

## 6. Christianity and Church History

The Christian love of history does not end with a love of Biblical history. It continues on into what is typically called “Church history.” Church history might be said to begin with the “resurrection of the disciples” from their despair over the untimely death of Jesus. But more frequently Church history means the ongoing life of this basic movement of Christian practice beyond the New Testament formation period. Both of these definitions of Church history are useful. Clearly the New Testament writings, especially the later ones, include a great deal of attention to the community of Christian practitioners. But especially among some Protestants, we often find a neglect of interest in the history of the Christian religion from the time of **John’s gospel (90 CE)** until **Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE)**. Obviously, the glory of what was explored in the previous chapter about “Christianity and the Love of History” did not end with the end of the first century. Our love of history as builders of a Next Christianity needs to include a love of the entire History of the Church. In fact we need to expand our view of the term “Church history” so that it begins with the Exodus (and earlier) and extends into an unknown future whose shape with regard to Christian practice I am examining in this book.

I already introduced in Chapter 1 examples of how history is not only about the past but also about the present and future. Indeed, it cannot be said often enough that we simply do not have a profound love of history if our probing of the past is not being related to our present circumstances and our decisions relative to possible outcomes for our emerging future.

Most Protestants, and many Catholics too, know very little about Church history and even less about translating the meaning of that history into our current historical challenges, included the challenges with regard to building a Next Christian practice that is adequate to these times and for our emerging future. In this chapter I will explore some of the turning points in the post-New-Testament history of Christian practice and how Christians in those times were dealing with their history and what their dealings tells us about dealing with our historical challenges. I want to focus especially on the meaning of the term “Church” and how their struggle with the meaning of “Church” informs those of us who are choosing to create and practice a Next Christian practice for this century.

The meaning of the word “Church,” as a religious institution serving a neighborhood of geography did not come into full flower until after the Emperor Constantine’s edict in 313 CE allowed Christianity to be an authorized religion of the empire. Until then, Christianity was a widely diverse and creative outpouring from that enigmatic but powerful breakthrough in human understanding that Jesus, his first disciples, Paul, and the Gospel writers put into history. That movement’s basic understanding of itself was to manifest a community of people called out from the nations to be a communion of saints who as Christians needed no place of status in this world. After Constantine that image changed.

Whether Constantine was a true Christian or merely a shrewd politician may never be completely agreed upon. Perhaps he did hope to unite his empire with help from this fairly well-organized movement of popular strength and enthusiasm. But the Christian movement at this time was still small compared to all the other religious practices going on. Constantine did not ask for everyone to become a Christian. In fact, he forbade the rich elite from becoming clergy. Constantine viewed the Christian leaders as ministers to the poor, and he did not want to divert the wealth of the elite from supporting the Imperial court. Mostly, what Constantine did was to protect the Christian movement from persecution and provide its leaders with the status needed to do extended work. So perhaps Constantine did have a deep love for this movement.

However that may be, the Christians who accepted the challenge of being befriended by the Emperor faced a new problem: *What was validly Christian and what was not?* Also, how were they to remain true to their integrity as a vital movement loyal only to Reality and yet remain a useful and appropriate body of religious practice to this friendly Emperor. Surely this entailed a temptation to lean too far into the empirical customs of thinking. Some Christians did. But in the main Christians remained a scrappy group who were dedicated to a vision of Reality that is Infinitely beyond the canopy of reality typically accepted in that Roman civilization.

Constantine may have been surprised that this religious movement, that he hoped would help bring unity to his empire, was already embroiled in a furious division caused by the spread of a vigorous movement in the Eastern part of the empire called Arianism, after its charismatic founder Arius. So serious was this challenge that in 325 Constantine called together, paid for, and facilitated the first empire-wide council of the Christian movement. More local councils had been held, but this, the Council of Nicea, was the first of several empire-wide councils to iron out what was the Christianity that the Emperor was supporting, and what was not. After a whole month of furious debate, the Arians turned out to be the losers in this meeting. And this was a serious matter for them, because it meant a loss of support from the Emperor, a replacement of leaders in their home areas, and a vulnerability to persecution by the winning forces. All these consequences did occur, but the Arian movement did not go away. Several more councils moderated somewhat their defeat and went on to other controversial issues. Nevertheless, a serious gap of vision with regard to what Christianity was persisted and eventually the Eastern churches separated from the Western churches over the issue of having a pope in Rome. But the deeper reason for the separation was that these Eastern areas were pursuing a somewhat different religion. But I am getting ahead of my story. Let us examine the struggle with being "the Church" that was going on before and during the reign of Constantine the First.

The issue of what was the "authoritative" Christian faith was a raging debate in Paul's letters. By the second century each local gathering (ecclesia) of Christians had evolved a bishop whose role had become the defender of the viewpoint of last resort in the theological battles of the time. Mostly, the institutionalization of a bishopric came into being to resist Gnostic views of being Christian. Marcion of Sinope (85-160), a typical Gnostic Christian leader, distinguished a "Heavenly God," (promoter of "good form") from the "crass" Demiurge (the source or creator of chaotic material substance and its tragic history).

In order to meet such "departures from the faith," the Bishop acted as a sort of theological bouncer, whose job was to cast out of his community of Christian practitioners those who did not see that the appropriate worship of the ecclesia included devotion to "the creator of heaven and earth." In other words, for this emerging "orthodoxy" the so-called Demiurge was also the Christian God. Their "appropriate" worship was the God of history revered by Moses, the prophets, Jesus, Paul, and so forth. Years later, we see this reflected in the first line of the still famous Apostle's Creed that stated that this Gnostic dualism was not Christian faith: "*We credo* in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." The significance of this anti-Gnostic direction is still deep for us today. It means a full affirmation of the goodness of our own bodies (their birth, their sexuality, their variety as both men and women, their limitations, and their death). It also means a full affirmation of the natural planet (the other-than-human forms of life, the mountains, the trees, the grasses, the breezes and storms, the earthquakes and floods, etc.). These early Christians did not have our current understandings of ecosystems and ecological responsibility, but this ancient fight for devotion to the Divine Source of the material world undergirds current

Christian passion for ecological responsibility. The gnostic teachings do not do that. We find a form of gnosticism present in many forms of contemporary Christian practice – for example, those that emphasize escape to an otherworldly destiny and a consequent devaluing of the human body, sex, animal life, the Earth, and history. In order for these bishops and their followers to win this fight against gnostic forms of Christian understanding, a movement was begun toward defining an authoritative Christian faith and establishing an authoritative organization of Christian community to maintain that important emphasis.

Although this trend toward an authoritative Christianity was underway long before the Constantine's edict, it took on a new urgency after 313. As already mentioned above the Council of Nicea in 325 was a big fight and a big step with respect to clarifying the boundaries of an authoritative Christianity, which included defining the boundaries of "the Church" as an institution under the protection of the Emperor. The issue at Nicea was different than the earlier Gnostic struggle, but the deep conflict between the Greek and the Hebrew heritage was still part of the background of this new fight. In the forefront of the fight was the issue of the relation of Jesus Christ to God the Almighty Father. It had already been more or less settled that the Gnostic rejection of the goodness of the material creation was a Christian heresy. There was no argument over Jesus being a real human being who was born and died as a biological person. But what was the "divinity" that characterized Jesus Christ as divine as well as human? That question is still being asked today. When Christians today claim that Jesus was God walking this Earth, what on Earth do they mean?

In order to understand this fight, we 21st Century Earth walkers have to get our minds into the philosophical framework in which these Christian ancestors were operating. "Jesus Christ" had become a symbol for a mode of being that preceded the creation of the world. "Jesus Christ" was a symbol identified with the "logos" which we might translate as "the meaning of it all." So it was "the meaning it all" that was incarnate in the flesh of the ordinary Gallilian human, name of Jesus. Also, those who were being healed, saved, made righteous, joined with the family of the Eternal, and all such big transformations were said to be "in Christ." This need not mean perfectly "in Christ." It was understood that Christians were still growing up into the full stature of Jesus Christ. But this being "in Christ" was real enough as an experience in personal life that it is quite accurate to say that everything the Council of Nicea was saying about Jesus Christ was also being said about those of us who were "in Jesus Christ" – that is, were the true Church of Jesus Christ. If all this background is not understood, it remains incomprehensible why these Christians at Nicea were so passionate about a single word, indeed a single letter in a short piece of official Credo.

So what was this Nicean controversy about in terms of human existence, our human existence, everyone's human existence? This is the question we must ask about every word of Christian heritage for the last 3000 years. The original Nicean Creed ended with the following footnote that was dropped in later editions of this long Creedal fight:

"But those who say: 'There was a time when he (Jesus Christ) was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable' — they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church."

Of course "those who say" such things were the Arian members of the Council. What were they saying? They were saying that the "Eternal logos" that was incarnated in Jesus was first created by God, the Almighty. The Arians were saying that the Son of God essence of Jesus was one step removed from God himself. In other words we were not meeting the fullness of God in Jesus but a creation of God whose creation preceded the creation of the cosmos. Now, what was wrong with this, and why did

they care? In the ancient Hebrew thinking about the God of history, there was no problem meeting the fullness of the Almighty in a bush, or an ass, or a prophet, or a whirlwind or an earthquake or a small still voice inside one's own consciousness. So it was entirely plausible to the anti-Arian crowd that the fullness of the Almighty could be met in Jesus. Furthermore, this side believed that properly understanding their salvation depended upon Jesus being the full encounter with God in order that their life "in Christ" also consisted of participating in an incarnation of the Fullness of the Almighty. They felt that to say of themselves they were merely the incarnation of a halfway God, a creature of God, was appalling. So they went out of their way to make plain that the Jesus-Christ logos was not less than God but was of one substance with God. It was indeed God and not some creature of God who had saved us and was saving us. Arius, we might intuit, was trying to make the gospel a bit more appealing to his own Greek mind and to the Greek mind that still shaped the sensibilities of most people. Indeed, is it not still true that we 21st Century Earth walkers also find it difficult to see Jesus and ourselves as the walk of the Infinite mystery upon this Earth? Perhaps most of us are somewhat Arian rather than orthodox Christian as defined by the anti-Arians. So let us keep asking ourselves, "What is the truth of our own existence that made the Nicene Creed fight necessary?" Paul Tillich raised this question, "Would Western Civilization have been more vulnerable to becoming Muslim instead of Christian had the anti-Arians lost their fight? And here is our even deeper question: did humanity actually encounter the full majesty of Reality in the flesh and blood of Jesus poured out for our illumination, healing, reconciliation to Reality, adoption into the living body of profound humanness, "new-risen, resurrected, starved from the tomb, starved from a life of devouring always myself"?<sup>1</sup>

## The Enigma of the Church

While the Nicene Creed may not be the clearest expression of the Christian good news, it was a piece of clarity about being the Church. The Church is a scrappy bunch of saintly/sinners and sinner/saints who concern themselves with the course of history. Jesus, Paul, and the Gospel writers all understood the communities they were building as a communion of saints who were also sinners growing toward a full flowering of sainthood, and who were active in rescuing others from their delusory worlds of fallen humanity.

The communion of saints understanding was never entirely lost, but from the Nicene Council on, the understanding of the "Church" as a religious institution become a basic theological topic. As a communion of saints, the boundaries of the Church are invisible, "known only to God." But the boundaries of the Church as a religious institution are defined, known and written down, and its cultural, political and economic processes spelled out. The 136 years from the Council of Nicea (325) to the Council of Chalcedon (451) included a series of creedal statements that were definitive of what the institutional Church was, and what it was not. These creedal statements were not literal rational beliefs as we often take them to be. They were a sort of mystical-mythic-poetry about cosmic powers of being. In the next chapter I will attempt to decode the Chalcedonian Creed. But in this chapter I want to follow the thread of an authoritarian Christianity on down into our times.

## Augustine of Hippo

**Augustine (354-430)** is the philosopher/theologian who pulled together a three-century long ferment of Christian theologizing within and for the Greek/Roman cultural world. His synthesis of Greek and Hebraic themes enabled a certain stability

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<sup>1</sup> This imagery is taken from D.H. Lawrence's poem: "New Heaven and New Earth."

of thought and practice for the next 800 years of the Western practice of Christianity. Something different happened in the Eastern practice of Christianity, but we who have been nurtured or misnurtured by some form of Roman Catholicism or Protestantism need to first understand the Western story, so I am focusing there. Augustine in his *Confessions* introduced a style of biography that honored the Hebraic love of history. This love of history also appears in his *City of God* reflections. He provides a strong encouragement for sustaining a historically successful institutional Church.

Augustine was a seeker who came to Christianity after a number of breakthroughs that included astronomy and the Plato-leaning philosophy of Plotinus. In other words he mastered the Greco-Roman wisdom of his day that was available to him. He was also inspired by the teachings of the, by then, quite sophisticated and widespread Christian Church. Augustine did not find his mastery of Greek philosophical thinking adequate to affirm the "truth value" he found in this rich Hebraic/Christian heritage which dated all the way back to Moses. So Augustine held that the truth value of this heritage assembled in the Western Church be seen as an **authority** to be taken on faith quite beyond any possibility of proving it through the powers of Greek thought.

But the source of Augustine's own willingness to embrace this authority was that it spoke to something missing in his own life – that is, it opened his awareness of his own authenticity, his own consciousness of his own profound humanness. In this sense Augustine was an existentialist rather than a doctrinalist in the contemporary security-hungry and bigoted sense. It is important to see him this way in order to properly honor him today. And yet his support for an authoritative attitude toward Church heritage we now need to reject as we move forward into a vital Next Christianity. I will say more about this presently.

Out of the Augustinian pull-together (and earlier) grew the pattern of Church expansion that has dominated Christianity until our day. Here is a sketch of that pattern: take the best authoritarian doctrinal system so far created by the saints, theologians, and dignitaries of the "Church" and impose it on every village that a band of priests, nuns, monks, lay thinkers, and lay-financiers can reach. Those who do this bold task know that the children and untutored peasants will not understand what is being imposed upon them and ritualized for them every week. But these Christian cultural warriors do this in the hope that at least some of these masses will one day in their lives catch on to the truth contained in this imposed "authoritarian" system. However objectionable this crass telling of that process may seem to many of us today, we need to also notice that this method worked. Some people did catch on. Throughout the Middle Ages wave after wave of "saintly" living did arise.

## **Thomas Aquinas**

The life of **Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE)** is associated with a next huge shift in Christian practice. There were precursors to Aquinas, but his pull-together was determinative. This turning point is taking place at the high point of the Middle Ages in terms of massively elaborated and stable social structures. But cracks were appearing. It is hard for us who are living on this side of Thomas Aquinas to imagine what it was like to live in a society that had so thoroughly emphasized the Platonic side of Greek heritage and so fully neglected the Aristotelian side of Greek Heritage. We now live in a society dominated by natural science which has been a development of the Aristotelian emphasis on a type of truth that arrives from our observations of the external and material world. Thomas Aquinas, who has become such an establishmentarian figure within Catholicism, was in his lifetime a maverick, a revolutionary who, along with his Dominican Order, was recovering the wisdom of Aristotle that was being communicated to Europe from the Muslim side of the Mediterranean. Aristotelian wisdom was obviously helpful for conducting a vast and

complex social system. In Thomas's mind it needed to be adopted as far as it could go. Since it did not go far enough to encompass the wisdom of the authoritative Church. Aquinas resolved his overview of truth by stacking the wisdom of the Church on top of the wisdom of Aristotle. These two layers (natural and supernatural) became more distinctly separated than was the case earlier. The exploration of nature was set loose to follow its own lights. The continuing clarification of Church heritage also had its role. Thomas assumed that there was no fundamental contradiction between the wisdom of nature and the supernatural wisdom of the Church. Both reflected Truth from the same God. The hierarchical ordering of the two seemed to work quite well for a time. But as we have seen, the explosion of the nature-based wisdom of the sciences began to cast doubts of the Church side of this partnership, or at least on the ways that the Church side of the partnership was being communicated. The Church way of communication was still the same authoritarian way that was initiated by Augustine and earlier theologians – that is, having Church workers impose a highly developed set of doctrines upon a population and waiting for them to catch on to their interior meaning. Modern science included a method that was almost the opposite to this – namely, approaching all current thought with doubt and being open to explain our experience with new ways of looking at things.

Today, no matter how well crafted a doctrine may be, the communication style of imposing doctrine is inherently problematical. Though an imposed doctrine has been refined by many fierce battles among careful thinkers, no doctrine will hold for everyone the Spirit that generated the doctrine. No belief in rational statements can substitute for the direct personal experience of profound humanness.

Furthermore, the inherited doctrinal system of Medieval Christendom was vulnerable to perversion, both the sort of misunderstandings that can so easily arise over time as well as the direct misuse of the enlarged authoritarian power by the Church's top authorities for less than noble purposes.

## **Martin Luther**

In the late Middle Ages it became clear to wave after wave of would-be reformers that the Christian hierarchy from the Pope on down had become crazy making. **Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE)**, an Augustinian monk, broke with the authority of the Church and succeeded in establishing an alternative Christian practice that was based more on the authority of the Bible than on the authority of the current Catholic (that is, supposedly universal) Church. This was a huge break, a break based on Luther's own existential discoveries about the radicality of personal faith or trust in Reality. Upon that basis he was criticizing both the established Church and many portions of the Bible. But the Reformation was not a break with the authority mode of theological thinking. It was a reform within the system of authority thinking. Luther reconstructed an authoritarian Church with a significantly new doctrine and practice. Other reformers did likewise. The authority-mode of theological thought and religious practice, with its usefulness and its vulnerabilities, has dominated Christian thinking and organizing to this day. When we hear such questions as "What do Methodists believe?" we are hearing authoritarian thinking.

A valid Christian practice is not about what my church group believes; it is about personally entering into a history illuminating event that enables us to participate in our own profound humanness. Many contemporary Protestants (and Catholics too) have come to expect a personally grounded truth, but the church organizations to which these awakening persons belong (or once belonged) still tend to operate with the Medieval model of imposing a set of beliefs or doctrines that people are expected to catch on to by simply living with them and practicing them on a regular basis.

The Protestant Reformation did not resolve this paradox of the understanding the

term “Church” as both an authentic communion of saints and an authoritative religious institution. We still struggle with this topic. Any Next Christianity that is a daily, weekly, yearly religious practice will also face the paradox of an invisible communion of saints in tension with a visible community of the people who have a specific religious culture, polity, and economics.

## Kierkegaard

However enduring this Medieval model of Christian practice still is, a thoroughgoing authenticity mode of theological thinking and religious practice is now at least a couple of centuries in the making. We can date its beginnings with **Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)** – with roots somewhat earlier. In Kierkegaard’s wake we see this mode of theological thinking and practicing being fleshed out and taught broadly, by luminaries like Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, H. Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as the more orthodox-styled Karl Barth. Many other names could be added. Simone Weil is a woman writer on Christian topics that I would add to this core group, but a longer list of women authors, from Suzanne de Dietrich to Mary Daly also breathe the Kierkegaardian air. This Kierkegaardian beginning has also been manifest in a number of influential Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner, Jacques Maritain, and Catholic writers such as Thomas Merton, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry. Whatever be the gifts, limitations, and disagreements among these many voices, *authenticity*, as a mode of Christian thought and practice, is in history and is not likely to go away. A strong movement of ordinary Christians as well as scholars still live and witness and explore being a Christian in the “post-Kierkegaardian era.”

Nevertheless, we who wish to promote a vital Next Christian practice based on this authenticity breakthrough, still have work to do sorting out authenticity thinking from the hangovers of authority thinking that remain in our culture, in our Christian practices, and in our own “gizzards.”

For example, in order to appropriately guide the development of a vital “Next” Christian practice, we will be called upon to distinguish authenticity thinking from the many side-trips being taken into forms of relativism. The typical relativist tends to view authenticity thinking as another form of authority thinking. As important as it is to learn to mistrust the authority of the Church, the authority of the Bible, the authority of Pastor Smothers, or the authority of Pope Perfectas, it is just as important not to “fall off the other side of road” into an “absolute relativism.” I use the term “absolute relativism” to distinguish extreme relativism from our clarity that all cultural creations, including all religious creations, are indeed relative. No religious teaching is an absolute teaching dropped down from a presupposed heaven. Nevertheless, the truth of authenticity exists and this truth judges our various creations as more and less valid.

“Absolute relativism” can be defined as an unwitting escape into another form of authority – namely, “believing” that there is no such thing as an *authenticity experience* that can render one religious practice or insight more valid than another. Absolute relativism tends to be a psychological re-stimulation in the lives of people who have been hurt by some form of authoritarianism and thereby react negatively to any sort of claim to “certainty.” Absolute relativism can also be a deep rebellion against all meaningful discipline – a type of inner bondage similar to spending one’s whole life kicking the shins of a brutal or controlling father.

We who are flowing in the wake of this post-Kierkegaardian awakening are in the process of constructing a Next Christianity based upon the experience of authenticity – not authority, and not relativity. The departure from authority means giving up entirely any further dealing with a set of correct beliefs that can be imposed on a body of people or an entire society by some elite body of theologians, bishops, and cardinals,

or any collection of the centuries of writings by apostles, saints, and heroes of Christian loyalty. On the other hand, with respect to the relativity swamp, a vital Next Christianity needs to produce a set of religious methods that enable practitioners to discover in their own inner beings the living Truth of the historical breakthrough that occasioned the surge and spread of Christianity as an expression of profound humanness. Profound humanness is not a set of concepts or virtues; it is an experience, an inner certainty about the “real me” that arises as each specific estrangement from that profoundness is acknowledged, forgiven, and abandoned.

The above summary statements require more thought in order for the deep wonder and truthfulness of the Kierkegaardian transformation be fully seen. I am going to suggest that it is a turning point in Christian understanding more basic than the Reformation. The Reformation was a reform of Christendom, but as I will develop more fully in later chapters, the “Kierkegaardian Era” in Christian renewal is more than a reform of Christendom. As Kierkegaard himself dubbed his work: it is an “Attack on Christendom.” I am noting this in order to begin shaking our minds out of the authority rut in which most Christian practice is still stuck.

Here is a verse of scripture that enables us to view Jesus himself as a champion of authenticity over authority.

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching. For he taught them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

Matthew 7:28-29 Phillips translation

I understand this verse to mean that Jesus operated with an *authority of authenticity* rather than the *authority of tradition*. The scribes were using a scholarly proof texting. During the time in which Jesus and his first followers lived, the scribes were respected religious teachers. Many scribes were sincere persons, but they based their teachings on the written words of the heritage. The meaning of the above passage is that Jesus spoke with an inward type of authority, unlike the scribes who spoke with the objective authority of the traditions. I would say that Jesus spoke with the authority of authenticity while the scribes spoke with the authority of their scriptures. A similar scribal authority is manifest when contemporary Christians speak with the authority of their religious groups, their “pastors,” their “Pope,” their Scriptures, their favorite theologians, their favorite philosophy teachers, or some other mentor, parent, or friend, whom they are allowing to take the place of speaking from the heart of their own experience.

I will develop further details on this topic in later chapters, but for now, I will focus on the historical significance of the authenticity mode of teaching and practicing a Next Christianity. In making authenticity rather than authority the core approach for our Christian understanding of “Truth,” we have entered a new era of Christian practice. This turning point in Church history is surely as vast as any of the other turning points mentioned. Of course, whatever major turning point a person is now experiencing can seem like the most radical turning in all of history. But at least we must say to ourselves that this turning point is huge, not trivial.

Living this turning point from authority to authenticity means taking a new look at Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and others. All these luminaries lived in an era of Christian thought and practice in which authority was the taken-for-granted mode of thought and practice. We need to notice this context of their lives in order to be appropriately critical of these writers and not fall back into some fresh invention of authoritarian doctrinairism. At the same time we need to notice that these were great men precisely because they dealt with their authority-breathing times in a manner that expressed their own experiences of authenticity. They were able to be creative with the existing authoritarian structuring of their religion precisely because they were



operating from a fresh experience of authenticity. In order to show the truth of these assertions to reason-loving and authority-hating readers, I am going to write an entire chapter on each of the above three turning point figures: Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther.

Also, much more needs to be said about how we practice a Next Christianity in which authenticity, not authority, is the foundational motif. The following core difficulty will come up: any sort of historically ongoing Christian practice entails the creation and learning of a set of practices that actually access the authenticity of our profound humanness. Such practices will be relative historical structures. Along with these relative practices go the equally relative theoretical explanations or theological efforts that I am doing right now. All this amounts to creating historical structures – cultural commonality we might call it. In order to have a historical community of Christian practice using the authenticity mode, we will need to fashion some sort of cultural commonality, political organization, and economic disciplines that organize and support the Christian practice. So, we will have created a new version of the historical, institutional church, whose boundaries will not be the same as the invisible boundaries of the communion of authenticity saints. So how do we create such an institution without reverting to some new form of authoritarianism? How do we explain to ourselves that the structures established for our commonality of culture, politics, and economics are expressive of the Spirit of authenticity that we claim to base our institutionalization upon? How do we create a form of institutionalized commonality that discourages both authoritarianism and relativism? If you think this will be easy, you certainly need to read the rest of this book. If you already sense the difficulty of these issues, then you may want to read on.