

The Love of History and the Future of Christianity

Toward a Manifesto for a Next Christianity

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Cover Art by Lee Sax

Introduction:

What is a Manifesto and Why do we need a Next Christianity?

A manifesto is an examination of the past and a vision of the future that focuses upon action in the present for a community of actors who are calling themselves and others into being as a historical project of change.

Why is there a need for manifest action to build a Next Christianity? Why do we need a religious practice at all? Why is a Christian religious practice useful for ourselves or for whomever else might chose to join us in such a practice? And how do we ascertain what is for us the essence of a vital Christian practice for living our lives in this troubled and awesome 21st Century – a practice that we want to practice and feel is worth inviting others to practice? What can we learn from the abundance of ways that people have created to practice a religion they call “Christian”? How can we sort out from the history of Christianity what is essential from what is wayward or obsolete?

It is to such questions that a manifesto needs to give answer. At the same time a manifesto needs to be relatively brief and yet long enough to be convincing and clear. These are not easy requirements, for the topics involved can easily consume many books. In fact many very important books have already been written: such writings fill whole libraries. The manifesto I have in mind is a piece of writing that boils down this edge thinking to a tight focus on the core issues needed for a call to action within these 21st Century social conditions and within the redefinition of religion that is taking place in our time. I do not claim that this brief book is that manifesto, but I do claim that it is an attempt to move in that direction.

I am going to take a somewhat indirect approach to dealing with these challenges. I am going to start with a topic that I believe is one of the core blocks to a vital Christian resurgence – a love of history. By “a love of history” I mean a recovery of the past for the sake of anticipating the future in order to live fully in the present. I am assuming that a love of history and a loyal service of that Mysterious Power experienced in the unstoppable flow of time is foundational for a vital resurgence of a Christian-heritage-related religious practice. I am further assuming that such a recovery not only serves those of us who are reaching out for a vital practice of Christianity, but also contributes to our present moment of history a needed revolutionary force that can assist all humans to create a viable future for the human species.

Part One will focus on the basic love of history and especially upon key historical turning points within that period of time in which the writings of the Christian Bible were composed.

Part Two will focus on four key turning points within that period of time we commonly call “Church history.”

Part Three will focus on the future, the turning point that we now occupy and the vision of a Next Christianity that is or may be emerging.