

# THE THREAT OF GULLIBILITY: FAITH AND CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

Gullibility is understood variously as ranging from outright stupidity to indecision raised by the epistemic indeterminacy of the testimony of others. The activities of tricksters fall within this range. These activities happen in almost every sphere of our lives—in business, religion, the law, politics and so forth. Tricksters dangle “beautiful illusions” and sway people into believing that they have something to offer them. As a result, people throw caution out of the window. In the Christian religion for example, the air is drenched with claims about what God is saying to the Church during these last days! Those who claim to have direct contact with God tend to have an edge over those who do not have direct access to God. It is in such contexts that religious imposters arise. Prophets and firebrand preachers have sprung up and are promising the masses either prosperity, or healing, even in cases where ailments have confounded scientists. Many people are swayed into believing them sheepishly. It is against this backdrop that some end up being cheated. Often this tendency is labelled gullibility. If gullibility is understood as a belief in something with no substantiating facts, does this make the affected persons foolish? If someone believes that another person is endowed with special gifts from God, which can help them, is this belief unwarranted? In this article I seek to unpack the concept “religious gullibility”, with the hope of plugging the holes.

**Keywords:** belief; credulity; deception; gullible; skepticism; trust; warrant

## INTRODUCTION

Gullibility<sup>1</sup> is a facet of human life. As a result of our social interaction, some people cheat others all the times. In some instances gullibility is trivial but in other instances

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1 Baker, Brinke and Porter refer to it as deception (Barker, Brinke and Porter 2012).

has much more serious and devastating consequences (Barker, Brinke, and Porter 2012). The propensity to be amenable to gullibility is common in children (Clement 2010), people with intellectual disabilities (Smith, Polloway, Patton, and Beyer 2008), investors and the general public (Odlyzko 2010). Cyber fraud gullibility (Longe et al. 2009), as well as faith-based gullibility (Greenspan 2008) have also been noted among other forms of gullibility. All forms of deception are deliberate. In some extreme cases however, people suffer a great deal of loss; either in terms of property, reputation or life.

The study of gullibility is grounded in the field of epistemology—particularly as it pertains to issues of religious beliefs (faith beliefs). The interest has, among other things, been sparked by the evident manifestations in unwarranted beliefs in society. This article analyses the different levels of gullibility exhibited in selected communities of Southern Africa. It explores some of the common shades of gullibility that occur in everyday life, and examines the extent of the problem. In the end, it seeks to suggest realistic ways of minimising or eradicating this vice. The secondary objective of the article is to demonstrate the efforts African traditions in the sub-region have taken to prevent children and young people to fall victims to accidental or deliberate tricksters. However, the central concern of the article is the level of gullibility among Christians. In this respect the article seeks to establish the extent to which the nature of faith is essentially gullible. Secondly, the article seeks to ascertain the epistemic status of the testimony of others. When should someone, say (**x**), trust the utterances of another person, say (**y**)? Will such trust ever be warranted? Another objective of the article is to explore how African traditions deal with matters of gullibility. In the end, the article seeks to establish whether gullibility is a vice that needs to be uprooted. If so, how can this be accomplished? However, if we cannot uproot it, perhaps we can work out strategies on how this vice can be minimised.

In pursuance of these objectives, the article employs the philosophical method of conceptual analysis and the examination of argument forms. It also draws inferences from primary research conducted by other scholars. The article is divided into four sections. Section I attempts to construct an operational definition of gullibility, and examine why it is uncanny. The section also recounts some Shona folklore tales as a way of exemplifying gullibility and analyses the tales. Next, section II examines the epistemological dimensions of faith. Section III slides into the nature of religious gullibility and analyses the problems it creates in matters of faith. Section IV attempts to find ways of eradicating or minimising the impact of religious gullibility.

## UNDERSTANDING GULLIBILITY

From a common-sense perspective, gullibility is evident everywhere around us. We encounter it in ourselves and in others on a daily basis (Buller 2008, 2). Gullibility is the unwarranted belief in something (a proposition or the testimony of another person), with no substantiating facts to support it. Gullibility is failure of social intelligence, where

a person is easily tricked or manipulated into an ill-advised course of action. Richard Dawkins even contends that gullibility is part of our make-up as human beings (Dawkins 2004, 135). It is further noted that gullibility is closely related to credulity, which is a tendency to believe unlikely propositions that are unsupported by evidence. Kourken Michaelian (2010) refers to gullibility as blind trust. In this respect, many people are gullible! The question is, how much should one trust the testimony of another, in the absence of compelling evidence? Should one be radically sceptical and not believe anything, which presents itself with no undefeated evidence? What is the benefit of social trust as opposed to not trusting at all? What is the epistemic value of gullibility? Before attempting to answer these questions, let us cast a glance at some Shona folklore tales on the subject of gullibility.

From Shona tradition folktales, we find some tales dealing directly with gullibility. Folklore tales are specifically chosen here because they were, and are still a channel for Ubuntu education in traditional Shona culture (Mapara 2013). Three folklore tales—(i) *Musikana ne bere* (“A maiden and a Hyena”), (ii) *Gava na gunguwo* (“The Fox and the Raven”) and *Pfumvu* (“A near- death escapade”) are of particular interest and will be examined closely in this article. In the one case, the maiden was tricked by the Hyena to open the door, contrary to instructions not to open the door for anybody else except her mother. In the other, the Crow lost a priceless meaty bone because of its gullibility.

## FOLKLORE TALE ONE: *MUSIKANA NE BERE* (“A MAIDEN AND THE HYENA”)

Once upon a time when wild animals used to speak just like humans, there was a certain widow who lived with her two daughters at the periphery of the village. The woman would leave very early to go and work in the fields and only return at dusk. The older daughter was charged with the responsibility of looking after her younger sister, with strict orders never to venture outside, nor open the door; just in case there were wild predators or dangerous men. She was only supposed to open the door when letting in the mother. In order to be let in, the mother would sing a certain song, and the daughter would recognise her voice and let her in. The hyena had tumbled across this secret exchange on one occasion when he was trying to waylay goats. He came to the hut several times and tried to sing to the girls in order to gain entry, but his voice always betrayed him. The girl would report all these to her mother, who always admonished her to be extra careful. The hyena did not give up. He would come every day, hide behind the bushes and listened to how the woman sings the secret song. He perfected his art and managed to trick the maiden to open for him. What a meal, he mused!

## FOLKLORE TALE TWO: *GAVA NE GUNGUWO* (“THE RAVEN AND THE FOX”)

The fox found a crow perched high up a *munhondo*<sup>2</sup> tree. She had a meaty bone between her beaks and was contemplating where to go to feast on her find. The fox, gnawed by hunger, quickly devised a plan to get the bone from the crow’s beaks. After exchanging greetings, the fox praised the crow’s singing talent and mentioned that her fame had reached far and wide places. However, the fox asked the crow to sing for him, since he had never had the occasion to hear her sing. When the crow opened her beak to sing, she at once lost her prize, much to the delight of the fox, who caught the bone in mid air.

## FOLKLORE THREE: *PFUMVU* (“A NEAR-DEATH ESCAPE”)

This story involves two friends the *tsuro* (hare) and the *mhembwe* (buck). The buck approaches the hare and asks what *pfumvu* is. Instead of working on a conceptual definition in terms of clarifying the *definiendum* (*pfumvu*) in terms of the *definiens* (words or phrases meant to clarify it), the *tsuro* took *mhembwe* towards the direction of hunters, withdrew and hid in a bush, leaving *mhembwe* in a very precarious situation. An assortment of weapons whizz past his head and one of the dog’s incisors narrowly misses his left tendon. It is through a streak of fortune and superior speed that he escapes alive! The next day when he meets *tsuro*, he complains bitterly, much to the amusement of the latter, who giggles uncontrollably and threw himself on the ground in outbursts of laughter saying; “That’s *pfumvu* for you my friend. You met her first-hand!”

## TALE FOUR: THE TALE OF THE GULLIBLIANS

Daniel O’Brien (2006) gives interesting insights into the nature of gullibility through a hypothetical case of the inhabitants of an imaginary city called Gullible:

The inhabitants of City State Gullible, the Gullibilians, believe whatever they are being told. Tourists are known to be generally helpful in passing on truths about the world wherever they go. However, in recent times tourists have become rather mischievous and for the fun of it, feed false information to the Gullibilians. From their own empirical investigations the Gullibilians have formed the belief that the world is spherical, yet through misleading testimony they have also formed the belief that it is flat. For instance, they believe **(P)**, where **(P)** represents the statement “The world is flat” and **(-P)**, which represents the statement “The world is spherical.” By believing both **(P)** and **(-P)** suggests that Gullibilians hold incompatible views. As a matter of fact, holding contradictory beliefs has become widespread in our societies.

2 The botanical name for *Munhondo/mutondo* tree (Shona) is stipules Intrapetiolar, a deciduous tree.

The first three stories had pedagogical aspects, as they are meant to warn children or any would-be listener against falling victims to tricksters. Listeners, particularly children were cautioned against taking what was said by others as true in all cases. They were taught not to take anything at face value, particularly from characters which were morally suspect and particularly dangerous. In the animal kingdom, where these stories were taken, some of these—the hyena, the fox, the hare and the tortoise are known to be tricksters. Others among these are predators. Thus, this was a matter of life and death and certainly, something not to joke about. The baboon, the crow and the buck are always presented as gullible on the general grounds that they are always ready to believe everything they are told; even by characters ordinarily known to be schemers!

In the first folktale gullibility is seen when the girl mistakenly opens the door for the hyena, when she should not have done so. Behind these folklore anecdotes lies a nagging epistemological issue—how far one is warranted to go in accepting the testimony of others? Under what circumstances, if any would such acceptance constitutes knowledge of the external world?

In the fourth anecdote, we see the inhabitants of Gullible believing everything they are told. Although the travellers initially give them accurate information about the lands beyond their country, which they believe, when false information is deliberately given to them, the Gullibians still believe it. Thus, their preponderance to believe all statements coming from their traveller-informants leads them to believe contradictory statements! This is an epistemological disaster to believe (**P**), where (**P**) stands for any proposition and also believe (**-P**), where (**-P**) stands for negation. The anecdote suggests that only gullible people would do such a thing, and that if they do, this becomes an epistemological scandal. Classical logicians have devised the law of non-contradiction, which forbids one from believing both a proposition and its negation (Hurdy 2013, 51–52)

Moving away from anecdotes to real-life situations, one notes that gullibility is rife in society, and assumes many hues—in the form of investment blunders (Beach n.d.; Odlyzko 2010), the judgment of children (Clement 2010), the vulnerability of computer users (Savirimuthu 2008, 183–184), as well as the faith of gamblers, among other things.

Gullible tendencies are generously distributed among young and feeble-minded people. They are also readily found in persons with mental disabilities. Children in particular, are believed to be characteristically gullible as they tend to take the testimonies of others, based on trust (Clement 2010, 531). Connery points to the belief in Santa Claus and other similar fables as examples (Connery 2008, 11 and 12). Accordingly, children are prone to naivety as they tend to believe all things they hear from adults. In this respect, they fall easy prey to being tricked. The idea of the potential gullibility of children is corroborated by Orozco, who points at their tendency to imbibe the testimony of other indiscriminately (Orozco 2010, 531):

children come to know things about the world from testimony despite having gullible characters, and most accounts of knowledge require that a belief be reliably formed. Since children indiscriminately receive testimony, their testimony-based beliefs seem unreliable, and, consequently, should fail to qualify as knowledge.

However, it would be a smack of reductionism to regard all children as gullible. The truth of the matter is that even children would try and process the information they receive from others, relative to their stages of psychological development (Clement 2010, 12). However it is probably true to regard children as high-trusters. This high level of trust in the knowledge received from adults is unwarranted, if not backed by some evidence. In the end, they are more likely to be fooled by adults. Yet, that is the only way children learn about the world! The nagging question is, *to what extent should anyone take the testimony of others?* (Graham 2006, 105–106).

Adults too can be high-trusters, just like children. Trusting others is one of our greatest social capital—“our most common epistemic practice by which we understand the world” (Origgi 2008, 36). However, because of this trust people fall prey to tricksters (Greenspan 2008, xiii):

Gullibility is not generally seen as an affliction yet it can do us terrible harm: losing our life-savings to a swindler, falling in love with a sweet-talking scoundrel, putting our health in the hands of a Dr. Feelgood. We are all at daily risk, although some of us far more than others, for reasons the author diligently explores. It is no small achievement wrestling this subject to the ground because it encompasses so much as it serves as at least a partial explanation for real and fictional events of amazing global range and variety.

Like children, adults would be prone to gullibility if they do not subject beliefs to careful scrutiny, and only accept those that warrant accepting. Cases in point are generously drawn by the many instances of the Christian faith—in spite of the fact that in Southern Africa the media is awash with bizarre stories about what believers are made to do by their leaders—but followers all over just follow blindly. For instance, it was reported that a pastor from Durban, South Africa, instructed his followers to do weird things—such as eating grass, hair, snakes or parade naked (ENCA News 2015). Recently in Zimbabwe there were reports of “anointed condoms.”<sup>3</sup> Such stories encroach into the abyss of gullibility. What is the relationship between faith and gullibility? Why are Christians at large, particularly those in Southern Africa not showing epistemic vigilance necessary to avoid being tricked by upcoming leaders?

The questions that one needs to ask are, Is it in the charisma of the pastor, prophet or leader of a Christian church to wield so much influence and be able to instruct members to do almost anything as an exercise of faith? Or, is it that Christians are almost always gullible in the pursuit of their faith? How far should a convert take this seriously in the quest to promote true Christianity? Does it mean Christians must imbibe every belief

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3 There were reports by the Daily News (Zimbabwe) and the H-Metro of a scramble by women at a local Church for anointed condoms!

without question? Would Christians not be thrusting themselves into the very trap of gullibility that education and socialisation has over the years been, and still is trying to eradicate? The prophets or Christians leaders in question claim to have been instructed by the Holy Spirit to advise their members to engage in such acts. While it is not the aim of this article to question the authority of the Holy Spirit, the article has however, the modest task of raising issues regarding the manner in which Faith operates.

## THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The issues at hand involve how Christians conduct themselves as they lead faith full lives. A lot also depends on their understanding of how the triune God operates in their lives. Whereas some Christians claim to converse with God through the Holy Spirit, others are just blank. Whereas some get special instructions from God, others never hear God speaking to their lives—hence the latter should get guidance from those who have direct contact with God; on how to go about living as Christians on a day-to-day basis. If a pastor or prophet makes known to the congregation what s/he claims God has revealed to him/her, must this not be subjected to public scrutiny by the believers in question? Is it in the nature of faith to make believers accept anything and everything? The general notion is that God is the giver of faith. He is the one who deposits faith directly or indirectly in people's hearts, resulting in what they do (Dawes 2003, 2). Dawes' assertion has fascinated epistemologically-oriented philosophers and theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. In epistemological circles, if God is causally responsible for the belief that **(P)**, where **P** stands for some proposition, then someone's faith in **(P)** would be induced externally by factors external to that of a person's mind. This is an externalist claim to faith. Some external agent, in this case God, would have caused the belief that **(P)**. The challenge has always been to establish and convince others that indeed this cause is God. There is also the evidential claim—that there are internal grounds accessible to the believer that makes him convinced that indeed God has caused the belief that **(P)**.

There is an obvious epistemological problem associated with the knowing subject. There is surely a compound problem when that subject wants to convince others to act on his/her experiences of God! How can others trust the inner experiences of another person? This becomes a serious challenge in the context of competing or suspicious truth-claims. The problem facing the Christian community at this juncture is that many are purporting to speak for God such that it is almost impossible to know who is authentic and who is not. Others claim to have been instructed by God to tell their followers to perform certain acts. In an atmosphere saturated with claims and counter-claims. How should ordinary Christians behave? Christ the head of the church has enjoined His disciples (in Mathew 7:15) to be wary of false teachers who would come in His name (American Bible Society 1999). The other Apostles have also advised in 1 John 4: 1-6 that disciples must test all spirits (American Bible Society 1999).



We are largely social beings who depend on others for knowledge (Fricker 2006, 592). This dependence is quite widespread. According to Lackey (2011, 316)

Testimony itself is typically understood quite broadly so as to include a variety of acts of communication that are intended or taken to convey information—such as statements, nods, pointings, and so on...Knowledge that is distinctively testimonial requires belief that is based or grounded in, not merely caused by, an instance of testimony. For instance, suppose that I sing “I have a soprano voice” in a soprano voice and you come to believe this entirely on the basis of hearing my soprano voice.

Trust is social capital that people use all the time. What would happen if the whole society was generally suspicious and skeptical? We need general trust to function as a society. However, it is this same trust which is the source of vulnerability. One wonders to what extent people must be prepared to trust. Some scholars contend that trust is indispensable as it has kept societies going. For instance, Dietlind Stolle (2002, 397) observes that:

Trust is a public good and it is important for individuals, for communities, for regions and for nations. Generally, high levels of trust help reduce transaction costs. Trust reduces uncertainty about the future and the need to continually make provisions for the possibility of opportunistic behavior among actors. Trust increases peoples’ desire to take risks for productive social exchange

The general trust in question allows citizens to work together co-operatively and engage in activities that promote the general wellbeing of society. This generalised trust goes beyond one-on-one interactions (Stolle 2002, 397). In furtherance of this idea Stolle underscores the role of attitudes to general trust (Stolle 2002, 397):

Attitudes of generalized trust extend beyond the boundaries of face-to-face interaction and incorporate people who are not personally known. These attitudes of trust are generalized when they go beyond specific personal settings in which the partner to be cooperated with is already known. They even go beyond the boundaries of kinship and friendship, and the boundaries of acquaintance. (Stolle 2001, 397)

According to Stolle, general trust is different from the more private and personalised trust between close people—be it family, community or a fellow associate (Stolle 2002, 397). General trust however, is distinguished from civil-based trust:

More specifically, in the political sphere, generalized trust allows citizen to join their forces in social and political groups, and it enables them to come together in citizens’ initiatives more easily. In the social sphere, generalized trust facilitates life in diverse societies, fosters acts of tolerance, and promotes acceptance of otherness. (Stolle 2002, 397)

Livia Marckoczy devotes considerable attention to this question of social epistemology by focusing on trusting individuals. For her, there are two types of trusting individuals; namely (i) naïve trusters and (ii) prudent trusters (Marckoczy 2003). She however, argues that it does not follow that people who trust a lot are more gullible, and that



those who do not are more vigilant (Marckoczy 2003). Ordinarily, it is desirable to trust people who are trustworthy (Marckoczy 2003). A person who has a high propensity to trust is regarded as being trustful, while the one with a low propensity to trust is regarded as being distrustful (Marckoczy 2003). The characteristics of trusting and distrusting are part of human nature—it is often asserted that trusting is part of their psychological makeup (Mikolajczak et al. 2010, 1072). Psychologists claim that high and low trust depends on the distribution of oxytocin in the brain (Mikolajczak et al. 2010, 1072).

It is quite interesting to note that having high or low levels of oxytocin has both positive and negative implications on interpersonal trust. According to Julian Rotter (Rotter 1980, 1):

People who trust more are less likely to lie and are possibly less likely to cheat or steal. They are more likely to give others a second chance and to respect the rights of others. The high truster is less likely to be unhappy, conflicted, or maladjusted, and is liked more and sought out as a friend more often, both by low-trusting and high-trusting others.

Rotter argues further that since high trusters are more honest and are in interpersonal relations with most people, their chances of being duped are not any higher than low trusters (Rotter 1980, 1). Researchers are almost unanimously in agreement that the unwarranted distrust of others is dangerous as it threatens to disintegrate society; however foolish trust is no better (Rotter 1980, 1).

## RELIGIOUS TRUST OR GULLIBILITY

People are particularly vulnerable when it comes to religious beliefs. In Zimbabwe and in the sub-region, religious people tend to put a lot of trust in prophets who rise among them as well as from other places, claiming to be sent by God. As long as a prophet comes in the name of the Lord, particularly those who perform mighty works, people tend to believe everything they say. They embrace the teachings of these leaders and are even prepared to do as instructed, at any cost. Yet, the press is awash with reports of prophets who engage in uncanny, disgraceful or even criminal acts:

Stories of church leaders having sexual relations with several women in the church; being in polygamous relationships and even raping women are not unusual. Reports of a prophet being able to perform miracle abortions are confusing to say the least (Hameno 2014, 1).

The problem is compounded by the congregants' fear to question authority. Pastors and other Christian leaders are considered sacrosanct and are believed to represent God's authority on earth. The biblical injunction "touch not the anointed one of God" usually buttresses this fear. However, one wonders whether all Christian leaders are indeed of Christ, and whether their testimonies are authentic. To what extent is it reasonable to believe the testimony of others concerning God's instructions to the Church? It is tempting to dismiss these concerns on the basis that they are fueled by either skepticism or atheism. However, is it acceptable for Christians to believe every word from anyone

who claims to be of God? Given that the religious atmosphere in sub-Saharan Africa is saturated with new religious movements and doctrines, should Christians not take their time to reflect on what to believe?

Some scholars such as Richard Dawkins, maintain that human beings were created with a propensity to be gullible. This assertion is also underlined by Greenspan (2008, 33) and William James (James 1897)—and again corroborated by scholars such as Dave Hunt, who argues that people tend to adopt a form of blind allegiance to religion, epistemology and even science (Hunt 2008). Hunt (2008, 7) however, chides the adoption of such an attitude as dangerous and irresponsible:

Many people accept what is reported on radio, television, or in newspapers and magazines as though the media makes no mistakes and is above prejudice. Of course, both assumptions are foolish. No one and no agency is either infallible or without personal bias. That also goes for schools, educators, and textbooks. We know that a false history has been taught in Communist countries but often fail to recognize that similar falsehoods are instilled in the West because of equally dangerous prejudices and dishonesty. It takes both courage and humility to face the facts, especially when they may upset long-standing biases and loyalties.

Does it constitute a vice if people display a natural tendency to believe? What does the “will to believe” amount to?

When William James discussed the “will to believe” as a basic human tendency, did he commit all people to subjectivism and fideism? According to Andrew Bailey, James believes that as humans, we have an epistemic duty to accept beliefs which are in accordance or agreement with evidence (Bailey n.d.), If there is an inclination to doubt, reasons for the doubt must also be put to careful scrutiny (Bailey n.d). This is underscored by Sperber et al. (2010), who argues that human beings have a natural disposition for epistemic vigilance in order to avert the risk of being misinformed (Sperber et al. 2010, 2)

From the foregoing, it is not easy to separate gullibility from society, since trust forms part of social capital. People can't help it but trust the testimony of others. However, those who trust even when a lot is at stake are likely to end up being tricked. This is particularly the case with investments, online purchases, gambling and the like. The Christian religion has also proven to provide fertile ground for gullibility to thrive, especially when believers trust their leaders with their lives. Can this situation be ameliorated? The section below seeks to address this question.

## ELIMINATING GULLIBILITY

Gullibility has left many astounded. It has always been manifest in history. Will we ever be able to overcome it? Is there any way of protecting citizens from deception? Baker et al. argue that there is no fool proof measure that can ensure that people do not fall prey to tricksters (Barker et al. 2012, 1). Although at a common-sense level, people tend to act as if they are able to determine whether a person is credible or not, research has shown

this sense of assurance to be unfounded (Barker et al. 2012, 1)—even scientists have gone all the way to develop lie detectors to no avail (Mascaro 2014, 69 and 70). Here the idea was to adopt the disinterested point of view of the truth, in order to eliminate any bias and get to the bottom of the truth. Would we then say that such devices are perfect for foiling liars?

Referring to what William James asserts, one finds that the “Will to Believe” has an interesting aspect—the expressivist slant to it. As one commentator puts it (Kasser and Shah 2006, 2):

As a theorist, James espouses a view that anticipates many aspects of twentieth-century non-cognitivism. Judgments of intellectual obligation are expressions of our passional nature, as opposed to expressions of cognitive states such as belief

What makes Christians to trust pastors or prophets who instruct them to do certain things? People with similar passions will oblige, because they are bound to feel the same way (Kasser and Shah 2006, 3). How would this expressivist posture relate to the epistemological demand for evidence in our intellectual obligations to knowing the truth and avoiding error? James wonders what will happen if we fulfil our epistemic obligations to “regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary”, or to “treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance” (James 1897, 18). To answer questions about truth and knowledge one has to apply logic and rely on evidence or be willing to simply believe (Lawson n.d.). But, is logic and critical thinking amenable to faith? Should people believe just anything from anybody? This also applies to those who are in positions of authority, who have been serving us well in the past—should we always believe everything they say? The question is, what should people believe in times of uncertainty?

People are prone to making wrong judgments regarding who is speaking the truth or not. Although this has always been the basic problem in epistemology, the situation is compounded when God is brought into the picture. If a prophet claims that God has instructed that the congregants do this or that, how do congregants test the credence of this claim? Surely, there must be some ways to achieve this. Certainly prophets and seers have no problem as the truth would be revealed to them. This is usually a problem of people who use natural means to attain knowledge of the truth. To this group, logic and critical thinking can become handy as they can be used in the service of faith. In all this, one’s epistemic choices must always be guided by adequate information. It would be tragic for one to slip into atheism unaware, instead of having chosen to become one. Also disconcerting would be a situation where one loses something that turns out to be valuable in the end; simply on account that they were not able to prove that it is true. This is particularly the case with religious beliefs. However, for most Christians, it is better to believe that which appears foolish in the eyes of the world, just in case it is truthful in the end as espoused in 1 Corinthians 1:18–20 (American Bible Society 1999). However, the gospel of the cross does not amount to blind daring. As a matter of fact,

history has proven that Christianity is characterised by a strong interface between faith and reason.

Generally however, people must develop some form of protection against deception. The idea behind instruction is to produce future citizens who can think critically. Contemporary society demands that one becomes more than just being clever (ten Dam 2004, 359). This critical approach seeks to avoid mundane errors where possible. This applies to all citizens, including Christians. Scholars refer to this as “epistemic vigilance” (Sperber 2010, 359). However, such vigilance comes at a cost (Sperber 2010, 360). If we are to engender vigilance in our people, then our people must modulate the trust that they display towards others, the advancement of whose interests depends invariably on them deceiving or misinforming other people (Sperber 2010, 361). But, we also risk throwing away truths of faith obtained only through revelation.

The claim I am advancing is that the study and application of Logic and critical thinking by anyone, throughout the stages of life may help ameliorate gullibility. The following passages seek to demonstrate how gullibility can be ameliorated. Critical thinking skills are difficult to teach (Portelli 1994); nonetheless these skills are indispensable in moulding citizens in democratic societies (ten Dam and Volman 2004, 360). These skills are required in reading, writing and in decision making exercises at home, school or even at work (The Open University 2008, 7). Critical thinking is purposive thinking, which is directed at getting to the bottom of issues. This includes establishing warrant to our knowledge claims or those of others. In the words of Lai (2011, 2):

Critical thinking includes the component skills of analyzing arguments, making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and making decisions or solving problems. Background knowledge is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for enabling critical thought within a given subject. Critical thinking involves both cognitive skills and dispositions. These dispositions, which can be seen as attitudes or habits of mind, include open- and fair-mindedness, inquisitiveness, flexibility, a propensity to seek reason, a desire to be well-informed, and a respect for and willingness to entertain diverse viewpoints. There are both general- and domain-specific aspects of critical thinking.

## CONCLUSION

There are numerous and compounding instances of gullibility among members of the new charismatic Christian movements in Southern Africa, where followers are instructed to do bizarre things. This is a cause for concern and brings into question the nature of civic education in the region. Thus, all forms of socialisation and teaching must aim at producing citizens who are open-minded, and able to analyse issues and meticulously sift through evidence to generate warranted beliefs. On the basis of these processes, citizens will be able to develop a discerning spirit and make sound decisions on pertinent matters. In the majority of cases one is not convinced that followers of the

new Charismatic movement engage in epistemic vigilance or guard against gullibility. Hence, there is a yawning need to equip all citizens with critical thinking skills.

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