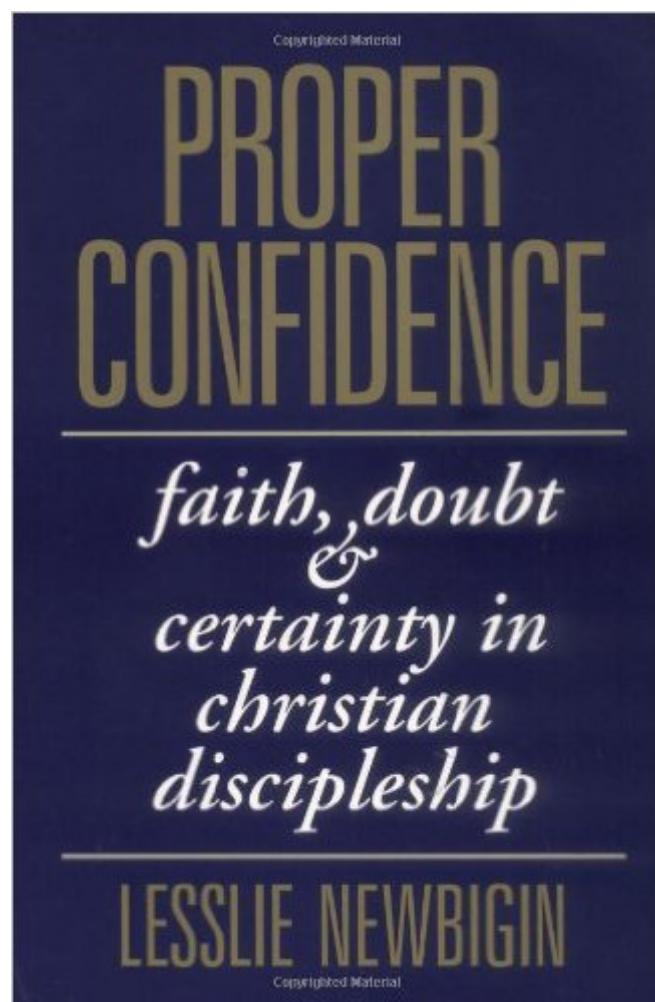


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Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, And Certainty In Christian Discipleship



Synopsis

Looking to end the divisive conflict that has raged between Christians who attack each other either as "liberals" or as "fundamentalists," Newbigin here gives a historical account of the roots of this conflict in order to begin laying the foundation for a middle ground that will benefit the Christian faith as a whole. What results is a perspective that allows Christians to confidently affirm the gospel as public truth in our pluralistic world.

Book Information

Paperback: 111 pages

Publisher: Eerdmans (March 30, 1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802808565

ISBN-13: 978-0802808561

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Newbigin's little text from the final years of his life is a brilliant analysis of the history of religious epistemology. He critiques the spectres of Enlightenment rationalism that still dominates theological discussions today and offers an alternative form of knowing that withstands the scepticism of postmodernity. He opens with a clever look at the worldviews of the ancient world. The certainty founded in the logos of Greek philosophy and that in the Israelite anthropomorphic God were suddenly challenged by the ultimate reality that was knowable in Jesus Christ. This led to Augustine's affirmation that he believed in order to know, an affirmation which Newbigin is essentially trying to resurrect. Chapter 2 explores the Thomistic synthesis, in which natural theology and the proofs of God create a cleavage between truths demonstrable by reason and truths known only through faith. This, Newbigin says, was a mistake, because it implies that more sure grounds than the biblical narrative should be sought in the communication of the faith. This in turn led to the rationalist of Descartes which, he says, erodes inevitably into nihilism, because no knowledge can

claim the kind of certainty that Descartes insisted was essential. Chapter 4, the philosophical center of the book and foundation for Newbigin's epistemology, is an analysis of Michael Polanyi's writings. Polanyi argues that knowledge is "personal," that it is never objective and removed from the subject which claims it. Later in the book Newbigin will cite a helpful analogy from William James, that knowledge is like hanging on a breaking branch on the side of a cliff and deciding whether or not to leap to another branch. Knowledge involves personal commitment and risk.

I spent this morning with two of life's great pleasures, a great cup of coffee and a really good book. The coffee was Kenyan Kiaguthu Peaberry roasted to the City+ level. Mmmm. The book is called Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt & Certainty in Christian Discipleship by Lesslie Newbigin. If you knew me, you would've heard me talk about Michael Polanyi, the 20th century scientist and philosopher whose work was the subject of my Master's thesis. Newbigin's book is a great quick reference for the application of Polanyi's thought to the Christian life, and I highly recommend it. It's only 105 pages and is written in a very accessible style. I read the whole thing this morning. If you're curious about how Christian thought fits (or doesn't fit, as Newbigin shows) into classical, modern, or post-modern ideas about knowledge, you should read this book. If you're one of those young evangelicals that is disenchanted with the hyper-rationalistic hyper-individualistic concepts of Christianity, you should read this book. If you want to figure out whether truth is objective or subjective, you should read this book. If you want to know what is really wrong with "fundamentalist" Christianity or with "liberal" Christianity (perhaps surprisingly, it's something they have in common), you should read this book. A few weeks back, my friend Jon (who also introduced me to home roasted coffee) wrote an interesting piece for his blog about a recent trend among young evangelicals in which many are departing to more liturgical versions of Church, especially various Eastern forms (by the way, I think the Emergent Church is sort of a wimpy American-consumer version of the same trend). It's all a sort of pre-modern postmodernism.

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