

## ONE

# Theologies of Identity and Truth

## *Legacies of Barth and Tillich*

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AT THE PRESENT TIME in our profession, a seeming incommensurable tension exists between what some call “identity theologies” and theologies that aim first to make a case for the truth about the theological topic and then to make religious identity contingent on that discovery.<sup>1</sup> This tension is by no means new. When theology is practiced by people who belong to religious communities, it nearly always has played a dual role—that of defining and refining the identity of the community and that of inquiring into what is true, usually about a problem that has come up within the community. In principle, of course, no theologian especially attentive to the identity dimension of religious belief would want to employ beliefs that were not also true on their own. By the same token, few theologians especially attentive to the truth dimension of belief would deliberately ignore for long the practical implications of belief for the identities of believers. Nevertheless, in our time these two dimensions of religious belief have come into very serious tension. This tension is high not only in Christian theology but in the theological traditions of all the world religions at this time. Reflect with me, if you will, on some aspects of this tension, which I will discuss mainly in reference to the Christian case.

### BARTH AND TILlich ON THEOLOGY: NARRATIVE AND SYSTEM

The two great giants of Protestant Christian theology of the twentieth century, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, famously agreed that theology is for the sake of the Church. The first sentences of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* are: “As

a theological discipline, dogmatics is the scientific test to which the Christian Church puts herself regarding the language about God which is peculiar to her. Dogmatics is a theological discipline. But theology is a function of the Church."<sup>2</sup> The first sentences of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* are: "Theology, as a function of the Christian Church, must serve the needs of the Church. A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation."<sup>3</sup> Barth and Tillich differed widely on the public to be engaged by theology, which is not identical with the public each meant to serve with his theology.

For Barth, "The subject of theology is the history of the communion of God with man and of man with God. This history is proclaimed, in ancient times and today, in the Old and New Testaments."<sup>4</sup> He also added the creeds and confessions of the Church as sources for the understanding of the great Christian narrative, and of course engaged in an extremely rich dialogue with many elements of the Christian tradition. His intent was to flesh out in exquisite detail the grand narrative of God's creation and redemption of the world in Jesus Christ. The form of theology for Barth was ultimately narrative, and the public for that theology consisted of those interested in that narrative, affirmatively or critically. Like Mozart, whose music he adored, Barth told his story with consummate complex artistry, and many people discovered themselves and their religious identity within his narrative. The force of his theology was that it gave Christian identity to those who found themselves within his story; the negative force of his theology was that those Christians who did not find themselves identified within his narrative were dismissed by many of his followers as not Christians. The force of Barth's theology in both positive and negative respects was very powerful indeed in American Protestant theological education after World War II.

For all its beauty, Barth's theology was seriously arbitrary. From the outside, it simply did not engage the stories of the Buddhists and Hindus, Confucians and Daoists, and hardly the Jews and Muslims. From their standpoint, Barth's story looks both parochial and uninteresting except as perhaps giving clues for understanding colonialism. From the inside, Barth's story is felt by those who identify with it to be God's revelation, not a human creative invention at all. Nevertheless, it had a very Reformed Protestant orientation, especially in comparison with John Milbank's slightly variant Anglican-Thomistic story. Variant Roman Catholic and Orthodox stories also flourish, often without insistence on strict narrative form. The Dispensationalist story, made popular by the "Left Behind" series of books, is even more strictly narrative in form than Barth's story. My point is that narrative, as a conceptual and literary form, lends itself to the arbitrariness of the narrator's own stresses and internal interpretations, even when the main characters and events are shared with alternative narratives.

To seek a non-narrative path for ascertaining the truth of a narrative is possible. Nineteenth century Christian historians tried to subject Christian narratives to non-narrative scientific history; twentieth century Christian fundamentalists tried to subject them to a non-narrative literal reading of the Bible. Both are fruitless attempts and Barth declined both. Immediately and also in the long run, the power in Barth's theology derives in large measure from the aesthetic beauty of its narrative, given the biblical, creedal and confessional base from which it is drawn. Most of my students today are uncomfortable with the authoritative status of the Bible, being aware of the wide variety of interpretations possible, and they quickly historicize the creeds and confessions. Many of them prefer the aesthetic imaginative narratives of Tolkien or Rowling that present Christian story themes in which they can find identity without embarrassing tethers to Bible, creed, or official theology. Few of these students would say that Tolkien or Rowling are theologians, only that they provide stories within which they can find their Christian identity. For Barth, the theological public he engaged in telling his story consisted of those who accepted his biblical and traditional sources and were willing to struggle with him for how to tell the story.

For Tillich, by contrast, the narrative associated with Christianity was relatively suppressed in favor of the form of system for theology. In a passage immediately preceding my last quotation from Barth on theology as history, Barth said,

Is not the term 'Systematic Theology' as paradoxical as a 'wooden iron'? One day this conception will disappear just as suddenly as it has come into being. Nevertheless, even if I allow myself to be called and to be a 'Professor of Systematic Theology,' I could never write a book under this title, as my great contemporary and colleague Tillich has done! A 'system' is an edifice of thought, constructed on certain fundamental conceptions which are selected in accordance with a certain philosophy by a method which corresponds to these conceptions. Theology cannot be carried on in confinement or under the pressure of such a construction.<sup>5</sup>

The reason for this, Barth went on to say, is that theology is the *narration of a history* given in the Bible, etc. What Barth said about systematic theology would be quite acceptable to Tillich, I think, so far as it went. It failed to point out that the "fundamental conceptions," "philosophy," and "method" are themselves internal to the theological system for Tillich, and therefore in need of critical elaboration and defense as one proceeds.

The implication of systematic form for Tillich was that he had to engage as within his theological public any thinker, position, or discipline that had something to say on the topics within the system. Philosophy is clearly important, and not only with regard to method. He had to defend his conception of God as fundamental ontology, his conception of the human condition in

terms of philosophical anthropology, his interpretation of the Christian narrative in terms of philosophy of history, and so forth. Tillich began philosophically pretty much where Barth began, with the Western tradition read through the problematics of German idealism, Kierkegaard, and crisis existentialism. As his career progressed, however, he was driven to wider philosophical publics that strayed from the historical connections between Christianity and German idealism. Much of twentieth century existentialism was directly atheistic. Sartre had an elaborate idea of God he was convinced does not exist. For Tillich, systematic theology needed to engage the world of secular atheism. Systematic theology's anthropology had to engage scientific psychology, especially psychoanalysis.

For Tillich, the pervasive, if crumbling, languages and images of the Christian narrative obscured the religious realities. The critical imagination of art was required to break through to revelatory truth. The power in Tillich's systematic theology was not its aesthetic coherence but rather its insistence on theology reaching out to any domain of inquiry that might bear upon the systematic topics. Tillich's vision was a powerful motivator in the development of religious studies in the United States, because all the many disciplines in that amorphous field can be relevant to the systematic questions. Tillich himself did not pursue all these disciplines, of course, but toward the end of his life he was moving to develop a theology of other religions, engaging directly in dialogue with Buddhists.

From our perspective, Tillich's system turns out to be extremely leaky. On the one hand, the "eternal truths" of the Christian kerygma, that he advertised as being a solid abutment of the bridge of correlation, have been relativized, historicized, and rendered ambiguous in comparison with the so-called eternal truths of other religions, and indeed of the secular aesthetic vision. On the other hand, the systematic engagements of public domains of theological discourse extending beyond the Christian theological circle has opened sluice-gates to alien seas, and we cannot tell whether it is so-called Christian truth that is washing out or an overwhelming wave of new and barely digestible material racing in. The neat world of German culture, including theology, the anti-establishment arts of the Weimar Republic, and existentialist culture that bounded Tillich's formative years, was exploded by the Second World War. In America Tillich was adopted by the experientialist Methodists whose Boston Personalism then was falling by the wayside because of its implausible idealism. Tillich's combination of rationalism and pietism provided a new language for old Methodist themes. How much of this he understood, I hesitate to say.

The leakiness of Tillich's system, including its readiness for cooptation by sophisticated American pietism, committed it inexorably to the dimension of truth in theology, not identity. Who knows where Tillich and the Tillichians would end up if they were to fan out steadily in all the directions that require

cases to be made for Christian claims? One of Tillich's principal legacies is the legitimation of the view that one's religious identity ought to follow one's pursuit of truth, wherever that might lead. This, of course, makes him supremely suspect to Barthians for whom Christian identity is secured immediately with the telling of the story.

Barth, by contrast, with his relatively water-tight story, was committed inexorably to the identity dimension of religious belief. If a Buddhist, say, or a secular person, would challenge the importance of Jesus Christ for Barth, the Barthian answer would not be the making of a case that respects the context, texts, and arguments of the other. It would be to say they simply do not fit the Christian story. Barth, of course, would never suggest that his own dogmatic story is not true, that it is merely a story with aesthetic attractiveness, or that it fails to define the only identity that really counts for human beings. For him it is the revealed word of God that he merely retold in ways relevant for his time.

#### LEGACIES OF NARRATIVE AND SYSTEM

The oddly parallel careers of Barth and Tillich symbolize the roots of the divergence of identity theologies of religious belief from theologies that make identity contingent upon the outcome of inquiry regarding the truth of theological beliefs. My teachers, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, took the Barthian trajectory to its next logical step in what has been called the theology of the Yale School. Implicitly admitting the arbitrariness of Barth's story, and drawing on long experience of inter-religious dialogue, they define theology as the exploration of the deep grammar of religious communities as cultural/linguistic systems. The critical edge of theology is the sorting of faithful identity within each community, and theology draws as much on social sciences that adduce the subtleties of community life as upon philosophy that might seek some external reference beyond the community. Each community has its own theology. The Yale School clearly aims theology at the identity dimension of religious belief.

John Milbank and the Radical Orthodox theologians take a more aggressive apologetic approach to identity theology. Claiming that the older theologies had been shaken by the social sciences that represent them as relativized to their social circumstances, class, and so forth, the Radical Orthodox argue that the social sciences themselves are strongly arbitrary in being historically located. If the social sciences can be arbitrary, then so can Christian theology, and Radical Orthodoxy asserts what it represents as the orthodox, that is, Thomistic-Anglican, theology with radical affirmation. Like Barth's theology, Radical Orthodoxy has a clear-edged beauty to it, and defines identity for those who accept it.<sup>6</sup> From Barth through Lindbeck and Milbank, and many other contemporary Protestant identity theologians such

as Stanley Hauerwas, Christian identity has somewhat sharp boundary conditions and criteria, though different ones for different theologians.

For the heirs of Tillich, sharp boundary conditions and criteria for Christian identity are much harder to come by. Although there is a Tillich Society associated with the American Academy of Religion, like the Barth Society, few orthodox Tillichians follow the master. Rather, his influence has been multivalent. For instance, probably the closest followers of his ontology of the ground of being for which he is famous are Mary Daly and Rosemary Ruether, extraordinary feminists whose work would have baffled him and who would give him the same low marks for his personal treatment of women that they would give Barth.

Generalizing his own ground-of-being ontology beyond the tradition of German idealism that shaped it, many contemporary theologians take Tillich to legitimate contemporary developments of Neo-Platonic and other ideas of the fullness of being beyond determinate being. My own ground-of-being theology focuses on the act that creates determinate being rather than on any antecedent fullness, so that I would say that the ground is nothing unless it grounds something, and that its whole nature comes from the grounding act.<sup>7</sup> Chapters 12, 13, and 14 below will elaborate this distinction in detail. Tillich is rather vague about the distinction between full and *ex nihilo* grounds.

My colleague, Wesley Wildman, elaborates a distinction between ground-of-being theologies as a class and the class of theologies that conceive God as a determinate being of some kind.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Tillich's insistence on the God beyond god led him to reject all conceptions of God as determinate, except through symbolic participation, nevertheless the metaphysical weight of his theology has given significant support to process theology, the most prominent determinate-being metaphysical theology of our time. Tillich was no match for Whitehead when it comes to precise metaphysics, particularly metaphysics that unites the sciences and arts as Whitehead's does. But Tillich brought to philosophical theology a depth of reflection in the Christian tradition, a serious appropriation of the philosophical as well as ecclesiological dimensions of that tradition, and seriousness about personal and communal piety that was not easily registered among the early Whiteheadians. Process theology has engaged these elements of Tillich to its great profit.

Tillich's concern for human nature, and his openness to existential psychoanalysis, have been influential in the development of pastoral care and counseling, pastoral psychology, and more generally in theological anthropology. Rejecting biblical language *per se*, Tillich led the way to finding anthropological language from literary and visual arts as well as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and then relating these conceptions back to biblical themes. Tillich was one of the founders, if not the principal founder, of what we now know as "religion and the arts," and he understood that. His concern that theology engage the physical sciences has promoted the science

and religion discussions, and with an alternative in that debate to the theologies of God as a determinate entity; Tillich would be surprised so see how far this dialogue as gone.

One of the influences I most appreciate myself is his suggestion that religious believers participate in the religious object through symbols, albeit broken symbols. Although he thoroughly absorbed Bultmann's demythologizing of the level of first naiveté, he pointed to a much more positive engagement with ultimate concerns and their objects. Connecting his concerns with religious symbols to the pragmatic semiotic tradition of Peirce and Dewey leads in a fruitful direction toward a theology that enlivens a critical appropriation of religious language for an apophatic ground-of-being theology for which little if anything can be said literally about a divine nature.

Another theological project that draws heavily from Tillich's influence, which he only slightly engaged toward the end of his life, is interfaith comparative studies. Because he paired issues of ontological ultimacy with issues of anthropological ultimate concern, his ideas are ideally ready to relate to religions of South and East Asia that focus on the human condition as the way to ultimacy. Because of his conception of God as ground of being transcending any determinate entity, his ideas are ready to relate to those religions for whom the ultimate is nonpersonal and for whom the thought of divine action within the world is superstitious. Theologians who are committed to conceptions of a finite God capable of playing roles within the world find it a nice irony that, in the long Christian-Buddhist dialogue of the Cobb-Abe Group, now in its fourth decade, the Buddhist Masao Abe is the Tillichian.

Tillich's systematic ideas have funded the contemporary theological projects of religious feminism, theological ontology and metaphysics, theology and psychology both theoretical and practical, religion and the arts, natural sciences and religion, social science studies of religion, theological semiotics, comparative theology, and I could extend the list past your patience. My point is that each of these areas and others in which Tillich has been influential has developed its own programmatic concerns for truth, its own plausibility conditions, and its own modes of inquiry. Sometimes these different theological projects learn from each other and sometimes not. Their modes of inquiry are constantly changing and relating to new areas of experience, new instruments of study, and new ideas. In no way could Tillich's original sense of theological system, expressed in the first part of his *Systematic Theology*, begin to integrate these diverse theological projects. The questions of truth, the plausibility conditions, and the modes of inquiry are simply too diverse and independent, even though each of these theological projects has something to say about classical theological issues such as the nature of God, the soul, sin, salvation, faithful community life, and so forth. Hardly anyone would undertake the task of developing a theological system encompassing

enough and sufficiently tolerant of internal differences to integrate these projects in ways by which they all can learn from one another and by which the whole can guide comprehensive religious life.

Imagine now the contrast between Barth's heirs, focusing theology around Christian identity, and Tillich's heirs, focusing theology in different ways according to all the directions in which theology can go to learn and be corrected. From the standpoint of Tillich's heirs, if I might use that label for the motley array of projects, the identity theologians have drifted very far from the issues of truth precisely because they do not enter into the different modes of inquiry, plausibility conditions, and even senses of truth that are involved in making good cases for claims. From the standpoint of Barth's heirs, the theologies pursuing truth in all directions simply have insufficient unity to articulate Christian identity in any helpful way. From the standpoint of Tillich's heirs, Christian identity must be, and rightfully is, a piecemeal thing because it depends on the outcomes of critical inquiry in each of the theological projects. From the standpoint of Barth's heirs, if theology goes off on the pursuit of truth in a motley array of incommensurate projects, then some other discipline, say, *Theologie* (pronounced as in German), needs to say what Christian identity is in order to serve the Church. This *Theologie* must rest on some authority such as Barth's claim to have the one and only real revelation, or the Yale School's claim that the deep grammar of a cultural/linguistic community is its own authority, or Radical Orthodoxy's claim that since all positions are somewhat arbitrary, it is fine to assert your own.

The two dimensions of religious belief, belief as establishing religious identity and belief as the truth claims of inquiry that in turn establish identity, are thus institutionalized in tension with each other in the current theological situation. I have told the story in terms of recent classic Protestantism that can relate to the debates between Barth and Tillich. By loosening the metaphors we can see how conservative Evangelicalism reflects the tension between its defense of a particular culture and the varied modes of truth seeking, from fundamentalist biblical literalism to charismatic pneumatology. In many places Christian Unitarianism explicitly eschews the project of caring for religious identity. Within Roman Catholicism, the openness to truth-seeking in the secular world, from other Christians, and from other religions, that characterized the immediate results of the Second Vatican Council, stands in tension with a reaction to limit the results of inquiry to what is compatible with the identity of the Magisterium. Orthodoxy has not gone as far as either Catholicism or Protestantism in following truth-seeking inquiry wherever it goes; nevertheless, the growing presence of Orthodoxy in cultures other than those of Eastern Europe untethers the authority for defining Orthodox identity from its traditional cultural base, and wide-ranging truth-seeking will be needed to formulate identity in strange lands. Judaism in America is witnessing a resurgence of



traditional practices for the sake of identity, pushing against the almost scientific truth-seeking orientation of Reform Judaism.

Now it would be foolish to try to make the distinction between two dimensions of religious belief, and the theologies they enjoin, do too much work to explain the world situation in religion. But it is apparent that the recent modernization of vast areas of the world has raised problems for traditional religious identity in Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian/Daoist lands. Moreover, the Enlightenment elements of modernization have provoked truth-seeking projects that often are perpendicular to traditional practices and ideas. Theologians within all these traditions have to cope with the challenges of identity and truth-seeking in religious matters under conditions exacerbated by colonialism and anti-colonialism, the continuing conflict between Muslim and Christian civilizations, and the meteoric explosion of the Indian and Chinese economies contrasted with seemingly intractable poverty and disorder in Africa. The world situation regarding religions and religious cultures is extraordinarily volatile now, and the tension I have been describing is not a settling factor.

#### TRUTH, IDENTITY, AND AUTHORITY

I am reasonably certain that nearly everyone here believes that I have made an artificially wide distinction between the identity dimension and truth dimension of religious belief. Few who are engaged in the theological projects I have labeled as identity theologies or truth-seeking theologies think that they fail to honor the other. There is also some uneasiness, I suspect, about my labels as such, since truth-seeking is a bit more honorific than identity-seeking, like apple pie. Nevertheless, the tension between these two often leads to dismissal of others in dialogue so that learning is blocked arbitrarily. Those in the truth-seeking projects often dismiss the identity theologians for putting the cart before the horse, with willful arbitrariness. Those in the identity theologies often dismiss the others as not being within the theological circle, not being Christians. Permit me to make some suggestions to remedy such uncharitable dismissals.

First, we can all admit that religious belief does have both dimensions, intellectual and performative. Religious beliefs are not only like the announcement of conclusions of research projects: they include something of a commitment to act in accordance with them, often a deep existential commitment. Thus to believe something in theology is not just to assert a truth claim but to act performatively, giving oneself the identity of living out the consequences of the belief. On the other hand, no religious belief is only performative, with no intellectual content. Perhaps we approach this extreme when someone, say, believes that Jesus Christ is Lord solely in order to be saved. The performance is the act of belief that accomplishes the salvation,

allegedly. The person believes, not because the person has reasons to think that it is true that Jesus Christ is Lord, but because believing that is salvific. Nevertheless, at least a modicum of intellectual content is present, no matter how primitive the person's ideas about Jesus, Lordship, and salvation are. Intellectual content is present whenever it is possible that the belief is mistaken, say, if John the Baptist, Caesar, or Buddha, is Lord. Given that both the intellectual and performative dimensions are present in religious belief, theology has a commitment to the integrity of both, and we should be uneasy when one overwhelms the other.

Second, having said this, we can distinguish between inhabiting a religious identity and practicing theology. In Augustine's conversion, he read the passage where Paul said to "put on Jesus Christ," and Augustine put on the Christian identity, like a Roman boy putting on the clothing of an adult citizen. This involved changing his social life, putting away friends and lovers, and taking on a new social life framed by the Church; it also involved taking on Christian intellectual practices, including theological ideas. Yet inhabiting a Christian identity gave Augustine the freedom to think theologically with such originality that he radically transformed the Christian theological heritage. Not only did he add new elements and drop out others, but he reordered theological priorities. This is to say, his theology significantly transformed Christian identity, both for him and for his successors. Of course, not everyone's theological inquiry will be compatible with manageable changes in the inhabited religious identity. Augustine had the advantages of being a bishop and being enormously persuasive. Others might have been rejected from the community as heretics, or have chosen to leave because they decided that Buddha in fact is the Lord. Nevertheless, the religious commitment to a way of life such as Christianity is a different thing from theological commitments to religious beliefs, though related.

Third, religious identities are neither theologically nor morally neutral. In our time Christian identity has been cited as reason to go to war for no other good reason, to denigrate non-Christians, and to abuse women, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals, all of which suggest that something is wrong with that identity. Christian identity has been cited as reason to reject science about scientific matters and to censure art without any other good reason to do so. Therefore, I believe that truth-seeking is the humble way to appropriate religious identity critically, for religious identities need correction as we discover that our conceptions of identity are mistaken. Not to do so is a sacrilege because it demeans the God before whom we seek truthful religious identities for ourselves and our communities. Religious communities shaped by particular identities need to seek out correction, even when that runs the risk of altering them significantly.

Fourth, two kinds of authority should be recognized. Authority within truth-seeking inquiry lies in the plausibility conditions, the modes of inquiry,

and the logic of the kinds of truth involved. This kind of authority is diverse, contextual, and usually in the process of being questioned and refashioned. The integrity of this authority lies in faithfulness to the vulnerability of truth-seeking to be corrected. The other kind of authority lies in the investment individuals and communities have in their religious identity. At the very least, this is the authority of will that commits to the identity. Usually also this authority is vested in the scriptures, traditions, experience, and reason, to use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, by which a community has shaped itself critically through history and continues to govern itself at the present, including its current debates. Sometimes, the authority of religious identity rests in the conviction that the identity and community expressing it is directly shaped by God. Of course, the nature of these senses of authority is complex and subject to much debate. My point is that the authority of the truth dimension is different from the authority of the identity dimension. To assert the authority of religious identity over processes of serious theological inquiry perverts the inquiry and renders the religious identity invulnerable to correction in the issue in question. To assert the authority of truth-seeking in its many modes over religious identity is to confuse the hypothetical and self-correcting character of intellectual authority for the existential commitments of religious identity. Religious identity is how we seek to live truthfully before God.

Fifth, the two authorities can come into conflict, and often have. Most of us can remember our adolescent selves saying some identity-affirming formula, such as the Apostle's Creed, with our fingers crossed because we knew we did not believe the whole creed as we understood it intellectually then. When the truth authority and the identity authority come into conflict, many different outcomes are possible. A change in religious identity can be chosen based on new understanding. One can continue to participate as loyal critical opposition in a community with a religious identity with whose theology one disagrees in certain points. One can continue to participate while accepting a marginalized role for one's theology. One can opt out of the religious identity and its community entirely, joining another, or joining none. One can deny entirely the existential importance of religious identity, thinking instead that one will be a connoisseur of religious inquiries and their tentative truths. Conflicts of these authorities need not be limited to the problems of individuals: communities can fight over changing their religious identity, groups can excommunicate one another within a community, different communities can be pitted against one another despite a common heritage, and religion itself can be attacked for causing more social and personal harm than good. These and other outcomes are possible because neither the authority of the truth dimension nor that of the identity dimension takes precedence over the other.

Sixth, because neither kind of authority takes precedence over the other, the resolution of their conflicts is subject to neither authority alone or

together but to something else. In order to address serious conflicts between these authorities we need slightly to transcend, and slightly to relativize, both the truth dimension and the identity dimension of religious belief. The very tentativeness of honest truth-seeking makes it perpetually underdetermined for the task of fixing religious identity. Religious identity in the sense I have traced from Barth and Tillich is an identity based on beliefs with consequences for practice, an identity that can be given either by a narrative saga of creation and redemption or by a system of doctrines expressing truths in historical contexts. A more profound sense of religious identity, however, consists in the characters we give ourselves as we decide how to respond to conflicts between these, and perhaps other, kinds of authority. Whereas religious identity, in the sense that is shaped by narrative or systematic beliefs, is existential in that it involves commitment to a somewhat integrated way of life, religious identity in this other sense is ontological because it is how we make ourselves up in the most important matters. Ontological religious identity might be taken very seriously, wrestling through issues of truth and issues of affiliation in the dark night of the soul. Or, ontological religious identity might happen by default, as when one gives up on the demands of truth or the demands of a religious identity that involves a pattern for loyalty and life. Even if we let things go by default, however, we are still responsible for the making up of our ontological religious identity. All of us, I'm sure, are working on optimal compromises of our respect for the authority of truth, understood according to the lay of our contemporary theological landscape, and for the authority of the religious identity based on beliefs to which we seek to be faithful and committed.

The sermon is the genre of religious thinking in which the truth and identity dimensions of religious belief are in tension, week by week, text by text, topic by topic. This is especially so in a university church where the professional inquirers are in the pews, bent on discovering and practicing true religious identity as Christians, and where the peoples of other faiths listen on the radio. The humility of the preacher comes from knowing that the truth and identity dimensions of the sermon do not always work out in harmony, and that the art of the sermon is to balance these with prudence. Even though you can subscribe to online sermon outlines and illustrations, no rule exists for achieving this balance. At best you can appeal to the charity of the congregation to work through the conflicts, step by step, with good will and respect.

This is how I would close this chapter, to appeal for good will and respect among those who understand that our theological situation has institutionalized divisions between those committed to the truth dimension of religious belief and those committed to the identity dimension. Of course I myself believe that *theology* should never compromise the truth dimension and that my affinities are with the heirs of Tillich rather than Barth. I

believe that any Christianity-alone theology is too narrow when we live next door to Buddhists, Hindus, and Confucians. But when personal or communal life comes to address the conflicts between the truth and identity dimensions of belief, theology is only one of the inputs. What else is needed for the decisions that determine our ontological religious identity is not always apparent to theologians.