

## Book Review

*The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our “Correct” Beliefs*

**Peter Enns**

(New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2016) 240 pages.

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*The Sin of Certainty* is the kind of book pastors and lay leaders will want to pull off their shelves and share with someone whose faith has taken a hit. Christians, regardless of educational level, have those difficult moments that provoke faith-critical questions. Enns’ book aims to help Christians embrace difficult times by learning to trust God rather than abandoning faith or endlessly seeking for better answers. *The Sin of Certainty* is not the kind of book sure-footed believers who have all the answers will appreciate. Enns answers are of a different sort—I’ll explain more later.

The “Sin” in Peter Enns’ book is a devotion to correct beliefs rather than a devotion to God characterized by trust. Trust in a person—God—is the only way for Christians to maintain faith *qua* faithfulness when simple biblical quotes do not seem to square with challenges from scientists or life events. In a close to memoir-style, Enns identifies four challenges (he calls them “uh-oh” moments) to faith since the 1800s. First on his list is Charles Darwin and the ensuing challenge to a literal interpretation of creation in Genesis. Second are findings from archeologists who found ancient documents from other cultures suggesting similar stories to those once considered unique to the writings attributed to Moses. The third challenge comes from the German scholars who examined the variations in the biblical texts in a quest to identify which

authors might be associated with what text sections at different periods in Hebrew history. Finally, the theological battle over American slavery aroused serious questions about how to use the Bible for moral instruction when different voices could reach contradictory conclusions from the same holy text.

Following the challenging introduction, Enns, an Old Testament scholar, takes readers on a tour through some difficult Old Testament texts from the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Job. The themes deal with the difficulty of trusting in God’s promises of protection and blessing when it looks like God does not care. Upright people following God’s commandments suffer pain and loss. Where are the blessings that are supposed to come in abundance when people obey God’s commandments? Anyone who has lived a few decades gets the picture. Honest people have questions. It’s the questions that Enns wants readers to confront and embrace because the theological answers do not seem to work very well for the psalmist, the preacher, or Job.

In the next section of the book, Enns takes the reader to a place of faith and trust. He does this by pointing readers away from searches for certain answers as if faith were a multipoint list of statements, toward a trust in God based on faithfulness. For Enns, faith is less about belief statements and more

about faithfulness to God and others. In his words: “Humility, love, and kindness are our grand acts of faithfulness and how we show that we are all in” (p. 101).

In a return to the “uh-oh” moments raised by scholars, Enns sought answers from Christians about the obstacles in their lives that posed a challenge to their Christian faith. The survey themes were the usual problems—violence in the Old Testament, conflicts with science, the apparent absence of God during suffering, Christianity as the only path to God, and the negative way Christians treat each other. In the following chapters, Enns addresses several of these issues in various ways, including a personal life-changing event that prompts an investment in family therapy.

In the process of reaching the conclusion but prior to suggestions for Christians to

strengthen their faith, Enns relates his dark night of the soul experience. Coming from a conservative Evangelical world, Enns struggled with one challenge after another. He was down in a dark space scraping intellectual sores. We see Enns as a Job-like figure surrounded by Evangelical colleagues who know right from wrong. Eventually, we see him emerge with a revised worldview. He still retains that sense of a personal God whose presence can be known and experienced thus, in that sense, Enns is an Evangelical—but there is a difference. He is not one to pound the table for a specific doctrine or set of correct beliefs. Instead, he is more like those using the labels “progressive” or “emergent church.” Regardless of label, Enns offers a challenge to help readers refocus on trusting God when traditional pillars of belief seem to sway.