

ZIMMERMANN ON DOUBT AND FAITH IN GOD

Rik Peels, VU University Amsterdam

Abstract

In this paper I respond to Gunter Zimmermann's article on doubt and faith in God that was published last year, by offering some criticisms of his views and elaborating on certain issues that Zimmermann leaves nearly or entirely untouched. First, I argue that Zimmermann's analysis of doxastic doubt is incomplete. Next, I defend the thesis that whether some specific doxastic doubt is compatible with someone's faith depends in at least four regards on the person who has that doubt. Subsequently, I champion the view that some so-called fiducial doubts are compatible with faith in God, whereas certain others are not. Also, I explain why by its very nature having some fiducial doubt entails having some doxastic doubt. Finally, I deal with some biblical passages in order to show why they do not preclude the possibility of someone's having faith and at the same time having certain fiducial doubts.

1. Introduction

In a recent and intriguing article on religious doubts and faith in God, Gunter Zimmermann has argued that certain kinds of doubt concerning God are compatible with the attitude of Christian faith (belief in God), while others are not.¹ The former merely consist of doxastic doubts, i.e. instances of the attitude of doubt toward some specific proposition *p*. Among the latter are also certain doxastic doubts, but primarily fiducial doubts, that is, doubts toward some specific person *X*.² According to Zimmerman, with regard to their object the attitudes of doxastic doubt and fiducial doubt can be considered as parallels of respectively *fides historica* (belief that God exists, belief that God is perfectly good, etc.) and *fides apprehensiva* (belief in God, trust in God, reliance on God, and so on).

Now, as it seems to me, between the lines of his article, Zimmermann puts forward two different theses about fiducial doubts and Christian faith:

A Fiducial doubts concerning God do not necessarily accompany Christian faith.³

¹ Zimmermann (2006). Henceforth, page references will be to this article, unless indicated otherwise.

² Cf. Zimmermann (2006), 313.: "(...) können wir vom doxastischen und vom fiduziellen Zweifel sprechen, wobei der historische Zweifel sich als propositionale Einstellung auf Propositionen, Aussagen, Behauptungen, auch historische Tatsachenberichte und Fakten richtet, während der fiduzielle Zweifel im Großen und Ganzen eine Haltung, eine Einstellung zu einer bestimmten Person kennzeichnet."

³ That fiducial doubts concerning God necessarily accompany Christian faith might be the view expressed in some issues of *Kultus und Unterricht: Amtsblatt des Ministeriums für Kultus, Jugend und Sport Baden-Württemberg* (cited in Zimmermann (2006), 305). For some clear statements of the

B Fiducial doubts concerning God are incompatible with Christian faith.⁴

These are two crucially different theses. They differ with regard to the placement of the negation. Letting ‘CF’ stand for ‘Christian faith’ and ‘FD’ for ‘fiducial doubt’, it seems that A and B can be formalized as follows:

A* ~(CF \Rightarrow FD)
 B* CF \Rightarrow ~FD

According to A, it is not the case that in any possible world W someone who has Christian faith also has fiducial doubts concerning God.⁵ B, on the other hand, says that in any possible world W someone who has Christian faith does not have fiducial doubts concerning God.⁶ B, therefore, entails A, but is significantly stronger: it not only says that, as a Christian, one *need not* have fiducial doubts concerning God, but also that, as a Christian, one *cannot* have such doubts.⁷ I will take it that Zimmermann defends B, thereby implicitly subscribing to A.⁸ As it seems to me, Zimmermann is right in adhering to A. To mention just one example in support of A, our ancestors Adam and Eve had faith in God and if they had chosen to remain faithful to him – which they did not, but could have, since they were significantly free creatures – and, in that way, had not fallen into sin, they would not have had fiducial doubts concerning God—or, at least, no *serious* fiducial doubts concerning God. This shows that having faith in God does not imply having fiducial doubts concerning God. Hence, A is true. However, as we will see, there are several problems with B.

In this paper I will first make some comments on Zimmermann’s analysis of ‘doxastic doubt’. I propose to revise his explanation of what it means to have doxastic doubt concerning some proposition p in at least two regards. Also, I offer some suggestions as to which doxastic doubts are compatible with Christian faith. Next, I will argue that Zimmermann’s account of why fiducial

view that fiducial doubts necessarily accompany Christian faith, see, for instance: Smits (1973), 17,19, and Tillich (1958), 18-22.

⁴ On p. 306 Zimmermann introduces his main thesis: “Für Zweifel, schon gar Gotteszweifel, bleibt da prima facie kein Platz (...) Und warum gehören Gotteszweifel nicht zum christlichen Glauben? (...) Auf diese Weise wird deutlich werden, dass, wie der Hebräerbrief zu Recht behauptet, Gotteszweifel nicht zum christlichen Glauben gehören.” It is not clear whether these sentences are intended to express A or B.

⁵ Or, on a weaker interpretation, according to A, it is not the case that in the actual world $W\alpha$ anyone who has Christian faith also has fiducial doubts concerning God.

⁶ Or, on a weaker interpretation, B has it that in the actual world $W\alpha$ anyone who has Christian faith has no fiducial doubts concerning God.

⁷ The view that one cannot (simultaneously) have Christian faith and doubts concerning God, has been endorsed by John H. Newman. It is not evident what kind of doubts he had in mind, but it seems that he meant to refer to certain fiducial doubts. Cf. Newman (1901), 86, cited in: Fey (1976), 58.

⁸ This becomes clear from what follows further on in Zimmermann’s article and he has confirmed this to me in personal correspondence.

doubt concerning God is incompatible with Christian faith, is seriously wanting. I will show that on some interpretation of ‘fiducial doubt’, one which Zimmermann himself seems to endorse, *some* fiducial doubts indeed preclude Christian faith, but that, contrary to what Zimmermann contends, others do not. Subsequently, I will try to answer the question of how my claims about fiducial doubts are to be interpreted in the light of some specific biblical texts about faith and doubt. Finally, on the basis of the three preceding sections, I shall draw some conclusions. In responding to Zimmermann’s article I will make use of the same analytical method that he makes use of.

2. Doxastic Doubt⁹

In order to understand why certain doxastic doubts are compatible with Christian faith (understood as belief in God, trust in God, etc., that is, understood as *fides qua creditur* rather than *fides quae creditur*), we have to know what it means to have doxastic doubt. Zimmermann’s most elaborate analysis of this attitude runs as follows:

Die Sprachgeschichte macht klar, dass der Zweifler unsicher und ungewiss ist – Unsicherheit und Ungewissheit gehören zweifellos zu den mit »Zweifel« verbundenen Konnotationen –, weil er zwei Einstellungen zu einem – wir wollen vorläufig formulieren – »Sachverhalt« besitzt. Er lehnt ihn nicht total ab, er verneint und negiert ihn nicht, er behauptet auch nicht von vornherein, dass er »nichtig« oder »falsch« sei, aber er akzeptiert ihn auch nicht ohne weiteres, er bejaht oder affirmiert ihn nicht, er behauptet nicht von vornherein, dass er »existent« oder »richtig« sei. Wie man in der Alltagssprache so sagt, ist er »im Zweifel«, das heißt, er steht zwischen den beiden fundamentalen Einstellungen der Bejahung oder Verneinung und hält in diesem Zustand des Zweifels beide Positionen für möglich, beide für möglicherweise »wahr«. (p. 307)

Unfortunately, this explanation of what it means to be in doubt concerning some specific proposition *p* is unsatisfactory in at least two regards. First, it does not offer a *sufficient* condition for someone’s doxastically doubting that *p*. Let me

⁹ I will make use of Zimmermann’s term ‘doxastic doubt’, although I think it is a bit confusing, since by ‘doxastic attitudes’ epistemologists usually refer to the attitudes of belief (the Greek δόξα, that is, belief that *p*), disbelief (belief that $\sim p$), and suspension of judgment (neither belief nor disbelief that *p*), none of which is identical to doxastic doubt (for suspension of judgment, see below). A better term might be ‘propositional doubt’, since what distinguishes doxastic doubt from fiducial doubt is not the inclination toward *belief* (even if one has fiducial rather than doxastic doubt, one might be inclined to (not) have belief in a person), but the *object* of the attitude, which is a proposition rather than a person.

illustrate this briefly by the following example. Imagine that some astronomer – let us call her Hadassah – considers the following proposition:

- (1) The total number of planets in the universe is odd.

After considering this proposition, Hadassah will most probably suspend judgment on (1). Presumably, she will defend her position by explaining that the total number of planets in the universe is neither infinite nor zero and, therefore, either even or odd. If she is not some kind of hard core determinist, Hadassah will proceed to explain that if (1) is true, it is, for all we know, *contingently* true and if it is false, *contingently* so, for the total number of planets could easily have been completely different from what it *de facto* is. That is, she will acknowledge that the following two propositions are true:

- (1*) \diamond (The total number of planets in the universe is odd.)
(1**) $\diamond\sim$ (The total number of planets in the universe is odd.)

Hadassah will add to this that she does not have (and that, for all she knows, nobody has) any kind of evidence for thinking that the total number of planets is in fact odd or that the total number of planets is in fact even. Accordingly, she winds up neither believing nor disbelieving (1)—and, I presume, the same applies to you. In that case she will have satisfied all the conditions that Zimmermann mentions (she will neither believe nor disbelieve (1) and believe (1*) and (1**)). However, we certainly would not say that Hadassah *doubts* that (1). What in addition is needed for someone to doubt whether some proposition *p* is true, is that in her mind she is wavering between two or three different doxastic attitudes. She might suspend judgment on *p* and feel inclined to believe *p*. She might suspend judgment on *p* and feel inclined to disbelieve *p*. She might suspend judgment on *p* and feel inclined both to belief that *p* and to disbelief that *p*. Henceforth, I will assume that this inclination toward at least one other doxastic attitudes is another necessary condition – besides neither believing nor disbelieving *p* – for doubting that *p*.

Second, contrary to what Zimmermann suggests¹⁰, it is *not* a necessary condition for some person *S*'s doubting that *p*, that *S* believes that both *p* and $\sim p$ be metaphysically or logically possible (i.e. possibly true). It is true that *often* when one doubts that *p*, one believes that *p* and $\sim p$ are both possibly true in this sense. This holds for propositions such as:

- (2) René Descartes wrote his *Meditations* in 1623.
(3) Michael put the beer in the refrigerator about two hours ago.

¹⁰ See the citation from p. 307, but also p. 308, where Zimmermann asserts: „Sie (‘zweifeln’ and ‘bezweifeln’; HDP) drücken die propositionale Einstellung der Unsicherheit und Ungewissheit in einer Alternative zwischen zwei Möglichkeiten aus [...]”

Nevertheless, this does not apply to *all* propositions. Take, for instance, (4):

- (4) There is a largest prime number.

Imagine that some cognitive subject S – let us call him Steven – for some reason or other, feels (strongly) inclined to believe (4) and at the same time (strongly) drawn toward believing $\sim(4)$. Imagine also that Steven neither believes nor disbelieves p, although he is pondering over (4) twenty-four hours a day. Let us assume that he has taken some courses in mathematics and that, therefore, he believes, like you and me, that if (4) is true, then it is *necessarily* so and that if it is false, it is a *necessary* falsehood. In that case Steven will neither believe nor disbelieve the following two propositions:

- (4*) $\diamond(\text{There is a largest prime number.})$
 (4**) $\diamond\sim(\text{There is a largest prime number.})$

Would we not say that, certainly, Steven seems to *doubt* whether (4)? Hence, believing some proposition p to be metaphysically or logically possibly false and possibly true is not a necessary condition for doubting that p. Perhaps there is a way out for Zimmermann: he might contend that the possibility in question is epistemic rather than logical or metaphysical: it is a necessary condition for Steven's doubting that he believes that *for all he knows*, (4) is possibly true, and that *for all he knows*, (4) is possibly false. The problem with this view is that it requires a belief, or two beliefs, that do not seem to be present in all cases of doubt. Imagine that a student, standing in front of the shelves of some store and thinking about her low budget, doubts that she should buy a jar of jam. Does her doubt require belief that, for all she knows, it is true that she should buy a jar of jam, and, for all she knows, that it is false that she should? I doubt it.

One might consider this point of mine as an instance of hairsplitting, but it is not. It is not, partly because, traditionally, Christians have believed that God is a necessarily existent being. This is why they have believed that the following proposition is metaphysically necessarily true:

- (5) There exists an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, perfectly good being.¹¹

¹¹ Or perhaps rather a proposition in the neighborhood of (5). For, the (necessary) truth of (5) does not exclude the following 'situation': in each possible world there exists an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and perfectly good being, although not all of these beings are identical to each other. Traditionally, most Christians would say (i) that there necessarily is only one omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and perfectly good being, (ii) that necessarily this being is the same across all possible worlds, and (iii) that this being has the aforementioned properties essentially. (I will understand something's having a property essentially as follows: some x has some property P essentially iff x has P in every possible world in which x exists. Cf. Plantinga (1974), 56). Thus, most traditional Christians would claim that the following proposition is necessarily true:

Surely, someone who understands this concept of the Christian God and who has doxastic doubt concerning (5) – i.e. who doubts that (5) – will not believe that possibly (5) is true and possibly (5) is false in the metaphysical sense of the word. For, he would realize that in that case, he would believe a flat contradiction. The same holds for propositions such as the proposition that God is omnipotent, the proposition that God is omniscient, and so on (doubt about these propositions might be more easily compatible with Christian faith).

Hence, the following definition of doxastic doubt will be more accurate than Zimmerman's explanation of what it means to have doxastic doubt concerning some proposition:

Def. 1: Some cognitive subject S doubts some proposition p iff S neither believes nor disbelieves p, and feels drawn toward at least one different doxastic attitude toward p.

Let us now turn to the issue of the compatibility of doxastic doubt and faith in God. Zimmermann rightly notices that certain doxastic doubts are compatible with Christian faith, although having too many of them (or too important ones; he is not clear on this) will damage or, in the end, destroy fiducial belief in God (cf. p. 314). In response to this, one might wonder which propositions one can doubt without losing one's faith in God. Obviously, one can have faith in God (i.e. to love, trust, rely on God, etc.) and at the same time doubt the following propositions (whether these propositions are in fact true or not):

- (6) God created humans by means of a mutation and selection based evolutionary process that took billions of years.
- (7) The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a historical event.

But what about doubt concerning the following propositions:

- (8) The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God.¹²
- (9) God has revealed himself to humankind.

And if you believe that doubt about each of these propositions is compatible with Christian faith (does not destroy one's faith in God), what about doubt whether God is good, or doubt whether there truly is such a person as God?

- (5*) There exists an essentially omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and perfectly good being x such that if some possible being y is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and perfectly good, then $x = y$.

¹² According to the seventh century Athanasian Creed, those who do not believe (8) cannot be saved. Given the fact that one's having Christian faith in God seems to imply that (in the end) one is saved, this means that no one who has Christian faith in God will doubt whether (8) is true.

I will not try to answer the question of which propositions one can doubt, while still having faith in God. This is because I do not believe that there is any right answer to this question. And that is because I believe that what doubt about some proposition does to one's faith is person dependent in at least four regards.

First, it will depend on one's doubt about other religious (or perhaps also non-religious) propositions. That is, not only the *content* of one's doubts, but also the *amount* of one's doubts is relevant for one's having faith in God.

Second, some people are much more inclined to trust and love other persons (including God) or are just much more gullible than others. It might be that doubt about certain propositions will not damage or destroy their faith in God as quickly as it will obliterate the faith of suspicious and distrustful people.

Third, it depends on the degree to which one holds other beliefs about such things as God's existence and divine revelation. If someone holds those other beliefs (that strengthen his faith) to a high degree, doubts about certain religious propositions will be less likely to damage or wreck his faith than the faith of someone who holds many of his religious beliefs only to an extremely low degree (a degree which is just sufficient for maintaining the attitude of belief toward the proposition in question).

Fourth, one might have certain defeaters for one's doubt that are strong enough to continue to believe in God. For example, one might find oneself with doubt concerning this proposition:

- (10) God is not somehow self-righteous or arrogant in demanding all people from every nation to bow down before his throne, honoring him by songs of praise and confession of sins.

One might find oneself neither believing nor disbelieving (10), feeling both inclined to accept and to reject this proposition. Yet, one might also believe that one of the affective consequences of the fall of humankind in Adam is being selfish and proud and that one of the cognitive lapsarian consequences is that one has an obscured knowledge of who God truly is. As a result, one might doubt whether (10) is true and simultaneously realize that one has a defeater (in some sense of the word) for doubting (10) and for disbelieving it, although one still finds oneself not believing (10). In such a case, doubt that (10) does not necessarily do much damage to one's faith in God.

3. Fiducial Doubt

Let us now turn to fiducial doubt. This kind of doubt, according to Zimmermann, is that doubt which is expressed by the verb *zweifeln an* (to doubt *about*, to doubt *in*, to doubt *of*, or to doubt *on*, rather than to doubt *that*). The object of this doubt, he says, is some other person X. Fiducial doubt is similar to belief in some person X (*glauben an* or *jemandem glauben*) in that it expresses a certain attitude

(*Haltung, Einstellung*, pp. 309-10) toward some person, whether human or divine. In the case of fiducial belief, this attitude is emotionally positive. Fiducial doubt, on the other hand, consists partly of a negative emotional attitude. Unfortunately, Zimmermann does not give us a precise definition of ‘fiducial doubt’, but he explains fiducial *belief* in someone as trust in some specific person, which implies that one believes that what that person asserts is true (cf. p. 310). This suggests that having fiducial doubt concerning some person means *not* trusting that person, which seems to imply that one does not believe what that person says (nor that one disbelieves what that person contends). However, as we have seen in our treatment of doxastic doubt, this cannot be the whole story. It seems to be a necessary condition for doubt that the cognitive subject in question feels inclined to at least one other attitude than the attitude she has, say, trust, or distrust.¹³ Thus, it seems that we can initially define fiducial belief and fiducial doubt as follows:

Def. 2: Some cognitive subject S has fiducial belief in X iff X is a person and S trusts X, i.e. believes that X’s assertions are a reliable indicator of the truth and has a positive emotional attitude toward X.

Def. 3: Some cognitive subject S has fiducial doubt in X iff X is a person, S has a negative affective attitude toward X, S believes neither that X’s assertions are a reliable indicator of the truth nor that they are not, although S feels inclined to at least one of the following attitudes toward X: trust and distrust.

At several places (for instance, on p. 312) Zimmermann considers Christian belief in God (Christian faith) as an instance of fiducial belief. It is evident that one cannot have at the same time fiducial doubt concerning God in the sense of Def. 3 and fiducial belief in God in the sense of Def. 2. If that were possible, one could simultaneously believe and not believe some proposition and this seems infeasible (if not conceptually incoherent).

Regrettably, there are several problems with Zimmermann’s treatment of fiducial belief and fiducial doubt. First, at several places Zimmermann offers an explanation of fiducial doubt that contradicts Def. 3. For, he contends, one cannot only doubt of some person, but also of some person’s good will, faithfulness, capacity to do a certain thing, etc.¹⁴ He even offers the following lucid example of fiducial doubt: to say “I doubt of God’s goodness, but this (topic) leaves me entirely untouched” does not make any sense. The verb

¹³ ‘Distrust’, as it seems to me, is stronger than ‘mistrust’ in that it is closer to belief that someone cannot be trusted and in that it seems to imply stronger negative emotions.

¹⁴ Cf. Zimmermann (2006), 309: “Obwohl es nahe liegt, muss in dieser Interpretation nicht unbedingt eine personale Beziehung, also eine Beziehung zwischen Person und Person, intendiert sein, denn man kann zum Beispiel auch »an den guten Willen (einer anderen Person)« glauben, genauso wie man »an dem guten Willen (einer anderen Person)« zweifeln kann.” The same fact is noticed by Von Kutschera (1990), 123.

zweifeln an ('to doubt of/in/on') does not only have words that refer to persons as its object, but also, for instance, words that refer to people's character traits. And I would think that the same applies to 'belief in' (*glauben an*): one can not only believe in a person, but also in someone's goodness, capability, faithfulness, etc. In my opinion, one can also doubt of or believe in non-human objects or properties of non-human objects, such as one's country, a project's feasibility, a computer's reliability, etc.¹⁵ This means that Def. 2 and Def. 3 need to be revised in such a way that the object of belief and doubt can also be properties or attributes of persons and non-human objects.

Second, besides cases of belief in something (*glauben an*) Zimmermann seems to treat cases of believing someone (*jemandem glauben*) as cases of fiducial belief as well (cf. p. 310). But, certainly, to believe some person X does not imply having a positive affective attitude toward X. I might quite well believe in someone's reliability (I know that he will always tell me the truth) and still hate that person—perhaps, if I am somewhat perverse, because of the very fact that he never tells me a falsehood.¹⁶ In fact, believing someone does not imply an emotional attitude of any kind. It may be that often when one believes someone, one has a positive affective attitude toward that person, but the latter does not follow from the former. This means that Zimmermann has either to give up his idea that believing someone is a subcategory of fiducial belief or deny that fiducial belief and fiducial doubt imply having some sort of affective attitude. If he were to do the latter, however, it would seem that fiducial doubt can almost¹⁷ be reduced to doxastic doubt, which Zimmermann will certainly want to avoid. Therefore, I shall assume that he will drop his claim that to believe someone is a case of fiducial belief.

Third and most importantly, particular cases of fiducial belief do not imply having a positive affective attitude toward the person or thing in question, in the same way as certain cases of fiducial doubt do not imply having a negative affective attitude toward the person or thing in question, although both of these attitudes might imply an emotional or existential involvement of some sort. Believing in (*glauben an*) or doubting of (*zweifeln an*) someone's honesty, for instance, imply neither a positive nor a negative emotional attitude toward the person in question. One can believe in some criminal's honesty when he confesses his murders and rapes, but still despise him for what he has done. Doubting about some disabled person X's capability to accomplish a job does not imply having a negative attitude toward X. This issue is crucial, because the same thing applies to fiducial belief in and fiducial doubt about God. Beelzebub

¹⁵ That is, I believe that in German, the verb '*glauben an*' can have these things as its object, although 'to believe in' is applicable to many more objects (for a list of some interesting examples, see Price (1965), 6-9).

¹⁶ The (mistaken) idea that to believe someone (*jemandem glauben*) implies having a positive affective attitude toward that person, can also be found in Franz Von Kutschera (1990), 122.

¹⁷ Almost, for the object of the attitude would still be a person, rather than a proposition. However, if this attitude does not imply any emotion toward the person in question, it will be hard to explain why this attitude toward that person cannot be reduced to an attitude toward some specific proposition.

can believe in (*glauben an*) God's omniscience, but feel nothing but jealousy, grudge, and hatred toward God. More to the point of discussion, an unpretentious Christian who has suffered a lot during his life, may simultaneously have doubts about (*zweifeln an*) God's omnipotence and yet still have (Christian) faith in God, and convey this as follows:

I'm sure that God is light and that in him there is no darkness at all. If he could have prevented my wife's terrible disease, he surely would have done so, or if he could have healed her, he certainly would have done that, thereby answering to my continuous prayer. But he did not. Hence, I feel strongly inclined to think that he could not have done any such thing and that, therefore, God is not omnipotent. At the same time, the bible tells me that God could indeed do such a thing, so that I simultaneously feel inclined to believe that he could. Every time I reflect on it, in the end I find myself with *doubt on God's omnipotence*. Still, I realize that I'm just a simple human being with limited capacities. Anyway, no matter what the truth about this is, *I believe in God*. I love him more than anyone else, I trust him, and I do everything to honor him by my thoughts, words, and deeds.

There is nothing incoherent in the way this man describes his own situation. He has fiducial belief in God (he has Christian faith), and at the same time he has certain fiducial doubts. I believe that in the same way, Christians can have fiducial doubts concerning God's omniscience, his necessary existence, his omnipresence, and perhaps even his perfect goodness. In the same way one can have fiducial doubts about, for instance, divine revelation in the scriptures or in nature. Zimmermann may be right that being emotionally involved is a necessary condition for someone's having fiducial doubts, but there is no reason to think that having a negative attitude to the object (human or non-human) in question is essential to it.

Now that we have seen that some fiducial doubts do not imply having a negative attitude toward the person in question, we can turn to two important questions that Zimmermann raises in the course of his article. 1) Is fiducial doubt entirely independent of propositional attitudes? 2) What is the exact relationship between doxastic and fiducial doubt? Zimmermann answers the first question by responding to the second. The relation between fiducial and doxastic doubt, so he says, is that fiducial doubt always implies doxastic doubt. In order to explain why, he appeals to Franz von Kutschera's claim that to believe someone (*jemandem glauben*) entails believing that what that person asserts is true. (cf. pp. 310-11) Both Zimmermann's thesis and his claim in support of it seem correct to me. Unfortunately, the latter does not establish the truth of the former, since, as we have seen above, there are fiducial beliefs that do not imply believing that the person in question makes true assertions. One might believe in someone's blamelessness or moral goodness, one might believe in someone's capabilities (say, to finish painting the entire barn within two days) without

believing that the person in question makes true assertions. In the same way, one can doubt someone's moral integrity or someone's steadfastness without doubting that person's contentions.

A good reason to think that fiducial doubt entails doxastic doubt, as it seems to me, is that it is hard – extremely hard, indeed – to conceive of a situation in which one has fiducial doubt concerning some person or thing without doubting whether some specific proposition is true. Doubt about Mother Theresa's moral sincerity, the president's trustworthiness, the reliability of some person X's belief formation on the basis of memory, God's perfect goodness – to mention just a few examples – simply seem to entail doubt that respectively the following propositions are true:¹⁸

- (11) Mother Theresa is morally sincere.
- (12) The president is trustworthy.
- (13) X's cognitive faculties that produce beliefs on the basis of memory are reliable.
- (14) God is perfectly good.

I would think that there is another reason why fiducial doubt is not completely independent from propositional attitudes (which was the first question asked above). That is because fiducial doubts do not only imply doxastic *doubts*, but also doxastic *beliefs* (although toward different propositions). In normal circumstances – you could specify them, if you want – the fiducial doubts mentioned above imply belief that the following propositions are true:

- (11*) There is such a person as Mother Theresa.
- (12*) The president is possibly trustworthy.
- (13*) X has cognitive faculties.
- (14*) God exists.

One might even wonder whether fiducial doubts can be reduced to doxastic doubts, which would imply that all doubts are doxastic doubts (assuming that the only candidates for doubt are doxastic and fiducial doubts). This is a difficult topic that I cannot in any way satisfactorily address here.¹⁹

At the end of this section we might ask a question which is similar to the question at the end of the second section: what fiducial doubts are compatible

¹⁸ And this, I guess, is why words like 'zweifeln', 'douter', and 'doubt' – words that are partly derived from 'zwei' or 'duo', as Zimmermann rightly notices – are not only used for doxastic, but also for fiducial doubt: even in the case of fiducial doubt one has doubt that some proposition p is true or false (or, alternatively, that p or ~p is true).

¹⁹ Cf. Price (1965), 25, who says the following about certain kinds of evaluative belief-in: "To put the same point in another way, the proposed reduction leaves out the 'warmth' which is a characteristic feature of evaluative belief-in. Evaluative belief-in is a 'pro attitude'. One is 'for' the person, thing, policy, etc. in whom or in which one believes. There is something more here than assenting or being disposed to assent to a proposition, no matter what concepts the proposition contains."

with Christian faith? Again, I am inclined to believe (and do in fact believe) that this will be person dependent. If faith in God implies loving and trusting him, however, there are at least two fiducial doubts that are incompatible with Christian faith, viz. doubt of God's worthiness of being loved and doubt of God's trustworthiness (whatever one's reasons might be for these doubts).

So far, we have worked with the rough definition of Christian faith as being an attitude of love and trust toward God, a definition that is also employed by Zimmermann. There are, however, a few passages in the scriptures on faith and doubt that suggest that Christian faith implies much more than merely loving and trusting God. Some of them might even, *prima facie* at least, seem to exclude the possibility of someone's having fiducial doubt and simultaneously having faith in God. Let us, therefore, finally turn to those passages and see what they tell us about Christian faith and fiducial doubt.²⁰

4. Some Biblical Passages about Faith and Doubt

The most difficult passage in this regard is perhaps Heb 11:1: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." *Prima facie*, words like "being sure" and "certain" do not leave much room for doubt, whether doxastic or fiducial.²¹ On second thoughts, however, this text turns out not to oppose anything of what we have seen above, for at least three reasons.

First, the translation of *υπόστασις* and *ἔλεγχος* by respectively "being sure" and "being certain" is highly contested. For, one might also interpret *υπόστασις* and *ἔλεγχος* objectively rather than subjectively and translate them by "guarantee", "foundation," or "objective reality," and "proof", "evidence," or "demonstration." The author of Hebrews uses the word *υπόστασις* twice elsewhere in his letter. Heb 1:3 reads: "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his *being* (*χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ*)." It is hard to attribute a subjective meaning to *υπόστασις* in this verse. This might be easier in Heb 3:14, but even there an objective interpretation seems to make good sense of the text. In LXX, *υπόστασις* is often used in one of its many objective senses: Judg 6:4, Ruth 1:12, Ps 68:3, Jer 10:17, Ezek 26:11, Nah 2:7, etc. Turning to *ἔλεγχος*, we should note that *ἐλέγχειν*, from which *ἔλεγχος* is derived (the NIV translates: "certain", but literally it means something like "proof" or "evidence"), often means "bringing to light" (Jn 3:20, Eph 5:11,13), or "arguing" / "reasoning" (LXX: Job 13:6, 16:22, 23:4).²² Hence,

²⁰ In what follows, bible quotations will be from the New International Version.

²¹ Zimmermann makes this explicit by saying that the idea that (fiducial) doubts concerning God belong to Christian faith contradicts the definition of Heb 11:1, "nach der der christliche Glaube aus zwei Komponenten besteht: einem unerschütterlichen Vertrauen auf das, was erhofft wird, und einem entschlossenen Rechnen – Luther übersetzt poetisch genauer: »Nicht-Zweifeln« - mit dem, was nicht gesehen wird." (Zimmermann (2006), 306.)

²² For some objective interpretations (faith as foundation, substance, prop, and manifestation, demonstration, support, evidence, proof, etc.), see also Calvin (1999), Ellingworth (1993), Lane

faith is the fulcrum, the foundation on which our hope rests (cf. Heb 6:18-20). On an objective interpretation, therefore, this text does not exclude fiducial doubt from the Christian life.

Second and closely related to the first point, most scholars are convinced that Heb 11:1 does not give a definition of faith in the first place. Nowadays, this verse is often understood as an explanation of the function of faith, as a summary of what faith *does* or what one can do on the basis of faith. And this seems right: the purpose of this chapter, which contains a long list of biblical heroes that performed certain acts on the basis of their faith, does not seem to be to define precisely what it means to have faith (any reference to God or Jesus Christ, to sin, to eternal life, etc. is absent). But if Heb 11:1 does not offer us any individually necessary or jointly sufficient conditions for having faith in God, then, obviously, this passage does not show that having faith excludes having certain fiducial doubts concerning God or his revelation.

But, third, even if we were to assume that the subjective interpretation is correct and that Heb 11:1 *does* offer us a strict definition of Christian faith, this text is not in conflict with anything of what I have said. For, usually ἐπιζομένων refers to those things that God has promised (cf. vss. 13 and 39) and πραγμάτων οὐ βλεπομένων has primarily to do with heavenly glory, eternal life (cf. vss. 10 and 13, Rom 8:24,25), and perhaps also with God's existence (cf. vs. 27). This leaves plenty of space for such things as fiducial doubts concerning God's perfect goodness, his omniscience, his omnipotence, etc.

Of course, there are several passages in the scriptures that speak negatively about doubt. In Mt 21:21 Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt (μὴ διακριθῆτε), not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." (cf. Mk 11:23) Here, however, Jesus does not contend that Christian faith is incompatible with doubt. He only encourages his disciples to have faith and to believe that by their faith they can do things that at first may seem (physically) impossible. (Cf. Mt 17:20) Even taken literally, this passage says nothing more than that Christian faith is a necessary condition for performing certain miraculous acts.

In Rom 14:23 Paul says the following: "But the man who has doubts (διακρινόμενος) is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith (οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως); and everything that does not come from faith is sin." This sentence, however, should not be isolated from the rest of the chapter. It goes back to vs. 5, in which the apostle says: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be

(1991), Michel (1975), and Van Oyen (1962). For subjective interpretations (faith as confidence, conviction, certainty, etc.) see Bruce (1990) and Moffatt (1979). For the latter, see also Martin Luther's translation of this verse: "Es ist aber der Glaube eine gewisse Zuversicht des, das man hofft, und ein Nichtzweifeln an dem, das man nicht sieht." For a sophisticated position that is in some sense between the two former views, see Gräber (1997), 92-98.

fully convinced in his own mind (ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῦ πληροφορεῖσθω).” The person who has doubts, referred to in vs. 23, is someone who believes or suspects that certain specific foods are forbidden and still partakes of them.²³ This verse clearly addresses the “weak”: they are condemned if they eat, because they do not do not rely on the Lord, but act in conflict with what they believe themselves.²⁴

Other passages also speak negatively about (fiducial) doubts, such as Mt 14:31, Jn 20:27, and Jas 1:6-8, or positively about the absence of doubt (Rom 4:19-21), but nothing in these passages suggests anyhow that Christian faith is incompatible with any kind of fiducial doubt. Incidentally, the bible even shows us some people that have trust in God, but still find themselves with strong doubts—doubts, I would say, that are not merely doxastic. In Mk 9:24, the father of a possessed boy exclaims: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” This text suggests that one can believe in God, while still fiducially doubting of certain things.²⁵ This, I would think, is also the reason why Jesus’ disciples ask him to increase their faith (Lk 17:5).

It is remarkable how often in scripture faith is related to or even explained as love toward God, hope for the realization of what he promised, and trust in him (see, for instance, 1Cor 13:13, Gal 5:6, Eph 6:23, 1Thes 5:8, 1Tim 1:5, 2:15, 6:11, 1Pet 1:21, 2:6, and Rev 2:19). Although it might not be possible to give an accurate definition of ‘Christian faith’, the following certainly seems to be the core of it: an attitude of love, dependence, and trust toward the Lord. This loving and trusting attitude is not compatible with certain doubts, such as doxastic doubt whether God exists (how could one love some person if one feels uncertain about that person’s very existence?) or fiducial doubt concerning God’s faithfulness and reliability. But this love *is* compatible with other doubts, such as doubts that certain things that are said about God are true or certain events that the bible predicts will indeed happen (doxastic doubts), but also doubt of certain divine attributes or such things as the reliability of (parts of) revelation, doubts that imply an existential or emotional involvement (i.e. fiducial doubts).

Let me end this section with a couple of questions. Above, I have dealt only with scriptural passages that make more or less explicit reference to the phenomenon of doubt. There are, however, also several places in the bible where people express their (fiducial) doubts concerning God, although these doubts are not designated as such. Think of the noteworthy combination of profound doubts and utter dependence and reliance on God in Ps 77, Jeremiah’s questioning God in Jer 12:1, the jolting words of those who fear the Lord (at least, on some interpretations) in Mal 3:14-15, Job’s accusing God (Job 9:22-24, 30:21-23),

²³ Cf. Schlier (1977), 418.

²⁴ Therefore, one could also translate διακρινόμενος as “the man who is in conflict with himself” (cf. Bauer: *mit sich im Streite sein*) or “the man with qualms about it” (cf. Dautzenberg (1980), 735, who offers the following translation: “Wer aber Skrupel empfindet.”)

²⁵ Thus also Sevenster (1950), 135.

John the Baptist's doubt concerning Jesus' Messiahship (Mat 11:2), and especially and most difficultly, Mat 27:46, where Jesus cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" How should we interpret these passages? Does each of them testify of real fiducial doubts concerning God or, rather, of something else? Do the subjects in question have genuine faith in God when they utter these words? If the answer to the latter two questions is affirmative, how do fiducial doubts and faith in God relate to each other in the lives of these people?

5. Conclusions

On the basis of the three preceding sections, we can draw the following six conclusions. First, although Zimmermann's analysis of doxastic doubt is incomplete, this flaw can be remedied. Second, whether certain doxastic doubts are compatible with Christian faith depends in at least four regards on the person in question: it depends on the amount of propositions she doubts, the extent to which she is inclined to love and trust others, the degree to which she holds certain other beliefs, and other beliefs she holds and that can function as defeaters. Third, fiducial doubts that concern God's reliability, faithfulness, trustworthiness, etc. are incompatible with Christian faith. Fourth, other fiducial doubts, viz. doubts concerning divine attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and doubts concerning the church or the reliability of (parts of) revelation can be (again, this depends on the person in question) compatible with faith in God. Fifth, by its very nature having some fiducial doubt entails having some doxastic doubt. Sixth and finally, no passage in the scriptures precludes the possibility of someone's having faith and simultaneously experiencing certain fiducial doubts.

References

- Bruce, F.F. (1990). *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. In *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Calvin, J. (1999). *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*. In *Calvin's Commentaries*, Baker, Grand Rapids.
- Dautzenberg, G. (1980). Art. διακρίνω. In H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 732-36.
- Ellingworth, P. (1993). *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. In *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Fey, W.R. (1976). *Faith and Doubt: The Unfolding of Newman's Thought on Certainty*. Patmos Press, Shepherdstown.
- Gräßer, E. (1997). *An die Hebräer*. In *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Benziger Verlag, Zürich.

- Lane, W.L. (1991). *Hebrews 9-13*. In *Word Biblical Commentary*, Word Books, Dallas.
- Michel, O. (1975). *Der Brief an die Hebräer*. In *Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar Über das Neue Testament*, VandenHoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen.
- Moffatt, J. (1979). *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. In *The International Critical Commentary*, Clark, Edinburgh.
- Newman, J.H. (1901). *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, Vol. 1, Longmans, Green & Co, London.
- Oyen, H. van. (1962), *De Brief aan de Hebreëen*. In *De Prediking van het Nieuwe Testament*, Callenbach, Nijkerk.
- Plantinga, A. (1974). *The Nature of Necessity*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Price, H.H. (1965). Belief 'in' and belief 'that'. *Religious Studies* 1, 5-27.
- Schlier, H. (1977). *Der Römerbrief*. In *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, Herder, Freiburg.
- Sevenster, G. (1950). De twijfel in de Bijbel. In W.J. Aalders, G. van der Leeuw, H.C. Rümke, and G. Sevenster (eds.), *Twijfel en geloof*, Uitgeversmaatschappij Holland, Amsterdam, 77-139.
- Smits, P. (1973). *Over religieuze twijfel*. Van Gorcum, Assen.
- Tillich, P. (1958). *Dynamics of Faith*. Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York.
- Von Kutschera, F. (1990), *Vernunft und Glaube*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/New York.
- Zimmermann, G. (2006). »An Gott zweifeln« - eine logische Untersuchung. *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 48, 305-320.