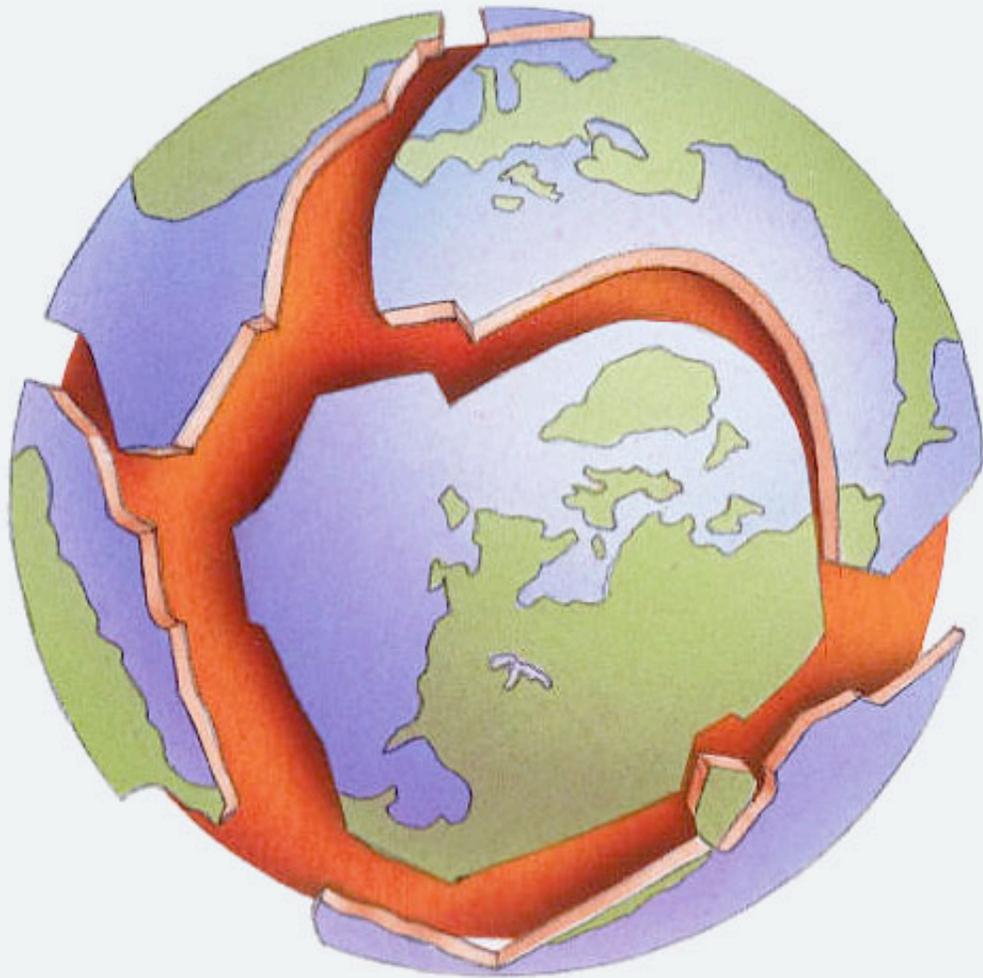


# Faith Tectonics



by M. Austin

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# Preface

In October of 1999 we received an e-mail from a nephew of my husband that included a chain of e-mails from two of his engineering buddies on the subject of religion. My husband showed me the e-mail and said, "Here, you do something about this."

This book grew out of my reply. But it deals with a subject that, as a Christian and a pastor, I've struggled to address for many years. How do we understand our religion or our faith response, which I believe are two very different things, as only one of a multitude of different belief systems in a global community. How do we know who is right? Is anyone right to the exclusion of others who believe differently?

And how do we talk about religion or faith in a scientifically and technically advanced world where many of us are unable to accept the "faith of our fathers" without serious reservations that seem to undermine that faith and where many people seem to have been left with no faith at all?

My own struggle started very early, around age thirteen, when I asked my Sunday School teacher, "What does it mean that we should "believe in Jesus Christ and we will be saved?" Even then, it seemed to me unjust that people in non-Christian countries, for example, should be denied the benefits of heaven simply because they didn't know about my religion.

My grandmother, a devout and gracious Southern Baptist lady, always found an answer for me that provided a loophole for the people of Africa or South America who had never "heard the Word." But also, for the town drunk (small town) who died not having darkened the door of the church for fifty years.

"Death bed conversion experience," she'd imply, or "they are adults, but God would consider them spiritual children since they had never heard the Word and therefore still are safe." Well, those answers weren't satisfying once I begin to think seriously about my own doubts about my own religion.

By the time I was a young mom in my twenties, I told the pastor of my church that I didn't think I belonged there anymore because I couldn't believe in resurrection. His reply was that I had a lot of company, even among clergy, and that questioning was always an important part of faith.

In addition, my parents were doctors. When I was a teenager, my mother said to me that God didn't give us a brain to mock us. She also said that in school the teachers might sometimes ask us to believe something that our intelligence questioned. "Don't

argue with them,” she said. “Just give them the answers they want, but remember; do your own thinking.”

Although my parents didn’t attend church, my grandmother lived with us while I was growing up and because of this I had the experience of exposure to multiple points of view on the subject of religion. She was my primary inspiration as I developed my own religious beliefs and faith. At one point, I decided that if my grandmother was so compassionate toward “unbelievers”, surely God couldn’t be any less so.

The Methodist church I attended in Irving, Texas as a young woman was a new church with a large number of young professionals who also were very interested in exploring and learning more about their religion. This was during the 60’s and we were fortunate to live in the Dallas metropolitan area with access to Southern Methodist University. It was at the height of Vatican II and all that was happening in a world in transition with the civil rights movement, the women’s movement and questions about our nations’ role in international affairs.

The Perkins School of Theology at SMU offered a “Lay Academy” program taught by major faculty and about a dozen couples from our church signed up to attend. It was such a success with our group that after a period of time we invited the professors out to our church to offer classes and these were well attended. Out of these classes, four of the women participants, including myself, went on in years to come to become pastors ourselves.

It was a watershed experience for me. I learned that there were many ways in which Christians interpreted their own scriptures and that it wasn’t at all necessary for an intelligent person to “put their brain on ice.”

This period of time was also very important because, unknown to me then, Vatican II had encouraged Catholic monastic communities to enter into dialogue with monastic communities of other religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism. The general public is not yet aware of the extent of this dialogue, but by the time I entered seminary in 1984, the landscape of Christianity, at least insofar as the mainline denominations were concerned, had become infused with many eastern ideas as the result of this dialogue, and was beginning to explore whole new ways of understanding our faith.

My own interest in eastern religions was stimulated by an experience I had in Sioux City, Iowa where I found myself working with a number of Southeast Asian children in a mission ministry. One day, a little Thai boy said to me, “I’m really not very interested in Jesus, but could you tell us about Buddha?” I replied, “Well, that is not my area of knowledge, but I’ll get back to you on that.”

That was the second watershed experience of my life. The prophet Isaiah said, “and a child shall lead them,” and that is why I’m writing this book.

The title and form of the book were inspired by a quote I read by Randall Balmer who described the turmoil in Christian Protestantism in America as “an evolving geography of religious tectonic plates in creative collusion.” That phrase caught my attention because of a long time interest of mine in geology, especially in the concept of “plate tectonics” which has entered the geological lexicon since the 1960’s and is the foundation of the study of structural geology. We now understand that the surface of our visible world rests on a set of underlying plates that float on a molten layer of magma and which are in a process of constant motion, collision and change.

Nothing in our world is permanent. Everything is in a state of continual change and evolution; biology, geology, cultures, language, ideas, even the way we think. The processes of change are so slow we generally are unaware of them, but they are as inevitable as sunrise and sunset. Not only is nothing written in stone, the stones themselves are subject to erosion, metamorphism and accretion.

We can’t enter either the physical or the thought world of the time of the development of ancient religious texts or ideas. There is a necessity at the heart of all knowledge, but that necessity is subject to the understanding and needs of the present time. Because we are social creatures, as well as biological, there are some underlying forms that have made our evolution and our existence possible. At it’s best, these underlying forms are addressed by religion. But the language changes and how we view and understand our world changes.

My physicist husband once said that nothing is certain except the speed of light, and there are those who are even questioning that now. The resistance to change is normal to the human condition because of our need to understand how to get on and live well and our fear of an unknown future. But change not only is inevitable, it’s what makes possible creativity and growth, spiritually as well as physically. Instead of being condemned to live in a static universe, we can live in hope and anticipation. As the prophet Isaiah also reminded us, God says, “Can’t you see I’m doing a new thing?”



music, art, tool making and "SOME GOD THING". At least, there has never been a culture that hasn't been hard wired for "SOMEGODTHING", which is why we talk about religion so much, especially in the early hours of the morning on the "net" and ask so many of the same questions. My niece, who is a premed student at Baylor explains, "We sit up half the night talking about everything, especially religion. Of course, we're all atheists!"

I can really identify with the dialogue Al and Will are having. I had tons of questions and doubts about the religious faith I inherited. When we're kids, we learn bible stories and stuff from our parents and Sunday School teachers and we hear them at kid level. Unfortunately, our religious education doesn't keep pace with the rest of our education. Most of us never get the opportunity to move on to the grad school of religion where we start asking questions about what we learned in Sunday School. The stories weren't told as children's stories in the first place, but we aren't given the key to understanding them as adults. The stories are about matters of the relationship between men and faith, not about how things work. They really have nothing to do with how did Noah really get all those animals on the ark, and what about the dinosaurs, etc.

It's interesting that we have no difficulty turning to modern myths for instruction in questions of good vs. evil, for example, in the Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter. You know, a myth isn't the same as fiction. News reporters have given myth a black eye. A myth is a story in search of meaning, and the meaning is the whole point of the story, not the details. We can accept what they say about life and human nature without having to get tangled up in whether or not Bumbledorf really existed. Stories always have been our best teachers because they're accessible. Stories don't work in a laboratory.

Even in a lab we still depend on theoretical models or hypotheses as Will points out. Unfortunately, there's often been a strong bias in the church against thinking clearly about religion and a sort of conspiracy in the church called "Don't Ask Don't Tell." The church has a big problem with honesty, as if in telling the truth, somehow, faith will be compromised. In the Bible, myth, fiction, poetry, history and even some pretty funny jokes get all mixed up with no guidelines to help us sort it out.

Now the fundamentalists are trying to get us to accept it all as science! That's just absurd! If we're going to read the Bible, we need to learn HOW to read it. The church has lost credibility with huge segments of the population because they've misled people about how to read the Bible. They know better, but it seems that much of the church has a hidden agenda to keep people ignorant. I say much of the church because, believe it or not, there really are a few intelligent people wearing collars. Control issues, I think because knowledge is power and the central agenda of the institutional church is to keep control, therefore, power.

As long as the church can convince people that she and she alone holds a monopoly on the goods of salvation, people will stay humbled and in their proper place and keep up their tithes. In the past, lay Christians usually have been discouraged from thinking or asking any deep, analytical questions about God which meant we couldn't ask questions about the stories. And no other ways were given to us to think about faith or metaphysics. We were given catechisms to memorize and were threatened with eternal retribution if we showed any lack of faith. Our teachers were content to remain with the Noah's Ark stories and Moses dividing the Red Sea, (don't you love Cecil B. de Mille) . . . and their pastors never made any serious attempt to enlighten them about anything more deep or meaningful than (see above). Talk about despotism!

Religious institutions seldom are comfortable places for inquiry. “True believers” in all religions have always been hostile to an inquiry that they fear might undermine THE TRUTH. Most people believe, or want to believe that truth **IS** absolute. We don’t want to entertain the notion that your truth may not be my truth, or that there are different ways of viewing the same thing. Even in my seminary, which was proud of its liberalism and intellectualism, there were professors whose faith was mortgaged to their egos and who were antagonistic to original thinking and disputation, especially from women. (But what else is new in higher education of any sort?) Training in logical thinking and the scientific method has not been a part of pastors’ education. Basically, most religious education, if there is any at all which is not very often these days, stops at about age twelve, except for the few kids who still are coerced into confirmation classes, in which case it stops age fourteen or so.

There is so much to respond to in the e-mail correspondence you sent me, Can we start with the simplest-hardest thing first; the question of God? Discussions about religion usually have to begin with lots of disclaimers and lots of sharing of stories because we all bring a lot of baggage to the table. I’d like to suggest that we try to separate questions about God from questions about religion because I believe they are two very different things. Then there is a third thing which is different from the first two: spirituality. Actually, spirituality is of much more interest these days than religion. I imagine it was spirituality that led to this discussion in the first place. As humans, I think we started doing theology, that is, thinking about God, long before we institutionalized our ideas in religious forms. We may have been thinking about God even before we could think, like humans, that is. Elaine Goodall has observed chimpanzees exhibiting behaviors that suggested a type of religious awe in certain natural settings of particular dramatic beauty. Our discussion also will be on a different level if we can we say that religion exists in a separate category than science, like art and music, for example? Art,

music and religion are not based on sets of empirical, verifiable truths. I want to say that religion is a conceptual framework, the model we use in which we express our ideas about God. That would solve the problem of having to give equal time to scientific inquiry in our discussion.

One doesn't need to be a scientist to have religious faith any more than one must be a scientist to be an artist. The experiences of life are first of all sensual and emotional and form the basis of all art and religion. "First the epiphany, then the dance, then the word, then the theology." Logic comes afterwards to mediate the sensual response, but never to rule out the validity of the senses. Hormones are what got us into the world to start with and hormones still form the basis of most of our responses, even our intellectual ones, as evidenced by our initial correspondence. Nothing stirs passions so much as religious discussions. So, as far as I'm concerned, The God Hypothesis must speak to my heart and my hormones as well as my brain. I can't shake the idea that life has to mediate both ethics and metaphysics. I hope you don't think that is too silly. I'm serious!

I want also to insist that if The God Hypothesis has any validity, it mustn't invalidate my brain. I insist on having it both ways. God has not given us a brain to mock us. We are noumenal creatures as well as phenomenal. "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution." Most of the mischief of the world is done by people who want to deny one or the other. For the sake of argument, can we say that God is something that either IS or IS NOT. Reductio ad absurdum. Religion is what we do when we have given a positive answer to the first proposition. This oversimplification does not, at this time, deal with the problem that some things we call "religion" may not be; Zen Buddhism, for example. On the other hand, we don't get to tell Zen Buddhists what they are or are not, which was the whole point Buddha was trying to make. God is not definable. Or that everyone's

idea of what constitutes “God” is the same. We can get lost in non-productive metaphysical speculation right here at the start and never get any further than that. Let’s bracket metaphysics and epistemology along with it and put it all in really simple terms.

- \* Is there anything “out there” besides my imagination?
- \* Is it of any use to me?
- \* Does it require anything of me?
- \* How can I know?

I love to watch the championship skater competitions on television. So does my physicist husband. There isn’t any logic to what they are doing, except that they are required to perform certain moves in order to satisfy the judges. Of course, one’s appreciation of the performance is enhanced when one understands the difficulty of doing triple-axels, etc. but that is not why we watch the performance. It is awesomely beautiful, sensuous, artistic and sexy. It is a form of dance! Both physicist and pastor say “Ah!” We wish we could skate like that. A few of us even might learn to skate . . . fewer still like that. It takes more than logic, skill and sheer physical effort to skate like that. It takes hormones, passion, heart.

Both the pastor and the physicist flip the light switch on in a dark room. We don’t analyze how electricity works. The physicist will acknowledge that, in point of fact, we don’t really understand how electricity works. We use models or purely speculative concepts such as photons, electrons, quarks, etc. to explain phenomena we can’t see and don’t really understand, and these models work for us until . . . as it may be . . . we make some new discoveries and need to come up with some new concepts to explain them. Photons . . . light . . . electricity . . . "MEGODTHI". We keep working to understand

them. "EGODTH" . . ."GODT" . ."GOD" . ."YHWH" . .(YAHWEH) . . "ALLAH",  
"WAKANTONKA".

The Hebrews knew God couldn't be defined, so they settled for four unpronounceable letters. We can't do much better. Models, including religious models, are always provisional, like language, for instance, but they work pretty well until someone comes up with a better model. We need the light. The pastor is just thankful the light comes on so she doesn't trip over the cat. Is the cat really in the box when it can't be seen or heard? Does the tree really make a noise when it falls in the woods when no one is around to hear it? Well, if you leave a tape player nearby, the machine records a sound.

So why do we even talk about God? I believe it is because we have these "Ah" experiences and need to ask questions about them, as well as about our "Ow" experiences. We can't just take them for granted and leave them alone in the box. When a child asks the question, "Who made the trees, who made the cat?", she is entering into a metaphysical dialogue. When we ask why all those people were killed in the World Trade Center attack, we are asking a metaphysical question. We already know who did it and they've told us why. We want to know something like, WHY did all those people have to die? That is a metaphysical question. We are unable to think things just exist or happen by accident without some design or purpose or instigator.

There are lots of things we just don't know. The church needs to start being honest by saying, "We just don't know, but let me tell you a story." I left the church for a number of years not because I couldn't find satisfactory answers to my questions, but because I was made to feel guilty for asking. I had a need to deconstruct everything and put it

back together in a way that made sense. But as time went by, I changed my mind and went back. Two things made me decide this.

First, I have this deep up-welling of thankfulness for my life that I must express to SOMEONE or SOMETHING. I have felt thankful even when going through some very rough times. Life is a gift and I have always known I hadn't done anything to deserve all that I had, especially when I see so many other people who have so much less than I have. If there is no God, to whom could I express this thanks. Secondly, there are my children. If there is no God, how was I to answer their metaphysical questions? I wasn't satisfied in telling them that things just happened or that it is all chemistry and physics. That would have left them all alone with their "Ah's" and "Ow's" when I wasn't around. For that matter, I can't imagine **NOT** being around for them in some way or other. I imagine the same for myself, that God somehow is there with me or for me. I do not have the sense of being alone in the universe. Even in times when I have felt doubtful about God's existence, I have had the sense that God was just waiting around for me to wander back in from the cold. The universe is a very cold place without God, without hope, without unending love which is what I think God is.

What would you accept as proof of God? We can't prove God anymore than we can prove love or hope. We use models and concepts to talk about God. Those get revised from time to time, but not very often. The model, the words we use are not "the thing in itself" any more than the name I give the cat, something the eastern religions can teach us some things about. But nevertheless, the cat has learned her name and comes when I call and if I don't see the cat in the dark, I still can trip over her. And yes, the cat really is there. Once she managed to trigger the "new message" button on my answering machine and it picked up her meow when I wasn't even in the room. I heard

it later when I recorded a new message. So there are some occasions, some events that are there even if we are not around to witness them. Maybe that includes God.

Furthermore, besides “events”, there seem also to be some underlying “forms” that emerge in different events. We’re talking space-time here. A mountain is a form, so is a living cell, so is the cat. I don’t know of any perfect mountain or living cell forms or cats. There seem to be an infinite variety of forms and the ongoing process of changing forms seems to be one of the few absolutes in the universe. Why must we imagine a perfect, unchanging God? I don’t really know what the concept of “perfection” means. I do know that the Platonic concept of ideal or perfect form is not what the Bible is talking about when it talks about perfection.

For Plato, there could be no perfect material form; everything was only a shadow of its true form which had no material reality. The biblical idea of perfection has to do with wholeness, not completeness. Everything essential, beautiful and good is included. Nothing left out. I can’t think of many things more perfect and beautiful than the Bach B-minor mass. But that certainly doesn’t mean Bach didn’t write some other equally perfect and beautiful stuff. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, celebrates the essential goodness of actual physical things including the process of change. Even God is allowed to change her mind!

Part of the problem in trying to talk about religion, like talking about culture in general, is that there are no pure or perfect forms of either. All things, including religions, undergo a continual process of change, assimilation, evolution, synthesis, deposition and erosion. Charles Hartshorne(1) tells us that concepts we have used in the West to talk about God, like omnipotence, perfection, eternal, absolute, immovable, infinite and

omniscience are some mistakes that are in need of revision.<sup>1</sup> Despite the long canonization by the church of these concepts, they are not biblical anyway, for the benefit of the “true believers” who insist on that criteria.

Hartshorne suggests we substitute dialogue for monologue when we talk metaphysics and that God may, in fact, be both absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, infinite and finite, actual and eternal, simple and complex. Maybe we need your ideas about God as well as mine to get a better understanding. Think of the possibilities this would open up. Instead of “God has a perfect plan for your life and an awful plan for your wife”, I might actually learn to skate after all . . . or . . . shoot pool or play the piano. I might even have learned physics and mathematics instead of music and philosophy. And any of these possibilities might still become actualities if I choose and I might even find my way home after all, after years of wandering in the desert . . . or fire my whole life and start over! Nothing is fixed forever in either stone or DNA or in a sacred text. Accidents happen.

I think it’s easier to talk about processes of change and models or paradigms now because of the changes that have taken place in science. The new quantum physics has opened up for us the possibility that we aren’t going to be able to nail down absolutes like we once thought we could. Instead, as many physicists now think, all knowledge is going to remain provisional. It isn’t just a matter of not yet having “all the facts, ma’am”: the facts rearrange themselves according to the position of the person observing and in response to different situations. The best we can do in describing any situation is to realize we are relying on models, on paradigms. Words can elucidate, or words can be a trap. One of my favorite Chinese parables goes like this. A fish net is

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<sup>1</sup> Hartshorne, Charles [Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes](#)

used to catch fish, and when the fish is caught, the net is no longer needed and is thrown away. A rabbit snare is used to catch a rabbit, and then the snare is thrown away. Words are used to capture ideas. Once the idea is caught, the words are no longer necessary. Show me the one who has no words. That is the one with whom I would speak.

I believe there are some underlying paradigm forms that are featureless, but which take on many different shapes. That doesn't mean we can't talk realistically about the shapes that present themselves to us. I don't want to get into an epistemological debate because I believe in the reality of underlying concepts, even if the forms and language are provisional. The argument in favor of underlying concepts is a practical one in that certain basic forms or ideas occur in most all religious and cultural traditions; Jung's "collective unconscious", if you will. The idea of God or the eternal is an underlying concept in all religions but is certainly not the same. Better to say the underlying concept is "the Eternal". In western religions this concept is personal. The Eternal in eastern religions is impersonal, although it can take on personal forms and permeates everything. The Eternal can be a Great Negative, or the One, or the essential unity of all things or NO THING. It is not my separate personality, needs or hopes, my personal relationships that are important. I am You. This is That.

But we all ask much the same questions. What is the nature of the universe and what is my place in the scheme of things? What is the story? What is good? What is the origin of evil or suffering? How can I be saved, redeemed, able to live authentically, escape suffering? What is the ultimate source of authority? How does one justify the claims of divine or inspired revelation? What are the responsibilities of discipleship? How will I be rewarded for being faithful?

There are only so many ways we have managed to envision answers to these questions and a study of comparative religions reveals that the same sort of answers keep cropping up again and again in different if similar forms. We attempt to answer our questions within the context in which the questions are asked (culture, language and tradition, . . . the position of the observer) and our answers come in the form of religious myth, various ancient texts, rituals, liturgies, poetry and hymns that have deep underlying meaning and have provided a pathway to peace and wholeness over the millennia. A scientist will naturally look for answers within the context of her situation; in a laboratory or in mathematical equations. But many of our questions do not fall within these contexts. No one has been able to put the World Trade Center into an experiment yet. Religious questions have to do with value, ultimate meaning and relationships, things we have no instruments to measure. We can clone a cluster of cells, but we can't predict behavior or aspiration or novelty. Life is unpredictable. Certain moves may be expected of us, but basically life is a dance. What we have is . . . the dance! Religion, then, is a dance.

This is something religious institutions always fail to understand which is why we keep getting into these debates and why the "true believers" keep trying to kill off everyone who will not either march or process with them. The religious liberals and fundamentals are not really very different from one another in this regard. One is as obstinately rigid as the other. The "fundies" refuse to accept science, or only what suits their position, and the "libbies" refuse to accept myth because they've moved beyond it. The fundies think they can coerce faith and the libbies think they can measure it. Neither one of them understand the dance. No one debates a dance. We either do it or we watch it. The church has usually tried to outlaw it. If anything like the church is going to survive in the 21st century, I believe it is going to have to learn to dance. I'm a dancer myself. That's how I survive life.

We live in the information age which is why we're having this conversation. Information is "king", and the universe is now wired to find it, send it and receive it INSTANTANEOUSLY. No intellectually honest, ethically concerned, rational, responsible thinking person is going to tolerate dogmatic elitism ever again, either from the libbies or the fundies. If you won't talk with me, there are millions of chat rooms full of people who will . . . anytime I log-on. When I was thirteen, I recall asking my Sunday School teacher what it meant to "Believe In Jesus Christ and You Will Be Saved", and was told that I didn't have faith if I was asking such a question. Many years later, in seminary, I asked a professor how God could have allowed the sexual abuse of a child and was given the same arrogant answer.

Don't expect the institutional church to be able to deal honestly with questions that can't be answered or to have compassion when perplexed. Institutions have neither compassion nor honesty. They only have agendas. This is why debates about dogma and questions about human sexuality threaten to split the Christian church wide open. As Jesus said, truth is a two-edged sword. It separates the wheat from the chaff. Questions that cannot be satisfactorily answered undermine authority and control, things which the church imagines she cannot exist without. That is why the church is failing in the information age. Authority and control are impossible when people have access to information.

Life presents an endless array of unanswerable questions. We all have questions and we hate answers that come from the outside and don't come from within. We only discover an answer when we experience it. Up to then, what we are told has to be provisional. Our experiences also are provisional. That is why stories and myths are so valuable. They transmit answers, but the answers pertain to the characters in the story

and we can identify with them or not. The best stories don't give answers, but present us with situations we identify with that get us thinking. The reason the stories have been around for so long is because so many people have been able to identify with the characters and situations and find some answers. I can choose to identify with the character or not. If I don't identify with the character, I still remember the story and at some later time, I may find myself in a similar situation and remember the answer suggested by the story and I may decide that it suits me as well.

None of us occupies the same space, the same observation point. What we can do is compare notes. When I have questions about either God or sexuality, I'm doing much more than merely seeking information. I know my life depend on the answers. It turns out sexuality is much more fluid than we think. Don't try to tell me who I am! Jung has said that when we ask a question about God, we are really asking a question about our own sexuality. And conversely, questions about sexuality are really questions about God. Whether we find answers or not, whatever God IS or IS NOT, questioning is the most important thing we do. I take all questions very very seriously. To struggle and to question are not signs of a lack of faith. **Struggle and questions are the beginning of faith and essential for its existence!**

As a Christian, I'm tired of the church conceding the field to the "true believer cults". Too many people like myself have fled the institutional church (some of us were kicked out) either because they were required to put their brain on ice and believe, like Alice in Wonderland, in Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast, or had their deep questions carelessly dismissed. "Sheep that to the fold did stray, Brother Billy Bob ran away." We live in the time of enormous change. The way we perceive the world is vastly different than 2000 years ago. It's vastly different than how we perceived it thirty years ago. You and I perceive the world differently because of our different observations points; male

or female, age, education and ability, life experiences. Children in the same family perceive family events very differently. But what we need from the world hasn't changed very much. When I was 30, I was hungry for information about how things worked and why. I was busy figuring out my relationships with people and with the question of doing something great with my life. Noah and the ark, the parting of the Red Sea, et. al. didn't have any relevant place in my world and were too fantastic to be taken seriously, anyway. At 60 I have different questions, different priorities, a different experience.

Life in the 1960's was awesome for those of us who were just getting off the launch pad. The groundwork was being laid for the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the ecology movement, and the computer-driven information revolution; those great products of the century just past upon which we will build our future. In the religious sphere, Vatican II had blasted a hole in the ozone layer of the church and all kinds of exotic elements and ideas were leaking in from outer space and charging up the atmosphere. We had new ideas, free speech, free sex and were all deconstructing like crazy and couldn't wait for the next cultural idol to come tumbling down.

Now, at the beginning of a new millennium, many of us are looking around out of breath at the wreckage that was left in the wake of our end-of-the-milennium party. We'd never go back to the "old days" for a million years, even if we could. Chaos always precedes change and creativity is messy and both are not only inevitable, but desirable.

Nevertheless, my priorities have changed with my age. Now that I am past 60 I am a whole lot less interested in deconstruction and a whole lot more hungry for some positive construction, maybe even a few answers. Paradoxically, I also am beginning to understand I know far less than I knew even ten years ago, maybe because I know more about what I don't know. **But my dancing has improved.** The world has

become increasingly an ambiguous place. Still, I can't help hoping that it hasn't been all for nothing. Are my successes, my failures really important? My children, will they prosper? What about unresolved grief and pain? What about the terrible suffering we have witnessed in this past century alone? Will it be resolved, alleviated, will there be justice done at last? If not in this life, then, in some other way? How can so much evil exist in the world? How does my life have meaning and value? The whole idea of "SOMEGODTHING" begins for all people in questions like these. The older we get, the more intense the questioning.

To be human is to be wired to question. And to imagine. That's why we are e-mailing each other on-line and not still living in caves carving notches in sticks. Carving notches in sticks **IS** "SOMEGODTHING".

Religious faith has taken a terrible beating in this century. Can it survive? It seems, for the thoughtful inquirer, that what the "true believers" have not ruined for us on the one hand, the logical positivists have on the other. Can the head and heart live in the same place? The world is an awesomely mysterious place. Whatever God is . . . is vastly more than any model I can conceive of. Perhaps God is DANCE, or PROCESS. But I have this vacuum! This question! This longing! And I love the dance!

p.s. (Religion, alas, is altogether another subject. More later, if you wish.)

p.p.s. This is much too long for an e-mail. It's going into an envelope.