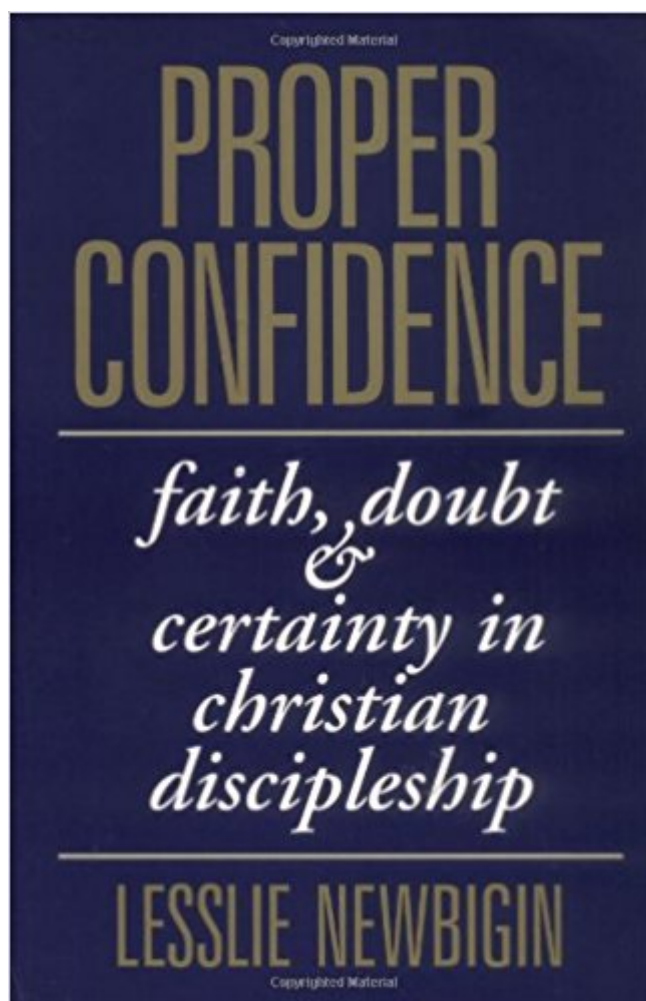


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Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, And Certainty In Christian Discipleship



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.

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Customer Reviews

'In this short but acute book, Bishop Newbigin unmask the unspoken and concealed conditions that have intimidated and effectively held Christians in check, making their taming by modern cultural forces easy and comprehensive. It follows from this that any home for renewal of mainline Christianity cannot take place without the kind of critical probing of those unspoken conditions that Bishop Newbigin presents here. This book begins the process by turning the searchlight on Christians themselves, charting a course between the fundamentalist reaction and postmodernist radical nihilism. Whether or not the book results in the long-overdue shake-up Newbigin calls for, it is bound to be included in the arsenal of any meaningful response to the contemporary challenge.

(1909-1998) Lesslie Newbigin was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, U.K., in 1909. He completed his undergraduate studies in Cambridge and then served as Staff Secretary of the Student Christian Movement in Glasgow, Scotland. He studied theology at Westminster College at Cambridge and was

ordained by the Presbytery of Edinburgh, Church of Scotland in 1936. That same year Newbigin married Helen Henderson and the two of them left for India where he was to be missionary of the Church of Scotland.

This book is much more profound than one would think. Newbigin unpacks the flawed quest for certainty of the Enlightenment - which also is evident in Fundamentalism (naturally so, as Fundamentalism is a product of the Enlightenment or modernism. It's the Enlightenment in application to religion - particularly with respect to Christian Fundamentalism). The belief one can find certainty ultimately results in nihilism - a loss of reason. And, that morphs into Power (per Nietzsche). This is also quite evident in Fundamentalism. Yet, Newbigin does not morph into postmodern nihilism. He demonstrates that confidence is not found in thinking one can or should arrive at certainty for no one does. He does point to faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus but seems to take more of a "leap" of faith in this event - rather than seeking to investigate it. Obviously, faith is still required; but I find Newbigin to be just a bit lacking in this area as he does not seem to believe any investigation into the "evidence" is necessary (or even point to this). I think this book combined with John Polkinghorne's excellent perspectives on the Resurrection (he approaches the evidence surrounding the resurrection the same way he, as a scientist, approaches evidence for scientific theories). Interestingly, both Polkinghorne and Newbigin point to the seminal and vitally important work of Michael Polanyi (scientist turned philosopher) on Personal Knowledge. Overall, a highly recommended read. I just think there's a bit more to it surrounding one's faith in Jesus. But, beyond that, I think many would do well (esp. those from very conservative; traditional Fundamentalist or Evangelical backgrounds).

Newbigin is brilliant in this volume, as always. However, this felt like a more condensed version of "gospel in a pluralist society". The only additions I really noticed were a more in-depth history on the development of enlightenment thought in Europe and more direct reference and quoting of Polanyi (whose epistemology Newbigin rests on heavily). Though I did enjoy it since it has been a while since I read gospel in a pluralist society, I'd save your money on this volume and just go for Gospel in a Pluralist Society. However, if you're looking for a slightly further historical development of the ideas he introduces there, this will be a welcomed addition. Evangelical readers should be aware that his doctrine of inspiration fall outside the standard Evangelical view. Nevertheless, very insightful.

I just completed *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* by Lesslie Newbigin. It gets my four star rating. This little book(105 pages) is of tremendous help in reflecting on apologetics in a postmodern West. The usual Newbigin fusion of Christo-centric, missions-oriented, impeccable scholarship, and concern for faithful Gospel witness all are here. In addition, Newbigin takes on a Cartesian approach to the defense of Christianity that has pervaded Western Christian thinking and must now be seen for its inability to fulfil God's purposes in the world. In his chapter, "Through Faith Alone," Newbigin says, "The reasonableness of Christianity will be demonstrated (insofar as it can be) not by adjusting its claims to the requirements of a preexisting structure of thought but by showing how it can provide an alternative foundation for a different structure (93-94)"Newbigin is, as this new century goes by, the kind of pastor-missionary-theologian that we need to consider. I find his writing of immense help. While I prefer to read Newbigin while reading Spurgeon or Ryle at the same time (outside of the box thinking tempered by clear, orthodox Protestant preaching), I still do like to read him and end up preaching better as a result. He excites my devotion to the Christian and Biblical vision of the Church in the world for God's purposes in the world. And in *Proper Confidence* he demonstrates a keen insight into how "to commend the truth of the gospel in a culture that has sought for absolute certainty as the ideal of true knowledge but now despairs of the possibility of knowing truth at all... (93)"

While not a new book, Newbigin's experience and insight into the nature of knowledge and learning by faith--more in line with Augustine's "I believe therefore I know" than Descartes' "I know therefore I believe"--is an essential read for those who wish to speak the truth in love to those who have been deceived about both the identity of Love and belonging to the Truth.

This is a short paperback, but a good piece of lucid writing. Newbigin spent thirty years in India as a missionary, and learned there how to talk about his faith to people who grew up with a different view of how the world is. Then he retired and returned to his native Great Britain, only to discover that his homeland had become a place in which had a different view of how the world is. Newbigin spent another couple of decades learning about the changes that had occurred in society, as well as how the Gospel message fits in with this, and wrote this book at the end of his life. The book describes with great clarity the impact of Cartesian ideas on our society ("Doubt as the path to certainty"), the correction provided by Michael Polanyi and others, and the Biblical picture of how we should think about knowing and believing. The book ends with a marvelous address in three directions: Newbigin

defends his conclusions against Catholic natural theology, liberal theology, and fundamentalist theology. It is a really good book, and I recommend it highly. It is already changing the way that I think about apologetics. But it also affects the way I think about my Christian discipleship across the board. Newbigin centers on the person of Christ. This quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer opens the book, and--now that I understand it better--sums up Newbigin's ideas well: Faith alone is certainty. Everything but faith is subject to doubt. Jesus Christ alone is the certainty of faith.

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