

## Celebrating Doubt as a Catalyst in authentic faith formation

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Woody Allen said - "I am plagued with doubts. What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists? In that case I overpaid for the carpet." Since you've been here, you have processed a bunch of doubts - was this the best session to choose? Did I lock the car? Does that woman think that shirt looks good on her? Doubt is an integral, healthy part of who we are and how we operate, yet Christianity has, for centuries, called it the enemy of faith. Our hymns are full of this. "Drive the dark night of doubt away"; "Fear and doubts too long have bound us"; "O doubting, struggling Christian, why thus in anguish pray? O cease to doubt and struggle, There is a better way". St Francis' prayer says; "where there is doubt, bring faith".

Twenty-five years ago, I began writing what became the book *In Defense of Doubt: an Invitation to Adventure*.<sup>1</sup> An expanded version came out a few years ago, showing doubt is still a big issue. I wrote as much for myself as anyone else, to articulate finally coming to terms with religious doubt as a *necessary* part of being human after forty painful years of feeling guilty about it! I wish I had encountered in my early years the Zen proverb, "At the bottom of great doubt lies great awakening. Small doubt: small awakening. No doubt: no awakening." I grew up a God-intoxicated, evangelical Christian, unable to sit beside someone in a bus without witnessing to them before their stop, in case they died that night - such a huge responsibility I took on for God. Yet all the while I doubted many Christian "truths" that simply had to be believed. Doubt was frowned upon -- the more you could just believe, the better Christian you were. I blamed *myself* for both my weakness and my arrogance in thinking I could question issues of such magnitude when so many had believed them. What I did not know then was that there has never has been only one way to think about God

and that theological ideas has changed often over the centuries - the theme of my latest book *Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology: finding your own voice*.

After a career in science, I went back to University to do religious studies. I could no longer live with the emotional torture my doubts created and was prepared to walk away from God and church should it prove necessary. My first class in New Testament studies left me angry and betrayed. I realized that clergy who had preached to me every Sunday had *also* taken these courses and discussed the many issues I doubted, yet laity were kept in ignorance because such questions were thought disturbing for them. When I finished my Ph.D. in theology, I resolved to bring academic theology to laity, ensuring others did not go through the trauma over doubt I did.

I began to put down on paper what had been composting in me -- that religious doubts are not negatives but positives as in other areas of life, catalysts that move us to new thinking. I had to pay attention to my doubts, as I had done as a research scientist, rather than squeezing my feet into someone else's certainties. I had no idea how the book would be received, as books on doubt to that point were about overcoming doubts to find certainty, but messages flooded in from people who finally felt validated to express *their* feelings - and this has continued over the years. The book doesn't dissect all the doctrines or offer new interpretations for troubling scripture, but rather gives permission to *doubt*, which is what doubters want to know, pointing out how healthy it is in any other area of life to move us from inadequate to better ideas. This seems blatantly obvious, like arguing we should be glad we have food, yet for many in religion, doubting the beliefs is *not* OK.

I call this theological abuse. There are exceptions, but for most of Christian history, non-negotiable truths have silenced doubters in pews, blaming *them* for their doubts. If one refuses to stifle doubts any longer, it is usually a point of desperation. Martin Luther endured years of agony before raising his questions. He wrote, "Although much of what the Church said seemed absurd to me and completely alien to Christ, for more than a decade I curbed my thoughts with the advice of Solomon, 'Do not rely on your own insight (Prov. 3:5)'. I always believed there were theologians

hidden in the schools who would not have been silent if these teachings were impious".<sup>ii</sup> The metaphor of *family* is often used for churches, yet many families are dysfunctional. Blaming the doubter is like abuse in a family. Not only is the person's authority violated by someone's authority over her, the violation is said to be *her* fault. She must internalize the belief that another's authority rightly substitutes for her own. We condemn such family abuse today, yet perpetuate this treatment in churches, whether by not allowing doubters' questions or by dismissing their questions with an infallible church or claims of "God said". The Catholic Encyclopedia says of "doubt":

The faith demanded by the Christian Revelation stands on a different footing from the belief claimed by any other religion. Since it rests on divine authority, it implies an obligation to believe on the part of all to whom it is proposed; and faith being an act of the will as well as of the intellect, its refusal involves not merely intellectual error, but also some degree of moral perversity. It follows that doubt in regard to the Christian religion is equivalent to its total rejection, the ground of its acceptance being necessarily in every case the authority on which it is proposed, and not, as with philosophical or scientific doctrines, its intrinsic demonstrability in detail. Thus, whereas a philosophical or scientific opinion may be held provisionally and subject to an unresolved doubt, no such position can be held towards the doctrines of Christianity; their authority must be either accepted or rejected. The unconditional, interior assent which the Church demands to the Divine authority of revelation is incompatible with any doubt as to its validity.<sup>iii</sup>

This basically demands people leave their minds at the door should they have doubts. No wonder so many leave churches, refusing to play such unhealthy games.

Religious historian Karen Armstrong tells of her doubts as a seventeen year old in a convent: For years I had told myself that black was white and white black; that the so-called 'proofs' for God's existence had truly convinced me, that I might not be feeling happy, but that I really *was* happy because I was doing God's will - I had deliberately told myself lies and

stamped hard on my mind whenever it had reached out towards the truth. As a result, I had warped and incapacitated my mental powers. <sup>iv</sup>

When she finally shared her doubts about a bodily resurrection with her superior, the sister agreed it could not be proved, but added, “Please don’t tell the others!” Karen realized that many Christians must have stamped on their rebellious thoughts and crippled their minds as she had done by confining themselves within a doctrinal system untenable to them.

The destructive nature of condemning doubt has long been known. Eighteenth century William Cowper wrote such beautiful hymns as “O for a closer walk with God” but spent his life plagued with doubt. The bogey in his day was the “unforgivable sin” - doubting or denying the Holy Spirit - which Cowper saw himself doing *despite* his passionate desire to believe. He decided God could *never* forgive him and his proof came when guilt left him unable to pray. Towards the end of life, Cowper dreamed God said, “It is all over with thee. Thou hast perished,” and thus he died. Such stories fill biographies of theologians, since many, like myself, began theological studies hoping their doubts might be resolved and many encountered doubts through their study – Paul Tillich, Rudolf Otto, Henry Fosdick, Rita Gross and Mary Daly talk of this. Some were destroyed in the process; others left religion behind, unable to live a sham; others survived because they found mentors who affirmed their questions and offered new ways to think.

Process theologian John Cobb, a child of missionary parents, wrote after entering the University of Chicago:

In a few months, I discovered that my understanding of Christianity melted away through my exposure to the thought of the modern world. I was appalled at how quickly a faith I had thought so secure was undercut. I experienced what has since come to be called “the death of God,” and it felt very much like my own spiritual death as well. <sup>v</sup>

This terrifying experience led Cobb to face his doubts head-on. He enrolled in the Divinity School and fortunately his first professor introduced him to Process thought which made sense to him. The late Marcus Borg wrote of doubts in his early teens and anxiety and fear about hell:

In retrospect, I can ... see that, for me at least, belief is not a matter of the will. I desperately wanted to believe and to be delivered from the anguish I was experiencing. If I could have made myself believe, I would have. <sup>vi</sup>

Borg was also lucky to find a professor who mentored him, who happened to be the same Professor, Paul Sponheim, who mentored me into finishing my Ph.D. years later. But not all are so lucky and are left to struggle privately, sometimes for life, hoping for a hint of a different way to think. Many are frustrated by the unwillingness of churches to address contemporary challenges; are put off by hymns, readings and liturgies perpetuating outdated cosmology, ethics and theology; yet are unwilling to forego the faith community that has been an important part of their history.

Religious doubt has often taken a different shape for women because of what the church has historically said about their inferiority. Catholic theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, when asked why she stays in a church that has consistently excluded and denigrated women, says the question is wrong, because it assumes the hierarchy and its doctrines *are* the church, rather than the people of God they serve. To leave, she says, is to give up our birthright and surrender the naming of God to others who will name it against women. Last year, I lectured to alumni of a Catholic University Women's College on the topic "The Career and Consequences of Eve for Women, Church and Society". These mature female college graduates were stunned to hear what their saints had said about them - Augustine, Tertullian, Aquinas and various Popes - how they had been called evil, deficient and in league with the devil from interpretations of the Adam and Eve story. The women began to share across the room things they long doubted in Catholic teaching but kept to themselves. However, there was a high level of caution, conscious of who might be listening. They felt the

disconnect with church doctrines about women, but could not bring themselves to question openly, realizing they had little power in their religious institutions.

Control of “knowledge” is a central problem in doubt – the stronger the doctrinal claims made by those in authority, the harder for doubts to get a hearing; and there are subtle ways to discipline or diffuse a doubter’s questions. Christopher Hitchens said in his iconoclastic way, "... the religion which treats its flock as a credulous play-thing offers one of the cruelest spectacles that can be imagined: a human being in fear and doubt who is openly exploited to believe in the impossible".

<sup>vii</sup> When the novel *The Da Vinci Code* came out, with hints about Jesus' personal life that been discussed in academic circles for centuries, there was a frenetic rush to publication of books by religious leaders pointing out what Dan Brown got *wrong*, rather than grabbing this overwhelming public interest as an opportunity to introduce biblical scholarship - an enthusiasm church educators spend *decades* trying to produce! What stimulated public interest was what many people suspected - there might be *more* to the story than what they had been told.

When I challenged my own minister why contemporary biblical scholarship was not offered in sermons, his said, “I don’t want to pull the carpet out from people if they don’t have doubts!” Would a doctor refrain from pointing out the proven negative effects of smoking, just because the patient was happy with her pack a day habit? *That* is a matter of life and death – and so is *this* for many if doubts have damaged or truncated they way they live. I hastened to assure this minister that many people were *already* sitting on bare floor boards, desperately wanting a new carpet or a promise of one! Another clergyperson, when I completed my first religious studies degree in midlife, got collegially confidential over coffee, telling me, now I was *in* the profession, how he had never believed the virgin birth and other key doctrines. I was devastated. I sat in his congregation Sunday after Sunday, doubting such things and hoping they might be open to question, but never a chink showed in his traditional line.

Leaders who claim their churches are hospitable spaces where *any* doubts can be aired need to take a closer look. Hordes of “backbones of the church” live lives of constant wrestling with doubt. Hundreds warm church pews, switching off to incongruities in the stories in order to remain in the community. Thousands, as evidenced by the increasing "spiritual not religious" category, seek the sacred but no longer in churches, forced out by unbelievable dogmas. Mother Teresa springs to mind as an example of great faith, yet letters to her confessor published after her death tell of years of darkness and doubt, even as she accomplished so much. She wrote:

...this terrible sense of loss - this untold darkness - this loneliness - this continual longing for God - which gives me such pain deep down in my heart ... Darkness is such that I really do not see - neither with my mind nor with my reason ... The place of God in my soul is blank ... There is no God for me ... When the pain of longing is so great - then it is that I feel - He does not want me - He is not there. <sup>viii</sup>

This was no fleeting experience but continued through her life. In 1985, she wrote to her confessor:

Father, I do realize that when I open my mouth to speak to the sisters and to people of God about God's work, it brings them light, joy and courage. But I get nothing of it. Inside it is all dark and feeling that I am totally cut off from God." <sup>ix</sup>

Most people have been exposed to only one set of doctrines, around which to live their life.

Without other explanations, their options are blind belief or rejecting God altogether. Yet many doubters do *not* want to reject God – if they did, they would simply walk away. They are looking instead for more authentic ways to think, new answers. When the stereotypical absent-minded professor gave the final exam to his secretary to type (when secretaries still did this), she said, “Professor, these are the same questions you set *last year*?” The professor smiled, “I know, but this year I’ve changed the answers!” That is what I discovered at university -- theologians from the beginning have doubted and asked questions, changing the answers century by century as knowledge, context, world view and language changed, because theology is both the story of God

*and* how that story can make sense in a particular time and place. These two aspects must always be held together. My latest book *Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology: finding your own voice* surveys such changes in theological ideas, and seeing the differences down the centuries encourages doubters to think for themselves in *their* time and place.

How did we get into this predicament with doubt? I've always felt sorry for Thomas. Next to Judas, he drew the worst press by keeping his options open until he saw the nail-holes. His stance was totally reasonable, yet Peter, who denied and deserted Jesus, became *head* of the church while Thomas became the face of a negative syndrome, a Doubting Thomas. There is more going on in Thomas' demotion. This story is only in John's gospel and leads directly into the Gospel's thesis - "[T]hese [stories] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah" (John 20: 31). Thomas stars in many stories in John about believing *in Jesus*, while ignored in the other gospels. Thomas insists the disciples go with Jesus when Lazarus dies (11: 16) and Jesus is glad Lazarus is dead so the disciples *would believe*. Later, the chief priests discuss killing Lazarus because people were *believing in Jesus* because of him (12: 10-11). When Jesus says he is going away and Thomas asks where, Jesus says, "I am the way, truth and life; none of you comes to God but by me" - *believing in Jesus* (14:6). Why so many stories only in John about Thomas and believing in Jesus?

In the *Gospel of Thomas* recovered in the mid nineteen hundreds, responses to the question "Who do people say I am"? go beyond Peter. *Thomas* says, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying who you are".<sup>x</sup> Indicating that Thomas showed deeper understanding, Jesus revealed special secrets to him. Biblical scholar Elaine Pagels suggests that John's gospel was written to promote belief *in Jesus*, in opposition to ideas circulating, like in the *Gospel of Thomas*, that one could "know" God from within, through one's own, divinely given capacity. Pagels says that John's message about believing *in Jesus* provided a better "foundation for a unified church, [whereas] the gospel of Thomas' emphasis on each person's individual search did not".<sup>xi</sup> Since Thomas was said to have evangelized the Parthians and the Thomas Christians in India, the negative image that

developed around him as a doubter may have been to silence his "unorthodox" teachings once orthodoxy was proclaimed. A later legend reinforced Thomas as doubter. When he did not believe Mary was bodily assumed into heaven, she dropped her girdle on him on her way up and his eyes were opened.

Unfortunately, doubt has been presented as the opposite of *faith* and *belief*, as we see in the hymns quoted earlier. As long as we call doubt the opposite of faith or belief, doubt will never get a fair hearing, as the religious goal is to encourage faith and belief and, by corollary, dispel doubt. But the opposite of faith is to be without faith. The opposite of belief is unbelief. Neither equate with doubt. And faith and belief are not the same. Faith is a response to, or trust in something, a feeling or experience. Beliefs are doctrines or propositions to be believed. Doubt is the *discrepancy* between the two, when beliefs do not line up with experience and reason. Doubt nudges us to ask questions. It is possible for beliefs to fall like dominoes without losing faith; and doubt is part of every act of faith because every act recognizes the possibility of doubt.

We have also been taught that "having faith" equals "certainty" - the more certain we are, the greater our faith, which condemns doubt. A friend was asking hard questions about beliefs and, when another friend heard, said "Oh, she's lost her faith". More of us need to "lose our faith" if faith means certainty. Richard Holloway, once Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, wrote:

The perils of being right points to one of the dangers of religion: our certainties - in a world where so little is certain - can make us haters and persecutors of the certainties of others, something that religion is all too prone to. But by contrast ... our doubts and loves can cause all sorts of lovely flowers to bloom, such as tolerance and compassion ... Faith has to be co-active with doubt or it is not faith but its opposite, certainty.<sup>xii</sup>

If some of you are getting nervous with this talk about doubt, let me remind you that, in other areas of life, doubt is positive and necessary for growth and knowledge. Would we tell students not to question? Jennifer Michael Hecht's book on doubt says doubt needs its own *positive* history:

Once we see [doubt] as its own story, rather than a mere collection of shadows of the history of belief, a whole new drama appears and new archetypes begin to come into focus. Without having the doubt story sketched out as such, it's hard to see how the patterns of questioning have mirrored certain types of social change, for instance, and hard to identify doubt's most enduring themes. There are saints of doubt, martyrs of atheism, and sages of happy disbelief, who have not been lined up as such ... and given the context of their story. <sup>xiii</sup>

Doubt actually has a grand history in Christianity if we see it as the catalyst that led to new knowledge, rather than something destroying faith. The Psalmists doubted when God went silent; Job doubted God's fairness; Sarah laughed at God and Abraham was also doubtful about a pregnancy in old age. Jesus doubted purity laws that denied full humanity to many, and the early church was a ferment of doubt about who Jesus was. Medieval theologian Peter Abelard said, "The first key to wisdom is assiduous and frequent questioning ... for by doubting we come to inquiry, and by inquiry we arrive at truth." <sup>xiv</sup> In modern times, John Robinson's book *Honest to God* doubted God descriptions in his day; Vatican II doubted some Catholic teachings; and many denominations doubted and ordained women and GLBTI people. Doubts are not red flags indicating weakness but auditors of beliefs, crucial to stop us adding more icing to a cake of tradition that may itself be stale.

I talked before of big and little doubts and some of the biggest are about God. Whatever we say about this Mystery is a metaphor, yet over the centuries, some metaphors have become literal reality, especially an all-powerful male Ruler orchestrating everything from afar, punishing or rewarding accordingly. This is the only God most people know and they would be surprised to think there are options. Yet our images of God *matter*. The way we imagine God determines how we act

towards God and whether we can believe in a God at all, the theme of my book *Like Catching Water in a Net: human attempts to describe the Divine*.<sup>xv</sup> and my other presentation today.

Doubts are not limited to lay people. Many clergy preach certainties on Sundays and weep during the week in the desert into which doubts have exiled them. The Clergy Project, a private website providing a safe haven for religious leaders who no longer hold their church's beliefs, has over 500 members, many in active ministry but caught by financial or family considerations, loss of face, and lack of alternative skills. These people tell of going into parishes and encountering troubling experiences, whether rejection of their scholarship, dishonesty and corruption, doubts that increased rather than decreased, and religious beliefs slowly departing. There is no way of determining how wide-spread this phenomenon is without anonymous surveys, but there is enough to warrant a safe website for doubting clergy, ironically funded by the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, rather than institutions in which they minister.

What if doubts were celebrated as essential to the dance of life and faith and freely discussed, not just in study groups on the side, but from the pulpit? What if church leaders believed laity do *not* want theological crumbs brushed from the altar in “suitable doses” as authorities deem, or fairy floss that tastes good but dissolves into nothing? What if laity long to graduate from milk to solids and not a pureed mess palatable enough not to spit out, but bland enough to disguise any identifiable ingredients? What if clergy shared their doubts without risk, as scientists share their questions, theories and failures? Many doubters simply leave the church, but for those whose church heritage is important, we need to find ways to allow faith, beliefs *and* doubts to survive in hospitable spaces.

What happens in congregations when members, both clergy and lay, in good conscience and after serious study, can no longer believe their confessional statements or church tradition, seeing other ways to interpret the Christian story for our age? Does this put them outside the church, not Christian? Should they leave or hide their ideas? Is their theology wrong, and by whose judgment? And, the million dollar question, who decides? How hospitable are our church decision-making

bodies to a variety of theological positions and how well-represented is that variety on our theological faculties that train future clergy who determine the faith offered to laity? There has never been only one way to think theologically and anyone who insists there is and uses this to exclude others has not read church history. Churches must become theologically hospitable before many of our brightest and best walk out the door.

With a diversity of beliefs, doubts and faith experiences trying to talk together in community, what binds us together? I believe the unifying factors in a hospitable community are Jesus' words, love God and neighbour and have compassion - do to others as you would have them do to you, wisdom found in most religious traditions across the ages. It is about relationships rather than creeds. History has proved that reverting to rules and control, to essential beliefs and institutional statements, does not solve problems of diversity of thought, no matter how we try to produce a hothouse of homogeneous believers. Homogeneity only survives if doubters leave, but this leaves little room for novelty, for more "truth" to be found.

Historian Diana Butler Bass, in her book *Christianity after Religion* says that, in the past, being a member of a church *started* with assent to a certain body of beliefs, but she thinks this odd today. What other groups insist you believe certain statements before you join? She suggests:

Instead of believing, behaving and belonging, we need to reverse the order to belonging, behaving, and believing ... the difference between religion-as-institution and *religio* as a spiritually vital faith.<sup>xvi</sup>

This was the way of Jesus. He invited followers into his community (belong) to work together proclaiming a world of love and justice (behaviour). As for beliefs, when the disciples complained that a man up the road, not trained in *their* theological school, was casting out demons in Jesus' name, Jesus said "Whoever is not against us is for us ... Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Matthew 10: 40) Such inclusive

theological hospitality is a radical departure from churches imprisoned in unchanging truths with authoritative structures to support these traditions against doubters.

We need to continually address this in the Uniting Church. Our *Basis of Union* states great openness to new scholarship and evolution of thought. It acknowledges the Uniting Church "receives" ancient creeds as authoritative statements of catholic faith (receives is an intriguing word rather than accepts or believes) and describes the creeds as "framed in the language of their day". It commits ministers and teachers to "careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age".<sup>xvii</sup> It *also* says, "The Uniting Church will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought ... and it stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission. The Uniting Church ... prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds".<sup>xviii</sup> This *Basis* (1977) was shaped at the height of the ecumenical movement and Faith and Order Commission with the emphasis on "the goal of visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, in order that the world might believe".<sup>xix</sup> Conformity with the historical apostolic Church was key, but, by the time *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* describing this was published in 1982, many Australian church leaders were moving to a contextual theology, looking at Australia's upcoming Bicentennial, commitment to Aboriginal people, increased localism and tolerance of diversity rather than conforming to ancient church tradition. Australian sociologist of religion Gary Bouma said:

[The ecumenical movement] began as a movement towards homogenization of belief and practice, towards the construction of a single formal organization which would "unite" all Christians. These homolithic and homogenous goals are now supplanted by affirmations of "unity in diversity", the celebration of local tradition and the mutual recognition of differences. Why some will decry such changes as failure of nerve, loss of vision and as

indicators of the decline of religion, they are more appropriately analysed as examples of change.<sup>xx</sup>

There has always been a tension in the Uniting Church between those who see the Uniting church's primary location within the universal church and those who see our location in our changing world, thus the need to breach ecumenical unity if contextually necessary, as was done with women's ordination. However, a recent Working Group on Doctrine paper (*The Nature of Doctrine and the role of the Assembly, 2009*) received by the Assembly, says:

There are certain central beliefs and practices which the church universal has decided are essential to being Christian. They include such affirmations as, that Christ is “of one being with the Father,” that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human, and that God is the triune One. Most of these issues were decided by the early Ecumenical Councils as they grappled with how best to represent the testimony of Scripture. They have been articulated in creeds, especially the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed ... They have to do with fundamental commitments which churches have in common. They set out what a person minimally needs to adhere to in order to be baptised a Christian... Were a church to decide contrary to such commitments, it would effectively place itself outside of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Uniting Church is therefore not free by itself to go contrary to such ecumenical commitments”.<sup>xxi</sup>

Many in the Uniting Church have trouble with these "minimum requirements". They do not want to say "I believe" to a creedal cosmology of a three tiered universe rejected by today's scientific knowledge, and a virgin birth, a second coming in judgment and a bodily resurrection are no longer universally accepted. Many books have emerged trying to reinterpret (or even abandon) the *metaphor* of Trinity for our twenty-first century understanding. In a recent Facebook discussion, a retired Uniting Church biblical scholar, when asked about the Trinity, agreed it was a helpful fourth century idea, although not spelled out in the Bible since biblical writers were not informed by the

neo-Platonic worldview of the creeds. He referred to other biblical understandings of God not featured in the doctrine, saying this one took hold, squeezing life out of other expressions and limiting, even belittling, our human grasping after God. He was attacked by some clergy colleagues, who did not engage his comments but scolded him for questioning a doctrine he promised to uphold at ordination; for suggesting historical church proclamations were passé or stifling; and for not affirming the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed -- all about obeying church tradition rather than addressing the question with new scholarship and context, as the *Basis* encourages.

What should happen to faithful church members, lay and clergy, who interpret the truth differently, backed by reputable scholars who may not be the scholars those who claim to speak for the church, use? Can such doubters belong to the church? Are they to hide their doubts rather than raise them and allow fresh winds to blow? Should we resort to declaring "minimum belief requirements for being a Christian" or conformity with other churches from whom we broke earlier in history? And who decides? These questions must be addressed in order to create hospitable churches who see doubts as *essential* to life and faith, freely discussed and celebrated. Let me finish with theologian Darrell J. Fasching:

I have found a fullness in the doubts and questions of my life that I once thought could only be found in the answers. Mercifully, doubts and questions have come to be so fulfilling that I find myself suspicious of answers, not because they are necessarily false or irrelevant, but because even when relevant and true they are, and can only be partial. It is doubt and questioning that always lure me on to broader horizons and deeper insights through an openness to the infinite that leave me contentedly discontent.<sup>xxii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Val Webb, *In Defense of Doubt: an invitation to adventure* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1995; Melbourne: Morning Star Publishing, 2014)

<sup>ii</sup> *Against Latomus*, in *Luther's Works*, Jaroslav Pelikan & Helmut T. Lehmann eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-86) 32: 140-41

<sup>iii</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia: "Doubt". <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05141a.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> Armstrong, Karen. *The Spiral Staircase: a memoir* (London Harper Perennial, 2005), 168

<sup>v</sup> John Cobb, *Can Christ become Good News Again?* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1991), 8

<sup>vi</sup> Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus again for the First Time* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 7

<sup>vii</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *Mortality* (NY: Twelve, Hachette Book Group, 2012), 25

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- <sup>viii</sup> Mother Teresa, *Come be My Light: the private writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"*, Brian Kolodiejchuk ed., (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 1-2
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid, 306
- <sup>x</sup> *Gospel of Thomas* 13: 119
- <sup>xi</sup> Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: the secret Gospel of Thomas*, (New York: Random House, 2003), 54
- <sup>xii</sup> Quoted in Val Webb, *In Defence of Doubt; and invitation to adventure*, 2nd ed, 171
- <sup>xiii</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht, *Doubt: a history*, (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 2003), 9
- <sup>xiv</sup> Abelard, from *Sic et Non* (c.1120), quoted in Frederick Denison Maurice, *Mediaeval Philosophy, or A Treatise of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (1870), 138
- <sup>xv</sup> Val Webb, *Like Catching Water in a Net: human attempts to describe the Divine* (New York & London: Continuum, 2007).
- <sup>xvi</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The end of church and the birth of a new spiritual awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 204
- <sup>xvii</sup> Uniting Church in Australia, *The Basis of Union*, 1992 edn. (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1992), paragraph 9
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ibid, paragraph 11
- <sup>xix</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, F & Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982), viii
- <sup>xx</sup> Gary Bouma, *Religion: meaning, transcendence and community in Australia* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1992), 168
- <sup>xxi</sup> [http://search.aol.com/aol/search?q=Nature+of+Doctrine+and+the+Role+of+the+AssemblyUCA+assembly&s\\_it=tb50-ff-customfirefox-chromesbox-en-us](http://search.aol.com/aol/search?q=Nature+of+Doctrine+and+the+Role+of+the+AssemblyUCA+assembly&s_it=tb50-ff-customfirefox-chromesbox-en-us)
- <sup>xxii</sup> Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation To Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1992), 4