

“Dealing with Doubt”

International Christian Evidence Conference – June 19–21, 2015
York College – York, Nebraska

Session Webpage: www.worldvieweyes.org/icec2015.html¹

Richard A. Knopp, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.
Prof. of Philosophy & Christian Apologetics
Program Director, WorldViewEyes (www.worldvieweyes.org)
Project Coordinator, Room For Doubt (www.roomfordoubt.com)

Email: rknopp@lincolnchristian.edu
Lincoln Christian University

I. The Predominant Perception of Faith and Doubt

- A. The “see saw” view
- B. Thomas (John 20:27)
- C. Jesus (Matt 21:20-21)
- D. Peter (Matt 14:31)
- E. Don't doubt!
 1. James 1:6
 2. Acts 2:36
- F. Theological Influence
 1. Karl Barth: When doubt consists of “a swaying and staggering between Yes and No,” it must be viewed as an unacceptable “embarrassment”.... “There is no justification for doubt itself No one should flirt with his unbelief or with his doubt. The theologian should only be sincerely *ashamed* of it” (*Evangelical Theology, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley [New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1963], 121, 124).
 1. Paul Tillich: Tillich contends that faith, as an experience of the infinite, is necessarily “uncertain” for a finite being and that doubt is “an element which was always and will always be present in the act of faith,” so much so that “serious doubt is confirmation of faith.” However, Tillich concurs with Barth on perhaps the most significant aspect of faith and doubt when he says, “If faith is understood as belief that something is true, doubt is incompatible with the act of faith” (*Dynamics of Faith* [New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957], 16, 22, 18).
- G. An alternative?

II. Growing Doubt and Disengagement²

- A. Doubt and church youth
 1. Significantly doubted their faith? _____ 38 %
 2. Felt like rejecting their parents' faith? _____ 32 %
 3. Can't ask their most pressing life questions? _____ 36 %
- B. Percent of church youth “disengaged” by age 30? _____ 59 %
- C. Percent of “Nones”

¹ Check the session webpage for additional resources, including slides and outline with answers for blanks.

² For statistical resources in this section, see David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Baker, 2011); James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones* (Baker, 2014); “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” Pew Research Center (Oct. 9, 2012); Drew Dyck, “The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church,” *Christianity Today* (posted 11/19/2010); Pew Research, “2014 Religious Landscape Survey.”

1. Adults in 2014: _____ **22.8 %**
2. Older millennials in 2014 (25-33): _____ **34 %**
3. Young millennials in 2014 (18-24): _____ **36%**
4. From “religious homes”? _____ **73 %**
5. Religious “de-converts”? _____ **66 %**

D. Vocal and visible atheists

Lawrence Krause: “Change is always one generation away. So if we can plant the seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away. And that’s what I think we have an obligation to do” (*Solon* [Nov. 4, 2014]).

III. A Double-Check on Doubt in Scripture

- A. Thomas (John 20)
- B. Peter (Matt 14)
- C. John the Baptist (compare John 1:19–34 and Matthew 11:1–11)
- D. 2 Cor 5:7
- E. 1 Cor 13:12
- F. Mark 9 “I do believe; help my unbelief.”
- G. “Room for Doubt” (www.roomfordoubt.com)

Dallas Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*: “We need to emphasize that point strongly, because the great problem facing the gospel of Jesus Christ is not the doubt that is outside the church; it is the doubt that is inside the church. We need to be able to deal with doubt lovingly, helpfully, and especially without ever scolding or shaming anyone for doubting. We must allow people to be who they are and then be able to meet them where they are” (25).

IV. Aspects of Faith and Types of Doubt

- A. Aspects of faith
 1. *Notitia*: The “what” of faith (2 Cor 13:5; Gal 1:23; Col 1:23; 1 Tim 4:6; Titus 1:13-14; Jude 1:3).
 2. *Assensus*: Mental assent to the “what” of faith (Matt. 16:15-17; John 20:30-31; 1 Jn 4:15; Rom 10:9; Heb 11:6; cf. Jm 2:19).
 3. *Fiducia*:
 - a. Trust in the “who” of faith (Heb 11:6; Rom 1:17; cf. Habakkuk 2:4).
 - b. The “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26; Acts 6:7).
 4. Biblical faith summarized (1 Thess 2:13).
- B. Types of doubt
 1. The **SOURCE** of doubt
 - a. _____ **EMOTIONAL**
 - b. _____ **SPIRITUAL**
 - c. _____ **INTELLECTUAL**
 - d. _____ **VOLITIONAL**
 2. The **SIGNIFICANCE** of doubt
 - a. _____ **PERIPHERAL**
 - b. _____ **CORE-BELIEF**

3. The **SEVERITY** of doubt
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

V. Doubt, the Christian Community, the Christian Academy, and Christian Apologetics

- A. Is there room for doubt, and if there is, then what kind, how much, and for whom?
- B. Acceptable doubt is person-relative.
- C. We must become “like children” to enter the kingdom of God (Matt 18:1-6; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:15-17).
- D. Intriguing questions about “simple (child-like) faith” and “intellectual awareness.”
- E. Developmental stages.
 1. James **Fowler**: stages of faith:
[Intuitive-Projective; Mythic-Literal; Synthetic-Conventional; Individuative-Reflective; Conjunctive Faith; Universalizing Faith]
 2. Jean **Piaget**: stages of cognitive development:
[Sensorimotor (0-2 yrs); Preoperational (2-7 yrs); Concrete Operational (7-11 yrs); Formal Operational (11+ yrs)]
 3. Lawrence **Kohlberg**: stages of moral development:
[Obedience or Punishment; Self-Interest; Social Conformity; Law and Order; Social Contract; Universal Ethics]
 4. Erik **Erickson**: stages of psychosocial development:
[Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 yrs); Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt (2-3 yrs); Initiative vs. Guilt (4-6 yrs); Industry vs. Inferiority (7-12 yrs); Identity vs. Role Confusion (13-19 yrs); Intimacy vs. Isolation (20-34 yrs); Generativity vs. Stagnation (35-65 yrs); Integrity vs. Despair (65+)]
- F. Plotting faith and doubt on a coordinate plane (see the chart below).
 1. The “assent” axis (cf. *assensus*).
 2. The “trust” axis (cf. *fiducia*).
 3. Absolute doubt (Buridan’s Donkey) and absolute certitude.
 4. Plotting for different people with different standpoints.
 5. Plotting for different issues.
 6. Confident faith and rational doubt.

Room For Doubt is a grant-funded program that provides learning experiences and resources to strengthen the faith of committed Christians, address the questions of those who have doubts about their Christian heritage, and represent the Christian message to those who are skeptical about its claims. See www.roomfordoubt.com.

Plotting Faith and Doubt

