A Diagram for Fire

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

Joel Robbins, Series Editor

A Diagram for Fire

Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement

JON BIALECKI

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For Clio, my muse

How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been; how gloriously different are the saints.

C.S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*

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Prologue

I came to this project—or rather, this project came to me—in an unexpected way. I was an anthropology graduate student in the first moments of my career. I was so early in my career, in fact, that I was still doing the prerequisite work for being released into "the field" (starting fieldwork is a rite of passage in my discipline). In my case, preparation for the field took the form of presenting to my advisors a series of papers on my intended research topic: Islam in Malaysia. This project was on the ambivalent relations between Malaysia's opposition Islamic party, the Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party, and ritual healers, known as "bomohs," who were working in a tradition with pre-Islamic roots but who still understood themselves as Islamic. This project would track this tension as it was being played out in Kelantan, a northeastern Malay province. Kelantan is a place where during the day one would have to stand in sex-segregated lines at the local supermarket, thanks to "Islamic" regulation, but at night one could truck with all sorts of wild spirits and jinn as they came into and out of people's bodies and minds. While this framing is incredibly crude, this was to be a project about the differences between, on the one hand, a vision of religiosity that was centered on texts and their strict interpretation, and, on the other, an oral, incredibly participatory mode of religiously inflected subjectivity. Law to the right, spirits to the left, and an open contestation as to which is in control.

The sorts of presentations that anthropology graduate students have to make before they are released into the field may be rites of passage, the very kind of initiation ritual that anthropology itself has made so much hay out of, but they are also serious scholastic affairs, with important stakes for one's career. And so, in early September, after coming back from an intensive summer language study program, my future wife and I decided to go camping in the central Oregon coast sand dunes, where I would write up

my proposal in longhand, when we were not hiking, spying on the Roosevelt elks, or gathering wood for our weak little fires. It was a picturesque place, where the wind would shift the terrain of the dunes overnight (I later learned that, when watching these very same dunes, Frank Herbert conceived of his most famous science fiction novel). We set up our tent, and I got to work.

Our plan was to camp for about a week, starting around September 8, 2001. September 11 passed without our even knowing it had happened.

It may be a cliché to talk about the world changing on September 11, but at the very least it was definitely on another footing. Driving back down to our home in Southern California a few days later, we decided not to take the main highway, a gash that runs straight down the middle of the agriculturally intense Central Valley, but instead go south by the small roads that thread through the coastal mountains running from Southern Oregon almost all the way down to San Francisco Bay. These mountains have been a haven for those who wished to leave behind what they felt was an ailing society; anarchists, libertarians, socialists, hippies, and fundamentalists have all settled there, hoping the mountains would insulate them from the perceived corruption of civilization. Many of these runaways have set up small-wattage radio stations (of varying degrees of legality) to broadcast their critiques, and in the immediate shadow of 9/11, they all felt that they had a great deal to share. As we wove through the mountains, our antennae wove through the radio signals, and the radio stations being played would switch all on their own; without any marked interruption, we would jump from a station operated by a people's autonomous collective to a station consecrated to announcing God's impending judgment on the world. On one turn, we would hear that what had happened was the result of American imperialism or of American capitalism or of a toxic American alienation from nature, while on another, we would hear that it was a product of American unfaithfulness to God. As the roads wavered, these various voices bled into one another until it was hard to tell which station one was on, which voice was promulgating which position.

These switchback transformations were dizzying, vertiginous; by the time my fiancé and I arrived back in Southern California, the United States had been made strange in a way that rivaled anything I had seen in Southeast Asia. Two questions simultaneously rose up, blending into one another like those mountain radio stations had blended their voices. The first was my original anthropological question, now disembedded from its Kelantan framing: What was the relationship between the seemingly fixed insistence of law and scripture and the strange experiential becomings asso-

ciated with spirits? The second question arose from listening to the blurred radio transmissions on the backcountry Northern California roads: Were the progressive left and the religious right diametrically opposed or was there some point where these voices joined, pointing a way to something new? I could not answer these questions by going to Malaysia, and so my anthropological attention slowly shifted its center of gravity to Southern California, the part of the country where I was going to graduate school, the part of the nation where I had grown up. The research in this book came directly from these two questions.

But what group I would be researching, and where I should research it, was not clear. After some looking around, I decided to study an association of like-minded churches called the Vineyard.[1] The Vineyard was an interesting mix of the nationally politically powerful Evangelical movement and the demographically diverse and globally powerful Pentecostal movement. My initial goal was to find a particular Vineyard church and follow it; the idea was that this church would "represent" this form of religion as a whole. To facilitate that research, I found myself talking to Vineyard pastors and attending Vineyard churches all over the Southern California region. I eventually found a church: a mixed fellowship of middle-aged Vineyard veterans, college students, and young professionals located by the coast in one of the most well-off regions of the country. But I also found something else: While in one way this church was representative of the Vineyard, in another way there was no church that was representative of the Vineyard. Churches ranged in size, from megachurches with multiple services and choked parking lots to small, fifty-member affairs that could only rent a hall by sharing the burden and space with unlikely partners (such as, in one case, a Korean-language Methodist church!). Churches pulled from a range of populations and reflected the character of the regions that they were located in, from working-class rural churches to urban churches that catered to the so-called creative class. Churches varied in the kind of politics they espoused. One church, for instance, celebrated the second Iraq war and hailed a church member from a Chaldean Christian background who volunteered to go to Iraq as a military translator, blessing her onstage. At another Church, the response to the war was more subdued; the pastor focused his prayers on requesting that God give succor to civilians who had died or been displaced and privately worried that neither America's nor Israel's then-conservative political leaderships understood the true meaning of Matthew 26:52 ("'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword'"). Some churches were almost (but never entirely) free of the kind of affectively intense spiritual

practices associated with Pentecostalism, and other churches reveled in them.

So my fieldwork with the Vineyard had two phases. One phase was directed at the Southern California church I spent the most time with; for a period of over two years, I attended all the church's services, lectures, and retreats that I was allowed to (some functions and meetings related to training for various leadership positions were closed to me). I attended some "small groups," the name for weekly weekday evening meetings held outside the church, where people would talk, study the Bible, and pray together. I interviewed the pastor and small group leadership numerous times, both formally and informally, and likewise interviewed other church members so often that I literally lost count. And finally, I did everything they did: I listened to the same sermons and read the same books, and I studied the Bible with them. I even did something that not many other nonreligious anthropologists of religion do: I prayed as they prayed, for healing and prophecy and visions, which included praying for other people in the in-person, and literally hands-on, style that is common to the Vineyard.

But the other phase of my fieldwork involved looking out to the Vineyard at large. During the time I was in the field, and even after my fieldwork was completed and my dissertation was submitted and approved, I continued to go to other Vineyard churches, including churches in other American geographical regions (the South and the Pacific Northwest) and other countries (the United Kingdom), whenever I could. I continued to talk to other Vineyard pastors, seminary students, and seminary instructors who had an association with the Vineyard, to Vineyard students of theology and Vineyard theologians, and to Pentecostal and evangelical academics who had thoughts on the Vineyard. I attended regional and national Vineyard gatherings. I even (briefly) talked to the then national director of the Vineyard. I paged through sections of an archive of papers, letters, documents, books, and objects that belonged to John Wimber, a man who had an important role in the founding of the Vineyard. I also talked to people who were at Fuller Theological Seminary, including people who were at the Fuller School of World Missions when John Wimber was associated with that influential evangelical institution; this was the period when he was also starting his Vineyard church.

The first phase of the field project gave me the sense of the dynamics of how a particular church operates, while the other phase gave me a sense of the wide range of churches and believers who identify as Vineyard. Together these two phases showed me how all these Vineyard churches and believers differed from other churches, movements, and people associated with even

more intense versions of ecstatic Pentecostal gifts, as well as how all these Vineyard churches and believers differed from some of the evangelical and fundamentalist churches that eschew Pentecostal supernaturalism.

It would be easy to see all these differences, within and without the Vineyard, simply as ways they are separate from and independent of one another. That sort of nominalist thinking, after all, is very powerful in contemporary anthropology. But recent work in the anthropology of Christianity suggests otherwise. Ethnographic depictions suggest that between discrete Christianities, and particularly between discrete Pentecostal and evangelical Christianities, there are both differences and a great number of recognizable similarities.

The anthropology of Christianity has grown too fast for me to give a through recounting of it in this book. That might itself be a book-length project. Besides, there are other sources, which while shorter have still managed to do a good job of encapsulating this field.[2] But there is one thing that we can say about this literature. While the discussions they are having are comparatively recent when set against similar conversations in the discipline, authors in the anthropology of Christianity have strongly suggested that there are recurrent patterns in exchange, semiotics and speech, temporalities, and subjectivities for Christian groups.[3] This body of literature has focused primarily, and some would say inordinately, on Protestant and post-Protestant movements, such as Pentecostalism, though Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and other forms of religion are beginning to get the attention they are due as well.[4] Even with these limitations in mind, though, this literature has still made a case for striking regularities in Christian praxis as it is found in some quite different nations, societies, and languages. But at the same time it has also done what anthropology often excels in: identifying a myriad of particularities and exceptions that question any claim to an overarching unity.

In short, I experienced with the Vineyard the same resistance anthropologists have encountered when they have attempted to sum up Christianity. In the Vineyard, I had a nagging sense of some insisting commonality, and yet there was a wealth of difference that denied any easy totalization. In the anthropology of Christianity, multiple authors have suggested that no anthropological definition of Christianity is either useful or possible; and yet we have the frequent, but not omnipresent, commonalities that give the field shape, suggesting that however much we might be dealing with forces of decohesion, there are forces of cohesion operating as well.[5] And in a way it was also the problem that I encountered in my pilot trips to Malaysia, as well as when I threaded my way through the Northern

California coastal mountains, where the voices melted together, even as they militated for seemingly irreconcilable propositions.

In this book, I argue for a kind of commonality to the Vineyard. Specifically, I put forward a type of recurrent event that constitutes a set of relations and brings subjects into being (as opposed to proposing a more agentive reading that would see subjects as the active authors of this species of event). I gesture toward a similar, larger commonality in Christianity on the basis of recurrent patterns from my ethnography and the arguments that support it.[6] In the conclusion, I even take the argument so far as to suggest, in a moment of Peircian abduction, that a speculative commonality to religion exists; this commonality presupposes rather than denies the historicist complaint that religious variation exceeds any theoretical reduction to any shared feature, such as "belief" or "practice." None of these arguments is meant to insist that different Vineyard churches, different Protestant and post-Protestant forms, or even different religiosities are either identical to one another or are not in motion. Nor is it to say that the commonalities here necessarily always point to the most salient aspects of any phenomenon, whether salience is measured by the standards of the people involved in a form of religiosity or by the standards of the academics who study them. All of this is merely to suggest that just as the shifting dunes at the Oregon coast never repeat themselves, even though they bear similar patterns arising from the conceptually simple yet complexly emergent play of wind, water, and sand, different forms of religiosity are historically particular and are the result of different causal forces. Yet they also still contain elements that express a common problem. This work can also be seen as a contribution to other recent anthropological concerns, such as affect, ontology, and ethics.[7] It can even be considered to be a part of an incipient anthropology of the will and of volition, as well as part of a much more established anthropological interest in Gilles Deleuze; both are important planks in this book's argument.[8] However, it is this play of differentiation, this problem, that is the thread that runs throughout the book,

And in the Vineyard, one name that is used for the expressions that come from that problem is "miracle."[9]

Introduction

Clearly Written on His Face

For this first story, we need to go back just a little in time and space. We are in the air, perhaps thirty-two to thirty-eight thousand feet above the ground, a relatively short-haul flight that will not leave the lower forty-eight states. Sometimes when this story is told we are given a bit more detail: we are on a flight from New York to Chicago. We can imagine that we have a view out the plane's window. It is night (most likely, though this is not always part of the narrative); we can also imagine below us dim sulfur-yellow lights arrayed in a faltering checker pattern that stretches out to the horizon. We're in the upper deck of the 747; it's a lounge/wet bar, this being the late seventies (or perhaps the early eighties), when things like this were common. Seated next to us at the bar, two men are talking. One could be any married man, but perhaps he is middle aged, a bit jaded and worldly, someone with a great number of commitments that he does not always meet. The other is a bit older with silver grey hair and a matching beard; he is heavyset but animated, and his voice is at once impulsive and laid back with a twang that suggests decades of a Southern California veneer have yet to completely cover over a Missouri undercoat. He is one of those people who seems to naturally attract attention, even though his at-ease nature suggests he is not purposefully seeking it.

The two men are talking in the in-flight lounge because, after they had first sat down in adjoining seats on boarding the airplane, the heavyset man had been staring (or as he himself described it later on "gaping") at the first man. The first man had naturally asked, "What do you want?" The heavyset man had responded by asking if a specific female name meant anything to the man. This had shaken the first man up, and after a very brief conversation they had retired to the airplane bar to talk privately. During that conversation, the heavyset man passes along a message. He says that God told

him that the first man had better turn away from his adulterous affair "or I'm going to take him." It is clear from the context that the pronoun "I" was spoken on behalf of God and that "take him" means death.[1] The first man "melts" on the spot, and the heavyset man leads him through "a prayer of repentance," at the end of which the adulterous man "accepts Christ." Two other passengers and a stewardess look on while all this occurs; according to the story, those onlookers also find themselves crying as they watch. Afterward, the first man walks back to the spiral staircase leading to the main passenger section, so he can tell his wife about what just transpired. When we are told this story, we are also told that shortly after being led to Christ himself the man leads his wife to Christ. We also learn exactly what it was that had first caused the heavyset man to gape at the self-admitted and now converted philanderer. When the heavyset man first set eyes on the man, he had seen the word *adultery,* as well as the name of a women, literally written in plainly visible characters all over the man's face.[2]

For the second story, we are far from the first in time and place. It is almost a decade later, and instead of being in the cocktail lounge of a 747, we are in the basement of a small Evangelical Covenant Church deep in the northern Midwest. Maybe the wall is wood paneled, maybe the room is full of folding chairs. The church has been struggling for about a decade now, ever since a particularly well-liked pastor moved on. On this day the church members are trying to do something about this long-running problem; they are interviewing candidates for senior pastor. When they come to the candidate they are presently interviewing, there is one issue the committee of church members is particularly concerned with. Some references had mentioned that at his last church posting this pastor had been a polarizing figure, an angry fellow who had sowed division. Naturally, the interview committee asks the candidate about this. He acknowledges he had encountered some problems when he was in his last position; he admits with a slight chuckle that there were members who had even insisted that he had a demon.

One of the members of the interview committee is a young man; he is the nephew of the Evangelical Covenant Church's original pastor, the pastor who had moved on all that while ago. When the candidate admits to the problem, the young man is suddenly more attentive. This is perhaps natural as this is not the sort of information one would expect a candidate to volunteer in a job interview. Maybe because of the subtle cue the young man gives off, the job candidate for the pastoral position attempts what linguistic anthropologists sometimes call "a conversational repair," an attempt to undo the damage caused by breaching implicit conversational norms: He tries joking with the committee by adding, "Now, I assure you,

I'm not demonized." Almost immediately after those words are uttered, the young man quickly gathers his things and heads out the door. He looks anxious (or as he would describe it years later "freaked out"). There is a reason for his panic: When he told me the story years later, he said he had seen the word *liar* appear on the candidate's forehead at the moment when the candidate denied he had a demon.

Many years later, the young man who fled the wood-paneled church basement learned about the heavyset evangelist on the 747. The name of the heavyset man on the airplane, the one who spied the word *adultery* on his interlocutor's head, was John Wimber. He was an experienced Jazz musician and a onetime sessions player for the American blue-eyed soul duo the Righteous Brothers. He was a raconteur, someone who knew how to thread together a good story. He was also a pastor, a specialist in the technical field of "church growth," and an adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, an institution that arguably was the center of influence for American evangelicalism in the second half of the twentieth century. While at that institution, he taught what has been called the most famous seminary class of that century: a course on miracles with an emphasis on miracles as an applied practice. That class was memorable for having a lab component, in which miracles were demonstrated to and practiced by the students. He fostered a network of churches called "the Vineyard," taking over the leadership of the seven original Southern California fellowships and seeing to their growth; they would eventually become a network of more than fifteen hundred churches worldwide. He claimed to heal people, and people claimed to be healed by him. He gave prophetic messages, and he cast out demons. Some people called him a prophet and some people called him an apostle, though he refused to adopt either term. A few people called him the *antichrist*, a term he also did not accept. He referred to himself simply as "just a fat man, trying to get to heaven."

CHRISTIAN PLASTICITY

At the time the young man from the Midwest saw the word *liar* emblazoned on the face of the candidate for senior pastor, he had never heard of anyone who saw words scrawled on people's faces, of the Vineyard, or of John Wimber. It was only years later after he joined the Vineyard that he was able to make sense of what he had experienced during that interview. But we should also note the original temporality of that strange moment in the interview. Before he made sense of it, that moment was still inchoate. It had a certain slippery irresolution, a kind of openness that only stabilized

after John Wimber and the Vineyard helped give that experience a shape. Beforehand, it could have been anything: a mental lapse, a physical symptom, a trick of memory, a supernatural abnormality; the man who experienced it had trouble speaking of it for years because it was so "out there." It was only later that he would see this as a sign of God acting in the world.

Giving a name to this surprising experience was not merely a closing down of a sort of indeterminate openness. It was also a retrenchment of the experience, a grounding of it that made it no less weird but easier to keep alive, both for himself and for others (at least for those who shared the same understandings of how God or the Holy Spirit might operate). There was a loss of possibility, but as those alternatives receded, there was also a gain in clarity and the seeding of a new space of potential. There was also an opening up not just of time as memory (or of the time of the actual miraculous event) but also of cosmological time; there was a new eschatological horizon that ensured not just the past but also the present moment had potentials in ways that had not existed beforehand. That moment in the church basement became at once a bit of time akin to the Gospels or the Acts of the Apostles and an intimation of a future moment, in which God would act fully and freely, openly and continually, in the world again. It was simultaneously originary and apocalyptic.

Note though that it was not just this moment that was given shape, that is, retroactively given a specific intelligibility. For this event to become intelligible to that young man as a specifically Christian experience, Christianity as he understood it had to shift. As Christian believers did in previous ages when the miraculous was a possibility, or as members of other contemporary Christian traditions that the young man was not familiar with at the time do, he had to make room for a sensible articulation of heretofore novel experiences, in which the Holy Spirit and God's prophetic message are contained not only in books or institutions but also in peak moments that occur for individuals and collectivities.

At the same time, the Christianity he practiced could not distend so much that it would allow any odd experience in and become unrecognizable *as* Christianity. If that happened, it would rapidly drift away from ever-differing instantiations of concepts understandable as Christian, and the proliferation of new concepts would cause it to mutate into something else as so many of the new religious movements that started during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s did. Which is to say that it would have to be immanently self-organized in such a way that rather than being something other than Christianity it would merely become a different mode of Christianity.

The term *mode* is used here because we are not talking about denominations, or large cladistic typologies, such as "Protestantism" or "Pentecostalism." Those institutions and classifications help locate and sustain modes, but modes of Christianity are not reducible to them. Rather, modes are distinct ways of organizing and expressing the same material and concerns.[3] And as a mode of Christianity, the Vineyard faces a particular challenge: how to remain a form of Christianity even if being a form of religiosity organized around a miraculous *recognizable novelty* seems to teeter on the edge of being an oxymoron.

This brings us to another important point. There is in these narratives more than a recalibration of emphasis and more than a bending but not a breaking. For the narrativized moments to be pliable, and for the Vineyard's understanding of what Christianity is to also be plastic, the constituent elements that make up Christianity, the set of concepts, practices, and entities (fictive or otherwise), had to have a certain preexisting plasticity as well. This holds not just for specific elements but also for the relationship between the various elements that make up Christianity. This plasticity is made apparent not just when different realizations of Christianity are compared, but also when features *within* a particular realization of Christianity are compared. Take, for instance, how the Holy Spirit works in the mode of Christianity that John Wimber helped to midwife. As we will see, for these Christians the Holy Spirit waxes and wanes, but it is never divisible. It is everywhere, yet it moves like a fire, searing some places for a while only to burn out, while bypassing other spaces completely. It is at once an all-pervading and a vanishing presence, sometimes palpable, sometimes intangible. Even worse, it can vanish in those moments when the Holy Spirit no longer makes sense, when it is undone by doubt even for those who say they know how to intuit its presence.

The Holy Spirit is not the only unfixed element. At least in some of its modes, Christianity can be seen to be about an absent God; this is a God who is transcendent to the point of vanishing and yet is still traceable through texts. It is these texts that act as stabilizing agents giving aspirant Christians wide-ranging access to him. But these texts only work if the protocols for accessing them, the hermeneutic processes and exercises that properly open up the Bible, are themselves invariant. Alternately, rather than a universalizing message that serves as proof through decoding, there is the possibility of finding God not in texts but through the body (individual or collective). In that case, the message would take the form of a particularizing, sensory presence: a voice, a vision, a feeling, a coincidence, an event. This route involves a ratification and instantiation of divine presence through the sensorium instead of the textual. This path seems to offer

a different kind of certainty than that granted by texts, giving the surety of experience rather than the faithfulness of scripture, but that is not the only work it does. By bringing the divine down to a level where it can be sensed with the flesh, the transcendent becomes laminated with the immanent. It also entangles God in place, presence, and subjectivity in a way that threatens to solipsistically constrict the divine message.

This instability, this question of whether to think of God as distant or near, of the Holy Spirit as waxing or waning, of God as something grasped through texts or intuited directly has been called the "problem of presence" in the anthropology of religion.[4] These two solutions, a God inscribed in text and a God who discloses himself through the senses, are not the only solutions, and they are not even necessarily mutually exclusive. For many of the Christians who constitute the Vineyard, texts *about* the divine and experiences *of* the divine are interwoven, sometimes by alternating between these two modes and sometimes by threading them together so tightly that they appear as one. There are degrees of play between the two, and different groups of Vineyard and Vineyard-like believers will lean toward one or the other, sometimes for moments and sometimes for years, only to reorient themselves to some other balance between the textual and experiential when circumstances change.

As we will see, this flexibility between the textual and experiential can also be found in the way that time is structured; even temporality can be stretched, folded, cut, and broken. For many anthropologists who study self-described Christian populations, Christianity is a religion of rupture, something that (at times) works through the instantiation of sharp breaks that give time a direction.[5] In the Christian temporal imagination, there is the guarantee of a culmination to history, or at least a culmination can be read into it in some Christian forms. But even being on the far side of these ruptures, even after the Incarnation, after the Crucifixion, after being "born again," Christians are not guaranteed the kind of stability and sureness that some nonbelievers imagine to be the primary lure of the religion. At the same time, that does not mean there is not another strain in the way that time is imagined, a Christian cosmic time that is not about Jesus breaking into history but about God founding and sustaining history, in which time is about long-running continuities in the way that nature (including human nature) is imagined. This then is not about a God who changes history but about a God who never changes.[6] Again, these different senses of time, time's flow, and time's import are not necessarily in opposition. As we will see, one of the most common ways of figuring temporality in the Vineyard is to simultaneously take up both rupture, the idea of a new and redeemed moment in human, and the sense of being continually ensnarled in a fallen

world; there is a perception of religious time as "already/not-yet," where God's grace is present in the world but has yet to complete its inevitable triumph over the Devil and his damaged earth.

This polyvalence in figures and temporalities is associated with a wobble in the scope and form of the religion itself. Christianity is a universal creed that is at the same time territorially delineated, at once everywhere and yet found only in certain locales, for all believers and yet expressed only in local forms for the faithful remnant.[7] Even its borders are uncertain; it has been argued convincingly that the question of the borders of Christianity, of figuring out, both in the abstract and with specific persons, what "counts" as Christianity is one of the greatest challenges of this religious form.[8] Needless to say, this determination is rarely carried out in the same manner by all the Christian groups that exist.

NOMINALISM, PARTICULARISM, AND ACTUALLY EXISTING CHRISTIANITY

If Christians themselves cannot determine or agree on who counts as a Christian, then what are we to make of all these different claimant forms of Christianity? Do we not count the Vineyard as Christian if some would argue against it (and some do argue against it) by saying that the type of odd miracles they truck in is sensationalism and not faith? This is not a question that applies to the Vineyard alone, of course; there are other forms of Christianity that bring up similar challenges. Do we not count the extreme cases of mainline Protestantism, Christians so liberal that they question the very existence of a Christian God—or of any god at all?[9] Do we not count Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the followers of Sun Myung Moon?

The best way to think of this challenge is not to ask which of these claimants is truly Christian and which is not, or to ask whether they share any specific, definable trait or set of traits. That is to mistake one of a whole raft of possible immanent choices made by a small group of particular believers for a transcendent and transcendental definition. It would be in short to choose sides, serving as an anthropological police officer who is self-authorized to pronounce what is authentic and what is a counterfeit. Nor is it productive to ask which churches are paradigmatically Christian and thus should serve as pure exemplars to which all others can be compared; this would be to cast any variation from these exemplars as a fallen form or simulacra, a manqué, damaged, or diseased copy. If we were to choose that option, we would not be police officers but art critics and commercial-goods

quality inspectors. Finally, the worst option would be to throw up our hands in a nominalist gesture and say that characterizing Christianity as having any determinate characteristics, qualities, or modes is impossible. Refusing to play the game by rejecting its rules may seem canny, a way of adopting the splendid indifference of the sage. But our vision would become so clear that we would be blinded by the light; through this hyperparticularism, we would lose the possibility of speaking comparatively about phenomena because the basis of any comparison would be erased. Or even worse, we could still make judgments—perhaps about other "real" forces, such as economy or politics—even after pleading nominalism. That would mean playing the game halfway, anointing ourselves as the true visionaries, who are able to judge what are and what are not valid and meaningful categories in the world, even if we can offer no grounds for the validity of these categories. Rather than police officers, inspectors, or aesthetes, we would become demiurges, embedded in the real world and yet convinced we are above it, usurping only a fraction of the possibilities in the world and congratulating ourselves on having found—or perhaps authored—what is the truly real. Even if we were not to fall into the trap of taking our nominalism, our particularism, only halfway, if we saw it all the way through to the end, we would still be in a bad way; having completely forsworn any kind of comparative move, we would find ourselves unable to comment about our particular objects in any way at all. Without a broader horizon to hold the object against, we would become unable to say anything meaningful (which is to say, anything that has any effects) about what it is that we are holding up for a shared gaze. Unable to talk about it in relation to anything specific because we are capable of talking about it only in relation to everything in total, we would be unable to say what is particularly striking about our object. We would be like mystics, undone by the wonder of everything and therefore incapable of saying anything.

How then should we think of Christianity, and of these diverse claimant forms of Christianity? Here, we will be considering them as "actually existing Christianities."[10] This is in part a reference to the phrase "actually existing Communism," a concept used by Soviet-affiliated socialist countries in the waning days of the Cold War to distinguish existing forms of state socialism that for pragmatic reasons often existed in ways not reducible to an abstract Marxist logic; the implicit contrast was with an ideal socialism that arguably was never made real in its pure form, or (as the argument went) was only made real through particular forms. If we were to think of these as actually existing Christianities, they would be copies without an original, an iteration of a pure Christianity that could never be

realized in itself because *it has no one particularized form*. If we make this move, the plurality of Christianities is not a problem but, rather, an important object of knowledge. The various actualized Christianities could potentially be organized in an array governed by the way some aspects of the religion changed over time; alternatively, these Christianities could be organized not by the historical processes that shaped them but by their current characteristics, the ways they each uniquely fold and stretch "Christianity in the abstract" to make their own variations on a schema of pure potentiality instead of a definite shape and contour. These Christianities would be like species, each one an expression of the form found in the genera but none being the pure image of that genera's form. Furthermore, their expression would neither be *closer* to that abstract form nor a *better realized* version of it than any other expression; it would be analogous to the way both tigers and house cats are members of the taxonomic family *Felidae*, even though there is no form of *Felidae* that is not expressed through a particular and specific species.

RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS

The schisms between this moment and eternity, between presence and absence, between the textually collective-objective and the sensorially individuated-subjective, in short between and among the imaginary spaces created by the juxtaposition of a variety of actually existing Christianities, may seem like the kinds of opposition that would capture the heart of an abstract philosopher. It is easy to imagine that we are speaking in a way too rarified to have any traction in forms of practice; that is, to think that we are stuck in intellectual deformations that are engendered by specific historical disciplinary practices, such as philosophy and theology, and not moving in the empirical tumult of anthropology.

When couched in this way, the problem does seem to be one for philosophers. One of the core arguments in this ethnography, though, is that this is also a problem for Christians in the here and now. Furthermore, for believers this is a problem that is more acute than it is for academics, in that it is not worked through at the level of self-reflexively articulated and alienated intellectual systems but through the ethical practices and ontological and epistemic structures that shape the contours of their lives. It is common in anthropology to refer to an issue, a topic, or a situation as "problematic." It is rare, though, to see the problem not only as generative but also as a problem for all—participants and observers alike. Just as anthropologists are interested in the concerns of their informants, they are

also troubled by the same problems as their informants—the problems appear to be simply academic when these life issues are inscribed in an academic register and expressed through an academic medium.

Definition may make this clearer. The word *problem* is not meant here in the sense found in a riddle or an arithmetic test, for which there is only one answer. The multiplicity of Christianities shows that any search for a way of producing singular answers must fail. *Problem* here is used in two senses, neither of which is suitable for thinking about answers that come solely in quantitative form. In the first sense, problem is meant as a challenge, something that suggests multiple ways forward after it has been given careful and sometimes well-tutored attention.[11] This makes sense. There have been too many answers to the problem of time and presence in Christianity to suggest that there is only *one* solution, as if other offerings were the result of sloppy thinkers. There have been far too many different, and even seemingly irreconcilable, answers to the challenge of Christianity to continence the idea that a singular solution exists. Rather, this is a problem in the sense of an equation that is made up not of fixed sums but multiple, enchained, and differentially related variables.[12] By *variables*, we are speaking here about elements in religion that are themselves without determinate content but can be given content from specific instantiations and set in relationship to one another, producing radically different results. Again each different result, each particular answer, is still a proper instantiation of the original formula. And when all the potential answers to a problem are set alongside one another, they together form a *possibility space*, a concept that will be explored in greater depth in this book's conclusion.

If we think of this as something along the lines of a qualitative variant of an algebra problem, or as a function for which the variables are given identifiable values so that the two sides of the equal sign mirror each other even as they initially appear to be vastly different, then the proliferation of different forms of Christianity becomes explicable. Different forms of Christianity (the "outputs" of the function) are the result of the same set of variables being given different content (the "arguments" of the function), even as the variables and their relationship to each other remain the same (the function's formula or algorithm). Particular Christianities are expressions of the immanent, but abstract conflux of forces descended from a moment when the shape and character of those already structured forces were still yet to be determined. When these undetermined, not-yet-individualized elements are invoked in different places, what is produced may look different and not only because it appears in different iterations; in an odd way, it may at times even look different from itself.

If this is the case, why is it so hard to identify the problems/equations that subsist under these Christianities? I would argue that the specific realizations in the form of particular Christianities overwrite the phantasmic unfixed elements of the undetermined form, making them hard to see. When variables are given content and then concretized, they become obscured; a fixed form covers up the product of the underlying relations between certain always-open, not-ever-specified variables. "Solving" the problem with specific exemplars seemingly erases the underlying relations that summoned it forth.

This obscuring work brings us to the second sense of the word *problem*, by which the word is not understood as a conscious challenge but as the insistent relation between aspects of things that are indifferent to whether they are too familiar or are too far from our consciousness or senses for us to see. We should also note that this second sense of the word *problem* is slightly oblique from the first sense, in which we were speaking of it as an issue that after it becomes visible demands a response. In the second sense, the shape of things can shift as their constituent elements wax or wane without any notice being taken of them. In a way, the first sense of problem (problem as difficulty or challenge) is just a special case of the second sense of problem (problem as a play of forces), that is, the first set of problems is merely a specific and subsidiary partial set of the second set of problems. For problems in the second sense, we would have juxtapositions always occurring but only when one of the elements either is given reflexive attention, or has reflexive attention as one of its constituent elements does it become a problem in the first sense.[13] Of course, the reverse argument could be made as well—that the first sense of problem as a conscious challenge is the prior one, that over time "thinking" problems become unconscious through processes ranging from inattention to repression, slinking away from neglect or thrust into darkness to curtail anxiety. Either way, what has to be remembered is that seemingly fixed practices are problems as well, albeit ones temporarily frozen in one solution; in proper circumstances these problems can open up again, generating new solutions that are a function of novel shifting values for the variables that are expressed by way of the problem. We have already seen the contours of one problem—the problem of presence—as expressed in different textual and sensorial responses, but this is only one such Christian problem, one structured set of variables.

PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC ACCELERATIONS AND INTENSIFICATIONS

When it comes to the history of Christianities, we could ask whether the "equation(s)" have changed. This is an open question: Are we dealing with the

same open problems as those of other historically prior Christianities? And, if so, which other Christianities and when? Regardless of how that question is answered, it is certain that the value given to the variables that make up this open equation have shifted dramatically in the past 125 years; they now have accelerated velocities and heightened degrees of intensity.[14] This is in large part attributable to a rapid expansion of Christianity in what is sometimes called "the Global South." There has been a Christianization of large portions of Africa and Southeast Asia, often in the form of new strains of conversion-prizing species of evangelicalism; it has also become rather common for new forms of Christianity, such as the African Independent churches, to be invented locally. The conjunction of the imported and the invented has also fueled Roman Catholic attempts to maximize gains, where the Catholic Church has experienced growth, and to renew attempts to decelerate losses, where it has been hemorrhaging followers.

The specter of demographic loss means we have to acknowledge growth has not been tout court globally. Christianity and various Christianities have withered in Europe, even though the tangent of growth has not been continuously negative and there is some reason to suspect that it might even be ready to start gaining adherents again. Even the United States, which has been going through a tremendous expansion of religion—some would say a revival—since the seventies, has seen various forms of atheism, agnosticism, and idiosyncratic, consumerist improvised religiosities ("Sheilaisms," to use the unforgettable phrase from *Habits of the Heart*) claim some of the space that was ceded to more recognizable forms of religion during the height of the revival. Even with this numerical whittling away, though, Christianity has grown tremendously worldwide, and this has had an effect even in places, such as the United States, where the numbers have dropped off.[15]

The type of new Christianities that did best involved democratic access to experiential, and often ecstatic, forms of divine authority. This is not to say that ecstatic religion with democratic (or at least a decentralized) potential is unprecedented. Since the Cathars and Franciscans, and possibly since the initial moments of the originary Christianities, there have been modes of Christianity that have emphasized aspects we could call "spiritual" or even "charismatic." While opinions differ as to whether its authority is historical or paradigmatic, the New Testament's book of Acts narrates the sober drunkenness of the first night of Pentecost, when members of the early church were supposed to have spoken in tongues as the Holy Spirit descended on them ("Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our

own native language?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'").[16] In an epistolic intervention in the fractious first-century church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul mentions gifts, such as prophecy—"distinguishing among spirits"—healing, and speaking in tongues, all of which were supposed to have been done "in the Spirit" (even if the purpose of his writing was seemingly to warn against prioritizing any of these practices in collective worship).[17] Even during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was common to find ecstatic Methodists and other spiritual athletes roaming the "burnt over" districts of the American East Coast, where religious revival had come so many times there was a sense that there was no more kindling for spiritual fires; likewise, many of the early Mormons spoke in tongues during the religion's tumultuous first century.[18]

But it was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that spiritual longings emerging from places as diverse as Wales; Topeka, Kansas; Los Angeles, California; and Portland, Oregon, all found ways to catalyze each other. This resulted in enthusiasms, admonitions, and techniques circulating with such speed and thickness that a new mode of Christianity appeared, complementing, informing, and sometimes surpassing other Christian modes, such as Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, in the speed and intensity of its transmission. While this mode took several forms, the movement is known collectively as Pentecostalism, named after Pentecost, that first night in the book of Acts when the Holy Spirit supposedly poured down on members of the fledgling church.

Pentecostalism, built around New Testament texts and long-running religious enthusiasms, may not have been entirely novel, but it came across as new—at least new enough to be resisted by some of the Christianities that it emerged from. At first, Pentecostalism may have seemed to be merely a distillation of a mode of Holiness Methodism that stressed *extasis* to a slightly more rarified degree than other cognate forms of Wesleyanism. And indeed, many Holiness Methodists took up their practices, folding themselves into Pentecostalism. But many more did not. There were numerous reasons for this rejection. There was an inability to accept Pentecostal truth claims, such as *initial evidence*, the name given to the belief that speaking in tongues—the original central practice in Pentecostalism—was the only guaranteed evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, which was in turn understood as the only reliable index of salvation. Other factors, like early Pentecostalism's indifference to both the racial boundary lines and gendered pastoral roles that informed so much of US society, probably did little to help. But distasteful or not, Pentecostalism, with its tendency to make ministers through relatively quick spiritual inspiration, instead of years of seminary education, had a powerful

capacity to reproduce; and the religious obligation to spread this news around the world, combined with the common early Pentecostal belief that speaking in tongues was actually an instance of xenoglossia, the instantaneous command over foreign languages through fiat of the Holy Spirit, ensured that this capacity to reproduce was widely distributed.[19] Eventually, Pentecostalism would differentiate and solidify, with loose associations of churches desiring to collectively turn themselves into denominations; denominational authority frequently came hand in hand with centralization of prophetic authority in a few key figures or select offices. Increasingly, only a select circle of individuals were becoming authorized to serve as intermediaries with God when it came to issues that spoke to the church as a collectivity. But this institutionalization, and the relative deceleration in the production of both novel authority and the ease with which believers could self-authorize as pastors, helped create the cohesion necessary to form a network of missionaries, pastors, authors, speakers, and radio performers; in turn this helped this fast-moving offshoot of Protestantism to quickly become its own identifiable mode of religiosity, with its own set of recognizable practices and discourses.[20]

Identifiable, that is, but not *distinct.* Pentecostalism may have begun by calving off from more sober forms of Protestantism, but that does not mean that Pentecostalism did not in some ways transform the terrain of these other Protestantisms. Even as the differences between Pentecostalism and other forms of Christianity promoted a separatist aesthetic that encouraged the Pentecostals to draw away from other forms of Christianity, the supernatural capacities claimed by followers of Pentecostalism encouraged other Christianities to take the risk and seek them out. In the first moments of the twentieth century, to receive the gifts of the spirit associated with Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and most particularly to receive the gift of speaking in tongues, was to leave (or be cast out of) one's previous religious affiliations and join a Pentecostal church or denomination. During the middle of the previous century, however, individuals (and sometimes even entire churches) would often opt not to leave their previous affiliations when the Holy Spirit alighted on them. Instead, they would attempt to combine charismatic expressions with the ecclesiology, rites, and theology that they already identified with. At first, these enclaves were often contained, either by institutional limitations or by a certain disquiet in the body of the larger church. But as we will see, the spread of the practice accelerated within a larger Evangelical church in a way not dissimilar to the way that the original form of Pentecostalism itself spread.

Even modes of Christianity for which the cladogenetic moment with Protestantism occurred as long ago as the Reformation were caught up in

this wider moment of Pentecostalization: in the late 1960s, select vanguard Catholic groups began to speak in tongues in the United States.[21] Alongside this proliferation, these practices also took on a middle-class aesthetics that would be hard to associate with that first generation of Pentecostal activists.[22] Eventually, these Pentecostal recesses in Evangelical and Roman Catholic bodies began to be christened as charismatic. Within decades of the name charismatic being coined, though, it was used not only to designate glossolaliac enclaves within existing denominations but to refer to gift-practicing movements and churches, which were not affiliated with any particular denomination and which chose not to refer to themselves as Pentecostal.

The reasons for this charismatic denial of a Pentecostal identity is debatable. As we will see, those churches that often saw themselves as charismatic refused the label Pentecostal for reasons having to do with historical fidelity (they wished to emphasize a wider Protestant heritage), contemporary stylistics (they viewed particular modes of public Pentecostal speech as contrived), theological exigencies (they refused the initial evidence doctrine), or future ambitions (they imagined charismatic Christianity was a "new movement" of the Holy Spirit on earth, marking not so much an expansion of Pentecostalism in the form of charismatic Christianity but, rather, Charismatic Christianity as complementing, or perhaps superseding, Pentecostalism). More archly, it sometimes seemed that the charismatic problem had more to do with the disfavored regional, class, and racial associations that Pentecostalism had in the United States: too Southern, too working class, too rural, and often too black. Regardless of the motive or motives for this decision regarding classification and self-identification, to these charismatics, Pentecostalism was something other.

The Vineyard was one such "charismatic" movement, a later and somewhat displaced child of a Pentecostalism that had wide-reaching roots. Its origin lay in the Fuller School of World Mission, a subdivision of Fuller Theological Seminary, the Southern California academy that played a central role in the mid-twentieth-century creation of contemporary evangelicalism.[23] The Fuller School of World Mission was imagined by its founders as a clearinghouse for best practices among evangelical missionaries.[24] However, in the period after World War 2, it was increasingly clear that best practices were not evangelical practices; in the developing world, and particularly in Africa and Latin America, it was clear that the efforts of American evangelicals could not compete with those of local Pentecostals. Missiologists at Fuller began to believe that Pentecostal church organization, Pentecostal class status, and particularly Pentecostal promulgation of

the miraculous gave these local churches an advantage that they lacked. They eventually began searching for an evangelical figure capable of reproducing these Pentecostal miraculous effects. They found such a figure in John Wimber, who not only had a knack for engaging in charismatic-style miraculous activity but who was also already associated with the Fuller School of World Mission as a "church growth consultant." Prominent missiological scholars at the Fuller School of World Mission gave their official imprimatur to his efforts to promulgate global Pentecostal-style miraculous practices throughout the United States and encouraged him to start a church in his home of Orange county. This church would eventually join forces with a small, but already-established network of Jesus people–type Christians, forming the "Vineyard" association of churches.[25]

What resulted was an amalgam of the disparate landscape of late 1970s conservative Southern California Christianity: an odd mix of hippy-like Jesus people, middle-class evangelicals, and seminary-based Christian intellectuals. Under John Wimber's tutelage, this assemblage would undergo striking expansion in a decade and would repeatedly also be at the heart of some of the most controversial moments that occurred in American charismatic Christianity during the 1980s and 1990s.

The disparate nature of this assemblage was consciously acknowledged by the Vineyard. As the movement developed, many members began referring to the Vineyard as a stapling together of evangelical theology and Pentecostal/charismatic experiential religious practice that together constituted a "radical middle."[26] Indeed, in their narration of events, it was the mix of Pentecostalism and evangelicalism—an experimental attitude toward the supernatural combined with reverence for Protestant creed—that was the source of both the growth and the difficulties that they experienced under Wimber's guidance. In the minds of the membership, this tension-filled, and to some degree self-contradicting, opposition was challenging and sometimes heartbreaking to maintain; but if it were successfully upheld, it would open up a way of life that they felt was one of the most authentic forms of Christianity that was possible at the time.

This self-consciousness about the tensions in this form of religiosity echoes both senses of the word "*problem*"—as an ethical challenge and as the focal point of a set of disparate combinatory forces—which were discussed earlier. As might be expected, the ethical challenge was taxing and the contesting forces created instability. The problem was also Promethean. This tension gave those who chose to take it up a set of capacities that, if not unique in Protestant, Pentecostal, and charismatic Christianity, resulted in a mode of religiosity that could be taken in several disparate directions at once.

RELIGION, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE DIAGRAM FOR FIRE

The stories of the Vineyard, which involve the contemporary shape of both Vineyard practice and that of later movements having their origins in the Vineyard, are all important for grasping not only religious change in America but also the complex reverberations among networked world Christianities. But a study of the Vineyard gives us more than that. It also gives us a vision of the human capacity for change in the abstract.

This may seem to be a bold claim, but it is credible if one considers that Christianity is not the only thing that was changing. Remember when the word *liar* appeared on the face of the pastoral candidate. That young man changed because something about Christianity had changed for him; but we should not think of these as necessarily *causal* in the crudest sense as a specific experience in one place having specific effects in another. Rather, the potentiality of the experience—a potentiality that had outlived the moment itself—was open ended, as was the sort of Protestant Christianity available to the young man.

In fact, there were multiple parallel transformations because the man himself was transformed, becoming a different kind of individual as he himself was *individuated*. This individuation was not just a shift of allegiances or a sharpening of cognition. Not only were his beliefs and practices different but his orientation to the world was as well; it is not merely that he acceded to a different set of beliefs about what might be in the world but that his world was now constituted by different relations and agents with the set of more-than-human entities that a fully charismaticized Christianity provides: not just a God in heaven but devils and the Holy Spirit here on earth.

We should pause to notice that the nonce structure of a moment—a memory, a person, and an idea of religion—was not the only thing in flux. There were also mediatic and technical changes facilitating the formation and circulation of the form of religiosity that the young man was participating in; for instance, the internal structures of denominations and the organization of Christian publishing and radio all transformed during this period. Finally, there were changes in the overarching social and cultural make up of America that contributed to the conditions of possibility for this change in religiosity; arguably, these changes in America and religion were inseparable, even if they can be analytically situated as occurring on different scales or ontic substrates with respect to words and thoughts, practices and bodies.

But to return to our main point, this mode of religiosity and the people who realized themselves through it unfolded together.[27] To many, this change in the mode of religiosity is the very promise of this form of Christianity, that is, the opportunity through what is often the cauldron of a very experiential (and sometimes very therapeutic) Christianity to "become a new Creation in Christ."[28] Now, while these kinds of changes, this pliability and the capacity to continually become a new sort of individual, or, rather, to continually engage in becoming a new sort of individual, may be valued by some strains of Christianity, they are not characteristic solely of these kinds of Christianity or of Christianity alone. Whether this production of the new is a fruit of a Protestant or Christian inheritance, or is instead completely orthogonal to Christianity, it can easily be argued that the shared promises of modernity, postmodernity, and the Enlightenment open up the possibility of creating almost de novo entirely new forms of thought and being in the world.[29]

But that is at the level of value and ideology. These forms of charismatic religiosity may be animated by ideational imperatives to endorse or desire change (or at least certain kinds of change), as opposed to attempting to retard or arrest change; but they do not speak to a fundamental *capacity* for change, the underlying ability that is being given value. This capacity for change is of a different order. A certain kind of pliability, a range of unfixed *potentia*, an abstract map of different possible forms and configurations, is universal—or at least effectively universal—for anything that may fall under anthropological scrutiny. It certainly does seem to be a characteristic of social life, which can be described as a continuous "Heraclitean" chain of creative action.[30] What is of interest is not an ontological prioritization of change—the endorsement of change or specific changes—as a good in itself. What is worth attending to is the play of play—the moments of contraction and dilation, of acceleration or deceleration—and how this may be working at different but enchained strata: social organization, ethical subjectivity, discourses, the human sensorium, and the physiological mechanisms of both the brain and the body. What is vital is not just that we attend to the changes that are being effectuated in each strata but also that we take care to note how these changes are simultaneously realized in different ways within and across multiple strata; and just as important is for us to maintain a concern with the manner in which change is constrained as well. Change that occurs too fast, or cuts across too many interlocking social, political, ethical, cultural, cognitive, psychological, and physiological strata, may mean more opportunities for creating new modes, but it also threatens the differing capacities for reproduction that all these systems depend on; the

autopoietic nature of social life, which has been given too little attention in recent anthropology, is vital.[31] A retrenchment, or even the production of capacities to harshly or violently fight back the undertow of change, is just as likely to be the product of change as is revolution.

That brings us to how this book works and to what this book intends to do. This book asks a series of linked questions. The first is about the *range* and *variation* in Vineyard modes of religiosity and in those people and groups that engage in them: How is it that the Vineyard produces novel experiences, and how is it that these novel experiences are not corrosive of the necessary regularity and recognizability that are required for them to stand at the heart of the Vineyard? Or to put it differently, what if anything is insistent in the different forms of novelty continually produced? This book will suggest that the miracle is both the mechanism through which novelty is produced and the sieve used to strain and order novelty. It will make this argument, however, only after elaborating on the way that various other forms of differentiation unfold in different registers, identifying where it is that constituent Vineyard events are socially and ontologically situated, and ruling out competing explanations for the Vineyard's particularities in terms of aesthetics and institutional social organization.

A second question arises from the first. Vineyard religiosity is not a stable thing; it arose from other modes of religion, includes a wide range of variations, and changes over time. It has also already given rise to other forms of Christian religiosity. Further, what is particular about Vineyard Christianity is often only visible if it is contrasted with other forms of Christian religiosity, and to contrast is always to acknowledge both relevant difference and equally controlling similitude between the counterpoised social forms and practices.[32] Therefore, our second question is implicit in the first: What is the wider range of variation in Christian forms and is there any hidden continuity or ongoing set of relations that can be found subsisting in seemingly quite different Christian religious modes?

Just as the second question is implicit in the first question, the third question arises from the second, but it is so large that it can only be gestured at in the conclusion of this book. To speak of different forms of Christianity is also to raise the question of Christianity's place in relation to the larger category of religion. The third question, therefore, is what (if anything) do all forms of religiosity share. Discussions of religion qua religion have not been very popular in recent social science; the general consensus is that such conversations are essentializing in that they occlude the range of variation that has been displayed by phenomena that are currently classified as "religion." There is a great deal of sense in this as religion has

been different things at different times, and there have been places where and eras when religion was not thought of as religion or did not exist at all. However, what the ban on discussing religiosity and religion as broader categories in turn prevents is thinking of variation, differentiation, and transformation as the work of religion. If religion is intimately related to difference, then this wealth of difference actually points to what it is that modes of religiosity share. This is not to say that religion has always entailed change or difference; religions can work to conserve as much as they work to transform. Nor is it to say that change occurs only through religion or in religion. Rather, it is to say that specific features of the semiotics and ontology of religion, through production, control, redirection, acceleration, and deceleration, control the expression of difference and do so in a way that suggests commonality. But this is a commonality in difference and not a commonality despite difference.

One figure in the book stands metaphorically for the concerns encapsulated by these three questions. In Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, the Holy Spirit is spoken of in several ways, among them wind, breath, and bird; all of these take the physical and sensual aspects of the various phenomena and make use of them to iconically reference the quicksilver-like nature of the Holy Spirit and Pentecostal-charismatic *extasis*. Similarly, another common metaphor for the Holy Spirit is fire. Fire, because of the way its plasma dances, is often put forward as the essence of mercurial change. But fire still has its immanent causal forces, and the relation between them and the way that fire unfolds from them are still recognizable.

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze had a term for the relations between social forces that can be actualized in different modes, and for how the relation between these social forces can be transposed to new spaces and can further play out to different effects: he called this a *diagram*.[33] We could possibly speak of there being a wider Pentecostal/charismatic diagram; we certainly could speak of there being a Vineyard diagram, actualized in coffee shops and conference halls, in living rooms and warehouses that have been turned into churches. This book is another realization and transposition of that diagram, a sketching out of its potential, but this time as it is realized through the medium of a secular anthropology. There will be infelicities because of the peculiar manner of its actualization in this instance; but there is hope that the immanent pattern that subsists in this actualization will still be graspable, that this book can convey—with the word *convey* used as much in the sense of *carry over* or *transmit* as *make comprehensible*—a diagram for fire.

Chapter 1 focuses on the Vineyard's practice of collective musical worship; through a discussion of worship, it sketches some of the institutional

features of the Vineyard and more importantly the Vineyard's manifold, distinctive time. Chapter two starts the search for a set or series of relationships that can be used to understand both what is particular to the Vineyard as a movement, as well as for what might be shared with larger Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity, interrogating institutional governance, the larger political-economic milieu, and aesthetics.

Chapter 3 proposes that both the particularities of the Vineyard and its resonances with the greater Pentecostal-charismatic world might be charted through thinking about the diagrammatic generative structure of the miraculous. Chapter 4 uses the diagrammatic miraculous to chart quotidian practices, such as private prayer and biblical reading, as well as reports of singular life-changing events by those who were spontaneously hailed by God to convert, rededicate themselves, or shift vocations. Chapter 5 expands this discussion to examine the seeming contradiction implicit in the intentional cultivation of spontaneous communication from God. It describes training for prophetic visions and discusses how these visions go through processes of typification and elaboration.

Chapter 6 takes the arguments of the last three chapters to work through the register of embodiment in processes, such as speaking in tongues, healing (including raising the dead), and deliverance from demons. Relying on the anthropologist Simon Coleman's concept of Evangelical and Pentecostal "part-cultures," chapter 7 shows how the diagrammatic miracle concatenates with and expresses itself though the religious-life trajectories of individual believers, as well as of larger Pentecostal/Charismatic movements; it also discusses how this diagram can make an appearance in economic and political spaces. This book concludes by taking the concepts and approaches produced to help think through the Vineyard and speculates about how they might be expanded to a general theory of religion. Relying on ideas such as relative degrees of freedom and probability spaces, it argues that one of the basic semiotic and material challenges inherent in religion—the sensible absence of a more-than-human interlocutor—might actually also be the engine of religion's central capacity, the ability to conceive and control in the abstract both change and change's antonym, eternity.