

Part Two: Other Big Turning Points in Western Church History

Christianity is now a tangle of many threads that have gone in many directions: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and many versions of each. Each of these threads contain valuable lessons for all of us, but each person who claims a Christian practice as his or her religion is living in and choosing to continue to live within one of these many threads. The thread I will discuss in Part Two reaches through four major turning points in Western Christian history.

As already mentioned in Part One, these turning points are associated with the illuminating work of these four very creative persons: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Søren Kierkegaard. It will not be my aim to add to the basic scholarship about these persons and their times, but merely to tell a story about a thread of history that has brought me and others to our current place of envisioning a Next Christianity. The Next Christianity I have in mind is a pull together of the vast current turning point in which I and many others now see our sector of Western Church History deeply embroiled.

8. Augustine and a Greek/Hebrew Synthesis

In this chapter I am not going to do a full examination of Augustine's writings or of the historical situation to which Augustine was addressing himself. This has been done and needs to be done, but I will attempt a much more limited task in this chapter.

I am going suggest that Augustine's work was a pull together of several centuries of intense theological discussion that was also a pull together of many of the key gifts from two quite different cultures: the Greco-Roman inheritance and the Hebrew cultural ferment that most characterized the Christian Scriptures. Indeed Augustine's work was a synthesis of truth for living that was powerful enough to guide Christian thinking and living for the next 800 years.

Augustine is also interesting as a personal story, a story that is well told in his own *Confessions* and in the many books and sermons written and delivered over a long public career. He was a determined seeker for "truth to live by," and he lived by the truth he found. He was both a Greek style mystic and a Hebrew style servant of history. He was both a monastic who renounces private property for himself and a Bishop and politician who defended private property for others as long as that wealth was viewed as a gift from God and was given generously as alms for the poor and support for the work of the church. He saw the depth of Christian community as a palpably intimate communion of saints, and he saw Christianity as in institution of religion that contained only sinners who were being provided daily, weekly means of grace for their Spirit journey. He was both an authoritarian church-person who honored fully the inherited traditions and yet was also capable of a remarkable freedom to enact creative thought and action. I find it impossible to know this man deeply without identifying with him strongly, and yet I also find ways in which I am impelled to disagree with him.

I will sketch some of these powerful themes. What I hope to contribute with this chapter is a method for appropriating the greatness of Augustine for our times. Secondly, I want to indicate three places where Augustine's Christian thought needs to be significantly corrected: (1) the mingling of his thinking about sex with his thinking about sin, (2) his use of the idea of predestination to undergird the experience of dependence on God's grace for our restoration from sin, and most important (3) his use of the concept of authority to establish the validity of the teachings of the Church. With regard to this last point it is interesting to note that Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk who pioneered a reform of our Christian understanding of authority. But Luther was also an authoritarian in ways that current Christian renewal is moving beyond. Nevertheless, in our dialogue with Augustine we need to notice that his authoritarianism, like Luther's, had a personal-experience basis to it that today is often missing in both conservative Catholic and Protestant practices.

Following is my simplified tour through these overwhelming themes.

The Hebrew Augustine

As a Hebrew heritage lover, Augustine provided to his times and ours a keen sense of history and of the God of history. We can see this in his *Confessions*, his personally intimate story of his own life journey. We also see his sense of history in *The City of God* books in which he examines how history is made by the interaction of the Eternal City with the Earthly cities of humanity. Augustine knew that his writings were making history, and he intended them to do so. His forceful quarrels with Donatism and Pelagianism indicate a passionate concern for the future of Christianity and for humankind as a whole. Augustine knew that the Empire of Rome was corrupt, yet he also saw within it great gifts capable of transformation and useful for his project.

The Greek Augustine

Augustine was open to the secular culture of his era, even though he always viewed himself as some sort of Christian and maintained a deep communion with his remarkably Christian mother. He was for seven years deeply involved in the Manichian view of good and evil: that the evil in this world could be understood as the result of a evil force in the cosmos that fought with another cosmic force for good. This took the form of a deep intellectual fellowship with fellow seekers who found in this Christianized Zoroastrianism both a realistic view of the tragic evil of the world as well as a path to participation in the “Eternal light” of good. His conversion or return to a more orthodox form of Christianity included the Hebraic understanding that the force of Reality is entirely good, that evil is but a hole in the good, a perversion of the good that does not do away with the good but instead makes the participant in evil vulnerable to an all-powerful good that is driving evil to despair. Augustine was also a student of Greek astronomy which gave him the sense of a cosmos of great order. This may also have assisted him in his doubt of the Manichian view of an evil that was built into the structure of the cosmos. He was also a student of Plotinus, a powerful current development of the Platonic side Greek philosophy. It was Plotinus’ mystical depth that seem to have been a significantly deepening force in Augustine’s journey. The practical social thought of Cicero was also important to him. Augustine was not privileged to know everything about Classical Greek heritage, but what he learned from the available Latinized Roman versions of this ancient heritage was very deeply appropriated and applied. The force for truth within these powerful gifts from Greek heritage were as much a part of his writings as his Hebraic influence. But it was the truth he found in the teachings of the then well-established Christian Church and its Bible that become central for his more settled adult life. Without Augustine’s synthesis of these two vast spheres of truth and his skillful communication, the Western world would have been deeply impoverished.

The Enigma of Original Sin

One aspect of Augustine’s lean toward the Hebrew side of his Greek and Hebrew influences found expression in his thinking about sin. The Greek mind was comparatively optimistic about human nature. Though seeing humanity as tragically flawed, Greek heritage also viewed humanity as capable of greatness, a greatness that the human mind and will could achieve. Augustine found this typical Greek-based attitude to be less than fully true. In terms of the *good* that is described by a full obedience to the Hebrew God of history, (that is to mysterious Reality with a capital R), the story of humanity was a history-long, oft-repeated fall into deep estrangement from what is fully true. This estrangement was seen as so deep that the human mind and will did not have the power to counter this condition.

Augustine described this estrangement as **pride**, not the psychological pride that is the opposite of self-depreciation, but a *hubris*, as Paul Tillich prefers to call it. Hubris is an unrealistic view of self, a self promotion that is out of touch with realism, a defense of the indefensible, a *megalomania* of the inner being. Both Augustine and Tillich saw self-depreciation as a depreciation of God’s creation, and thus also as a form of hubris.

Augustine also analyzed how a human who is enthralled in this hubris has lost control of the body. The human body becomes trapped a power of *concupiscence*, a desire to be infinitely fulfilled, a desire that can never be fulfilled and that is therefore restlessness and vulnerable to despair. We have seen a similar analysis take place by contemporary psychologists who point out how humanity is driven by out-of-control desires that render one permanently dissatisfied – so much so that a person can experience a desire for death rather than continuing in this troubling state of unpeace.

Freud, we may recall, made comments on this topic – his so-called “death instinct.”

Augustine viewed the essence of these complex states of estrangement (sin) as a “bondage of will.” The will of the human person is bound in an inability to live otherwise. The will is not free as the Greek mindset tended to claim. The will is trapped in a tragic state from which it does not have the power to extricate itself. A liberation must come from outside – the inside having become lost in bondage. Augustine was not talking about our capacity to decide this over that or our capacity to make history, change the course of things, make a difference, and so forth. He was talking about how all our choices are set in a pattern determined by the bondage of our will to some form of hubris, megalomania, concupiscence, addiction, unrealism, ideology, crass foolishness, denial of truth, etc. As long as this estranged devotion has captivated us, we cannot perform the good of loving Reality and living realistically.

Augustine conducted much of his discussion on this topic through an elaboration of the Adam and Eve myth. Adam, he claimed, was in full possession of his God-given freedom before the fall, as was Eve. There was no reason for this fall; Adam had everything he needed for a full life, but he (he and she) found themselves capable of envisioning a step up into hubris, of substituting human creations of reality for the given true Reality. This misplaced stepping-up toward a knowledge of good and evil turns out to be a step down or away from the GOOD of GOD.

Augustine did not have our sophisticated cultural anthropology for explaining how our estrangement from the GOOD is passed on from one generation to next in a cultural way. He gave a biological explanation to the continuation of estrangement from onegeneration to the next. This explanation tends to imply that the goodness of sex and the goodness of the human body have been lost in the fall, rather than remaining good and powerful forces that still exist as a challenge to our “fallen” sexual and bodily addictions and other estrangements from the enduring good of our created nature. Augustine was correct, however, that humanity’s estrangement affects everything, and that the general state of humanity is a lostness from our true being, including the true being of our body and its sexuality.

The essence of this enduring estrangement is, I believe, best described today as a result of the temptation that is present within our greatest gift, our ability to think – our ability to create and believe in the reality of a fabricated world that we prefer to the real world that is being given to us. We prefer our own *finite knowledge* of good and evil to any sort of *Eternal Truth* that characterizes the cosmos, rules the course of history, and undergirds everything that takes place in our lives. Such an *Eternal Truth* judges or undermines our *finite knowledge* of good and evil.

A Historical Method for Reading Augustine

The writings of Augustine are difficult for contemporary readers because he was operating within the two-realm metaphor of heaven and earth that was dominant in his time. I will illustrate how we can translate his thinking for our era. I will use one small piece of his writing to illustrate a method I call “metaphorical translation.” Following are my comments upon this famous opening line of his *Confessions*:

“Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, Oh God.”

To understand this phrase we need to know in our own life experience what Augustine was pointing in his life experience with the word “God.” Similarly, we must translate into our experience the words “hearts” “restlessness” and “rest.”

Hearts: Luther, the ex-Augustinian monk, provides us a clue to the meaning of “heart,” as this term was commonly used in Medieval Christian theological thought. Here is a quote from Luther that I have found illuminating: “Trust and faith of the heart

alone make both God and idol . . . for the two, faith and God, hold close together. Whatever then thy heart clings to . . . and relies upon, that is properly thy God."

"Heart," in both Luther and Augustine, means the seat of our basic devotion, our primal passion. It is to the heart, not the mind, that we must look for the personal meaning of both God and idol. To what are we devoted? To what does our heart cling? What is the worship of our heart?

God: In the above prayerful cry Augustine says that our worship of any "god" different than the biblical God (The Ultimate Reality manifest in history) renders our hearts restless. To find "Rest" in our hearts we must cling in passionate worship to this awesome, mysterious "God." We must be devoted to "God" to find "Rest." Augustine means the same "God" experienced in Isaiah's foundation-shaking temple vision, in Second Isaiah's world history lessons, in Paul's eternal power and divinity that are plainly discernible through things which are commonly seen and known, as well as in Psalm 90's Almighty Limiter of our finite lives. In a full 21st Century experiential language, "God" is that Mysterious Power we experience in the unstoppable flow of time and in all the events that encounter us in our planetary and solitary history.

Restlessness: The restlessness that Augustine has in mind is a restlessness that characterizes our heart's devotion to some finite object of life meaning. Sex addictions and drug addictions teach us something about restlessness. But the restlessness to which Augustine is pointing is more far-reaching than the much-discussed topics of sex and drug addiction. Anytime we reject the fullness of Reality as it is manifest in this moment and hope for something else, we are thereby trapped in a desire that cannot be satisfied. We are restless, seeking what can never be.

We all tend to be addicted (or have been addicted) to some sort of "someday." Someday I will have enough money to be happy. Someday I will find the right partner to make me happy. Someday my current partner will die so I can find another. Someday I will have children. Someday these children will finally leave home. Someday I will find the work I like. Someday I will finish my education so I can begin my life. Someday my health will improve. Someday I will be less busy. Someday I will get around to tending to my deeper life and become restful and happy.

Someday never comes. It is always and only today. It is always Now. Yes, things change – sometimes for more pleasant days, sometimes for less pleasant days. But the many changes we will experience are not in themselves the advent of that Rest that overcomes all restlessness. If we get what we want, we may discover it is not what we want. Or if we get what we want, we then become restless that we will lose it. If we do not get what we want, we remain restless to get it. And if we give up getting what we want, but still want it, we are restless as well. Restlessness is the action of our consciousness toward some other moment than this moment.

This lesson on restlessness is an especially hard lesson for those of us who have experienced or do experience serious oppression. Of course we want to be liberated from that oppression. We may be hard at work to bring about a social someday in which oppression is no more. "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last." If some of us are members of a racial minority in a bigoted culture, of course we want to live in a culture that treats us with the respect that our humanity deserves. If some of us are women in a patriarchal culture, of course we want to live in a culture that treats women with the respect that our humanity deserves. If we are gay or lesbian in a culture that misunderstands, mistreats, and despises such persons, of course we want to live in a culture that treats us with the respect that our humanity deserves. We may be hard at work to bring about that cultural someday, that promised land of social freedom. And that work is noble compassion for ourselves and others.

But even with regard to these deep and valid longings for a non-oppressive

someday, we can notice that someday is not today. The issue of Rest or restlessness is about today. Whatever be the set of cultural oppressions that oppress us, we can find Rest today in the Rest of which Augustine speaks. We do not need to wait until that someday when our oppressive culture is healed. Even if or when such a someday comes, we will find other oppressions about which to be restless for some other someday. If we are the oppressor, we are oppressed by our participation in that oppression, and we have our own “somedays” to which we escape and thereby escape confessing our mistreatment of others and the “Demand” to correct our living

Many of us have experienced the oppression for being a religious person, coming from a religion-ignoring or religion-hating culture. Indeed, the most hated person of all is often the one that has realized human authenticity to such an extent that he or she does not fit into the existing culture. Let Jesus be our illustration. Yet in spite of his ongoing oppression, Jesus surely experienced the Rest of which Augustine spoke.

Rest: So what is this Rest that overcomes all our restlessness, or at least exists in our lives alongside the many forms of restlessness that threaten to swamp us? It is Rest in the fullness of Reality pointed to with the word, “God.” This God of Augustine and Luther, as well as Jesus and Paul, does not exist in terms of what we normally mean by “existence.” The biblical words for God (Yahweh, Lord, Father, Mother, Friend of Abraham, Rock, Shepherd, Foundation) all point to the Ground of all that exists. This Ground does not exist in the common sense of the word “exist”: that is, this Ground does not come into being or go out of being. This Ground is not a being alongside other beings, like angels or humans. God is the Ground of all “coming into being.” And God is also the cosmic grave of all “going out of being.” Just as the Earth is both Ground and Grave, that inclusive Reality that includes the Earth is Ground and Grave of the Earth as well as everything of which the Earth is also Ground and Grave.

This everlasting Ground and Grave is the experience pointed to by the worshipful word “God” by Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Luther, and millions of others. This Ground and Grave is the “abba” or “papa” of whom Jesus spoke. And this Ground and Grave of all existing beings is experienced by these exemplars as benevolent toward us, as the bestower of Rest in our hearts.

This papa-mama-friend benevolence of God is only experienced by those who are willing to be content with being Grounded into being and Graved out of being – that is, being content with limits and possibilities, living and dying, coming into being and going out of being. We lack the stillness of Jesus, of Paul, of Augustine, of Luther until we Rest in our present moment, renouncing all rejection of that moment, renouncing all hope for a different moment, and thus having no desire to have the unhaveable – that is, some other moment than the moment we have.

No other time than Now is the moment of Rest, of stillness, of life before God. The moment before God is not some imagined moment in the future. This Now is the moment before God. “Now” is the only time for Rest. Rest takes place Now, not someday. It is this moment, however tragic or fortunate, that contains the “final arrival,” the heaven promised to us by Jesus and his many witnesses.

Yes, Jesus was a strange Messiah. He did not bring us what we wanted – the end of ruthless rulers, the reward for our religious excellence, the prosperity we think we have to have, the knowledge that ends all need for learning, and so on and so on and so on. He brought us back to something far more important – he brought us to ourselves, to our true lives, to our Rest in being who and what we are – not yesterday, not someday, but Now.

And in this living Now, whatever it is in temporal, historical terms, we have the capacity to discover Augustine’s Rest. We can look and see for ourselves. We can notice for ourselves those things that we have been unwilling to notice. We can notice how committed we are to those somedays that make us restless. We can notice how

resistant we are to being who we are in the current circumstances of our lives. We can notice that this “me” who resists today and longs for some other day is just a figment of our own invention. My “restless me” lives only by my own insistence. We can notice that it can become within our capability to give up being the “restless me.” The “me” who is restless is not the true me. If we give up the false me, we will notice that we are already the one that is not restless. We are forgiven for all our departures and delays in finding this Rest. We are welcome home to the family of Reality of which we are part. We can find ourselves enchanted with Being, singularly compassionate, fearlessly confident, meditatively brilliant, prayerfully initiative, detached, engaged, audacious, and at peace – yes, at Rest. Such Spirit gifts may not all be manifest in each and every moment, but they are all there ready to come forward as needed. We can take our Rest!

Not every sentence of Augustine needs this much commentary to bring it into our understanding, but the entire scope of his witness does. In his 10-book work called *“The City of God,”* he builds upon the “Rest” theme with the word “Peace.” He speaks of how our Peace with God brings peace into family relations, into communal life, into the wide-world relations. He spells out how “The City of God” is a presence in the midst of the City of Humankind that has become separated from God. He sees the then well-established institutional Church as a sphere within which the City of God dwells. From this City of God Presence on Earth, greater Peace can come to the world. He also sees that the Church is an institution composed of many humans whose lives are very far from Peace with God. Nevertheless, even a faithless priest who performs the Church’s sacramental graces brings healing Peace to the world. Almost every topic of life is engaged by this theologian, and he vigorously engages every misunderstanding that rears its head against his City-of-God realism, Peace, and Rest

The Ongoing Conflict with Pelagianism

One of the most memorable conflicts in Christian theological history was waged by Augustine with Pelagius and his followers. Pelagius was a brilliant and dedicated Christian theologian, but he did not grasp how the will of a human being can be bound by estrangements that the unassisted will cannot break. Pelagius was a proponent of free will. He emphasized that it is up to each human to do good and to not do evil. Augustine also emphasized the will rather than the reason as the core dynamic in human life, but he sees that the will, having rejected Reality (i.e. God), has thereby become bound within this rejection in a manner that can only be broken from the outside by events of Reality’s action (grace) upon us. This controversy still rages in contemporary theology, and Augustine’s view still proves itself the deeper vision. The healing of our addictions, rages, or malice requires a Word of judgment that reveals to us the tragedy of this despair-characterized state of living. We also require for the freeing of our will the gift of the Word of forgiveness that welcomes us home to the Reality for which we are made.

Pelagius was a perfectionist and an optimist. He was a monk and an ascetic; he opposed private property and asked rich people to give up their property and join his radicalism. Such acts he believed humans could and needed to do. His view was, “It is up to us to be good.” Pelagius, in a less extreme form, would fit into many of our contemporary liberal Churches. “It’s simply up to me to be good” is an oft heard message, but it is not the good news clarified by Augustine. Many of us today suspect that the world is more tragic and more mired in difficulties than a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian view can encompass.

Augustine’s view of a tragic world in hopeless restlessness is a realistic vision that is also profoundly optimistic. Augustine does find within himself the experience of Rest

in God. He is an activist bringing Peace on Earth. Augustine knows, however, that such transformation of human life does not take place by a mere act of human will. Our healing requires an act of God. It takes a power beyond our self-willed illusory worldview to crash into that closed circle of estrangement and welcome us home to Reality.

Augustine's View of the Church

Augustine resonated with the sense of the Church as a society of the Holy Spirit, a communion of saints, a comradeship of love of self, God, and neighbor. He sought to manifest that sort of community in his own monastic order. But he also uses the word "Church" to indicate the empire-wide religious institution that had by his day become a cultural, economic, and political force. That social power was relatively small in a still largely pagan world of Roman form. But Augustine was intent on increasing that social power and creating an historical religious institution that deserved to have the social power it was acquiring. He worked with his fellow bishops to fight off Pelagianism and other teachings and practices he found wanting. He saw the religious institutions of Christianity to be carrying a deep gift that gave it a sacramental power even if that power was administered by flawed, deeply estranged, and unbelieving priests. He fought with the Donatist Christians who held that baptism or marriage by a defrocked priest was invalid. Augustine's view was that such a rule was unenforceable because only "God knows" for sure who are the unfaithful priests. He also claimed that if these rituals were performed correctly, they had the same nurturing effect no matter who performed them. Augustine understood that the views of the Donatists were a form of perfectionism that ought not be applied to the historical Church. At the same time Augustine fought to move the visible, historical Church toward the sort of effective religious institution it needed to be to do the good it needed to do in the world of its time.

His use of the authority imagery made Augustine's perspective a strong proponent of tradition even though he was a very innovative person himself. He argued for the authority of the heritage and based his programs for Church improvement on the authority of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. He saw himself and the fellowship of bishops with whom he worked as an extension of that authority and as an historical group deserving of an obedience that seemed arbitrary and needlessly stubborn to the free-minded Greek influenced rationalists of his time, and also of our time. But as we study Augustine's life closely, we can see that his intent in all his scrappy orthodoxy was to sustain, proclaim, and extend the ministry that he had experienced healing to himself and the many people that he served. Some of Augustine's fights have never been entirely won within the wide-range of Christian practice. Indeed, some of his positions can now stand some correction. But we need to honor this man and his friends in mission for delivering to the succeeding centuries a more vital and realistic form of Christianity than we might have had without him.

Corrections to Augustine's Vision that 21st Century Christians can See More Clearly

Three aspects of Augustine's vision now stand out to me and many others as in need of correction: (1) his way of mingling his thinking about *sex* with his thinking about sin, (2) his use of the idea of *predestination* to undergird the experience of dependence on God's grace for our restoration from sin, and most important (3) his use of the concept of *authority* to establish the validity of the teachings of the Church.

Sex: Augustine may have been helped by the Christian witness to overcome his own sexual addictions. This may have been one source for his certainty about the

existence of the bound will. But some Medieval theologians and many Modern theologians have criticized his view that sex and birth is the means of the transmission of estrangement from Adam and Eve to the following generations of humans. It was an overkill for Augustine to suggest that Adam before the fall only had erections when he choose to have them, implying that our more out-of-control experience is a sign of the fall. It is more consistent and nature-affirming to view sex, with all its controllable and uncontrollable features, as merely part of our biological nature, part of our created Christ-innocence, not a factor of our estrangement. Estrangement comes into being through our erroneous relationships with sex and other features of our finite lives, and these estrangements are transferred to following generations through cultural rather than biological means. Though concupiscence is a real experience, Augustine's biological overkill had far reaching consequences for Christian living – an overemphasis on celibacy and asceticism with regard to sex, giving a needless second-rate status to married life, and worst of all encouraging a diminished status and honor toward women. Further, such views tend to deny us the redemptive role of women in the lives of men as well as the redemptive role of men in the lives of women. And all the above creates suffering for the gay and lesbian persons in our populations.

Predestination: The experience that it is God's grace, not our own action, that restores us to our authenticity was a positive contribution of Augustine as well as of Luther, Calvin, Wickliff, and others. But it has been another overkill to buttress the grace experience with the notion that our "liberation" from the swamp of estrangement was predestined from the foundations of creation. It is perhaps true that it does feel that way when one realizes the comfort of total dependence upon God (Reality) for our authenticity. We do not have to achieve this authenticity, we only have to surrender to it. But to spell this out as a predestination has consequences that need to be questioned. John Wesley insisted against a decayed Calvinist predestinarianism that "faith is 100% God's gift and 100% my choice." I find this to be strange mathematics but, nevertheless, true to my experience. As Paul Tillich spelled this out, the grace happening is incomplete without its third aspect: my acceptance of God's acceptance of me for a fresh start in spite of my many estrangements. This trusting of God is my doing even though it is a surrender, a sort of non-doing, an effortless-letting-be of "God's reign of forgiveness," rather than an accomplishment of which I can boast.

Authority: Augustine's view of the authority of the Church had a mystical or existential element to it that the post-Aquinas era lost to a large extent. So when Protestants criticized the overreaching authority of the Church, they were criticizing an authoritarianism that was a decayed form of the Augustinian view of authority. For Augustine the authority of the Church meant obedience to a received body of teachings, creeds, and practices that had a very personal or mystical meaning. Augustine surrendered to these inherited traditions because he experienced their healing power. The "grace" of these traditions seemed to him like a fluid substance that flowed from this authoritarian inheritance into the souls of the being saved. Whether this heritage was the letters of Paul or the elements of the Eucharist, such tradition was felt to have healing power, making it an authority for Augustine. But as the history of Christianity unfolded after Aquinas, a more objective view of the authority of the Pope and the Church become customary and that development was deadly to our trust in our own experience as well as our trust in the deep reasonings of the heart of faith. In the post-Lutheran and post-Kierkegaardian eras, a new view concerning the authority of the Church has become a crucial theological and practical issue. Today, we can admit that the inherited tradition contains teachings and practices that can be healing, but we can also be clear that all these humanly-invented contents are just methods that sometimes work of our healing and sometimes do not. The story of our healing needs

to be told in a more accurate way than a surrender to Church authority. Not only can the Pope of Roman Catholicism be wrong on matters of faith and practice, but the “popery” of Protestant denominations can also be validly questioned. It is my intent in this book to paint the possibility of a vital Next Christianity that rests upon the supporting ground of authenticity, rather than on a subservience to the authority of any institutions of Christian heritage, including those institutions that I myself might invent. I understand this to be a theological and practical improvement of the thinking of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and many others. The move toward authenticity over authority does not mean that we cannot learn from all the vast variety of Christian formations, but we can also say our “yes’s” and “no’s” to these sources from a fresh viewpoint that trusts the “Holy Spirit” operating in our own personal depths of consciousness. We deeply need to trust that Spirit over any former attempt to describe that Spirit and its implications.