, Babylonians, Chinese, Phoenicians, Israelites, Greeks, and Romans were among the foreign people who had contacts with the Kerala Coast in ancient India". Thomas' missionary work was therefore not only confined to the Hindus, he also witnessed to the Jews in India. Koder (1965: 3) documented that the first Jews arrived in Kerala in Kings Solomon's merchant fleet. He further states that "Habban, a Jewish merchant is said to have accompanied Thomas along the trade routes... and some Jews are said to have been baptised by him in Cranganore". This is also confirmed and by Yohannan (2000: 23) when he says that "Thomas preached the Gospel to the settled Jews first and then to the Hindus". What is evident from this account is that Thomas in his missiology operated exactly in accordance with the blueprint for spreading the gospel as stipulated and instructed by Jesus: "*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8), "*first to the Jew and then to the Gentile*" (Romans 1:16). The missionary activities of Thomas along the trade routes of the orient stretched as far as China. Koder (1965: 3) also makes references to trading activities of the Jews between Malabar, China and Egypt. He further states that the "old Jewish settlement in China under the Hung dynasty was an offshoot of the Malabar Jews". Anthony'samy (2004; 133) says of Thomas journeys to China: "Then he went to Mailepuram (Madras) where he preached the Gospel of the Lord for four and a half months and then took ship for China. He stayed four and a half months in China and returned to Mailepuram". Bhaskaran (2007) also confirms this by saying that Thomas, instead of building the palace for the king, went about distributing the money to the poor, preaching and even travelled to China to preach the Good News. According to Wilkinson (2004: 293), "the gospel was first preached in India by the Apostle Thomas near Cochin... then near Madras (Mylapore)... and then he sailed from this port to preach Christianity in China". Thomas should thus correctly be remembered as the Apostle to India and China.

Thomas is remembered as the 'doubting' apostle. Doubt, as a status can be positioned anywhere between belief and unbelief, but when issues of faith in relation to Thomas are spoken, there is a distinction that should be borne in mind: firstly, doubt is not the opposite of faith, and secondly, belief is distinct from faith. Even Satan and his hosts cannot deny the deity and resurrection of Christ, for the Biblical scripture says "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder*" (James 2:19, Luke 4:41). But this is not faith. It is therefore shocking to realise that even a fervent believer can lack faith. This raises the serious question of what constitutes faith and how it differentiates from belief. Where there is not only a belief, but also a submission and alignment of the will to such an extent that the heart, the affections and the actions of an individual yield to and are fixed upon Christ- there will be found genuine faith (White, 2001). This is the kind of faith demonstrated by Thomas and also attested to by the apostle Paul who says "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life which I now live in the body, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Galatians 2:20). James goes further by saying "*You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ... Your faith, if it had no deeds, is dead*" (James 2:20, 26). While the commonly accepted dogma is that Thomas is a doubter, it can be argued that Thomas demonstrated in his life, by his mission and travels and through his deeds, the requisite faith that shows he was more than a mere believer. His faith manifested itself through works of righteousness and obedience to Jesus and His command.

Conclusions

Thomas' unique internal disposition and situational encounter of Jesus was of a pragmatic and empirical nature. For this he was reproved, criticised and even labelled a doubter. It is also argued in this paper that his unique experience not only prepared him, but also qualified and positioned him to effectively witness to both the Jews and the Gentiles. His testimony is a powerful one that speaks to all through the ages who were to request evidence and question the legitimacy concerning the deity and the resurrection of Christ. Who, other than a forensic Thomas could have faced a dangerous world of many deities? As a true disciple and apostle, he demonstrated genuine faith. He proclaimed the gospel according to instruction given by Jesus. For him, only one person could be adored as Lord and rightly be called God. Of all the apostles, he travelled the furthest. While the other apostles spread the gospel to the known world at the time, Thomas literally took the gospel to the ends of the earth. He risked his life and lost it in an unbreakable commitment to Jesus. His testimony was accompanied by signs and wonders like that of the other apostles. He even shared martyrdom like the other apostles. He established in India, a Christian history and ancestry that is longer and extends higher than the Christianity of many countries in Europe. Of all the apostles, Thomas may have faded from view, only to be remembered as the 'doubting' apostle, but he represents most profoundly an affirmation of faith and the missionary zeal associated with the rise of Christianity.

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