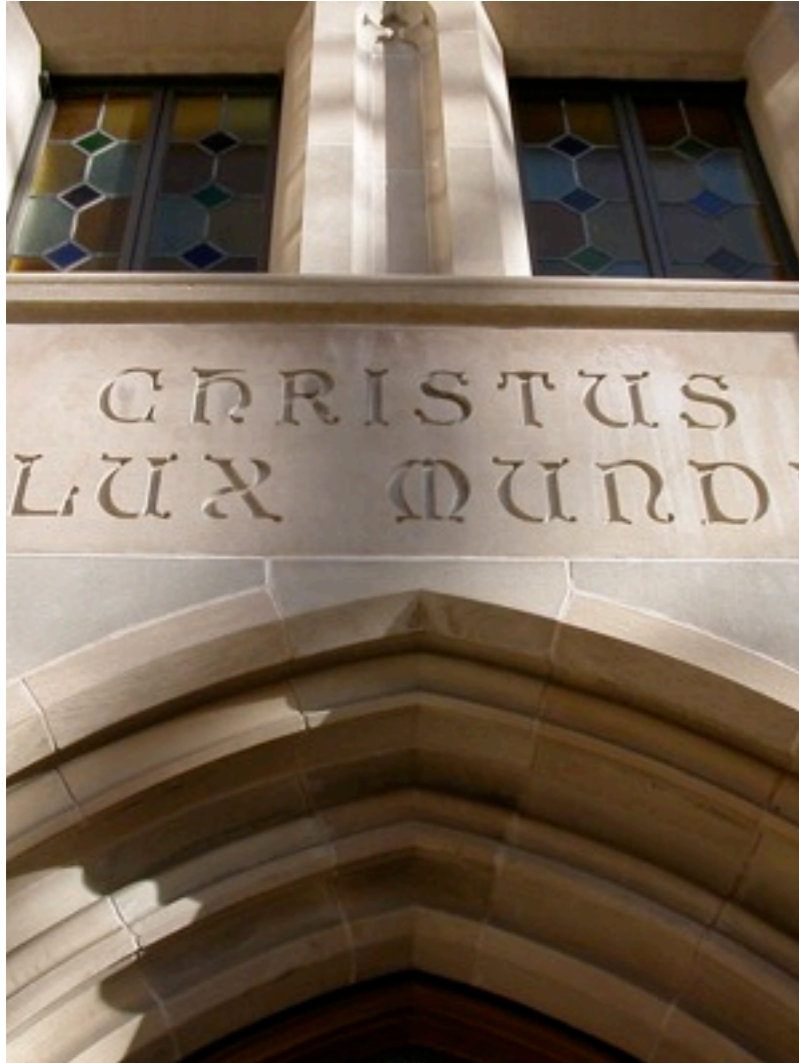


# Learning the Bible in the 21st Century

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Lessons from *Harry Potter* and vampires



**WIRED**



SPECIAL REPORT  
**Science + Religion**

Gregg Easterbrook • Po Bronson • Kevin Kelly • Margaret Wertheim • Robert Wright • Oliver Sacks

where I live contextualizes what I bring





young people are eager learners -- when interested

# attributes of the Facebook generation

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- all ideas compete on an equal footing
- contribution counts for more than credentials
- hierarchies are natural, not prescribed
- leaders serve rather than preside
- tasks are chosen, not assigned
- groups are self-defining and self-organizing
- resources get attracted, not allocated
- power comes from sharing information, not hoarding it
- opinions compound and decisions are peer-reviewed
- users can veto most policy decisions
- intrinsic rewards matter most
- hackers are heroes



issue is not *how* to teach the Bible, but *why* to learn it



bad implicit messaging



key shift: from teaching to learning

good teachers design and sustain learning environments that are adaptive and geared to the learners they are working with





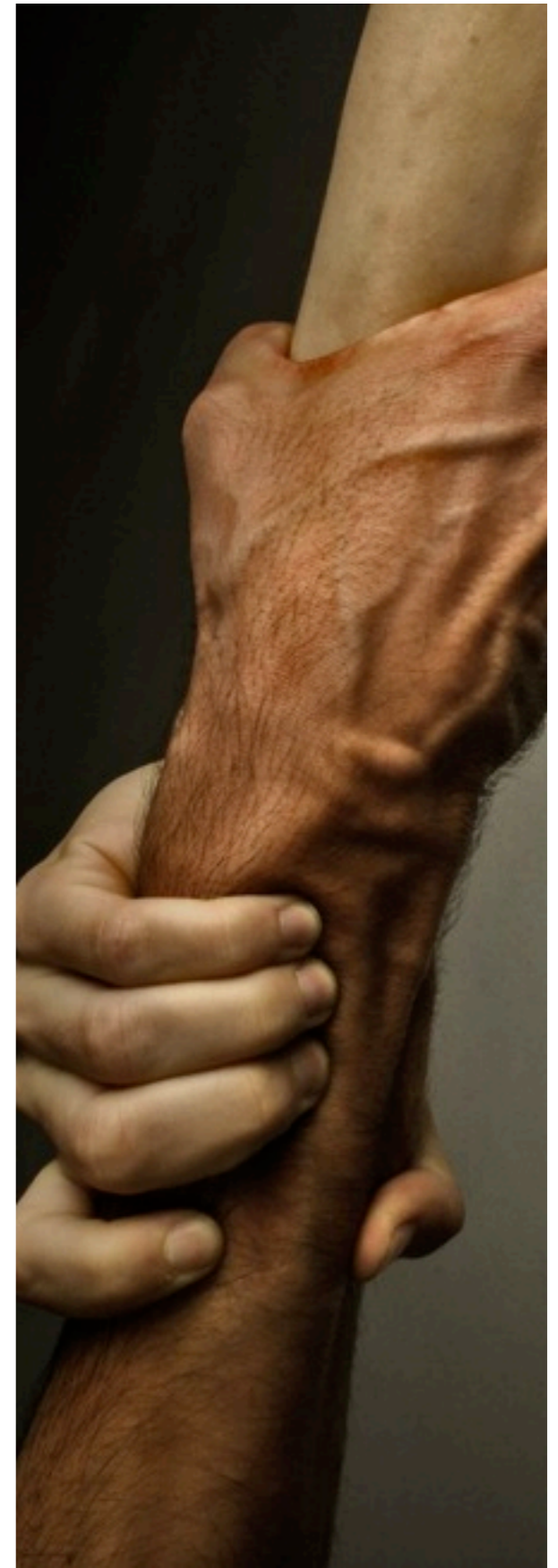
learners come from myriad places, with diverse learning needs

learning to listen, learning to teach



confirmation, contradiction, continuity

authority, authenticity, agency





if we want to help people *desire*  
to learn the Bible,  
then we need know what  
they currently think of the Bible





an exercise in listening  
to pop culture





four short video clips,  
place them on a spectrum















# what did you discover?

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- what criteria did you use?
- did the genre matter?
- did the production values matter?
- was it the message?
- did you feel manipulated, or was there anything authentic in a particular clip?



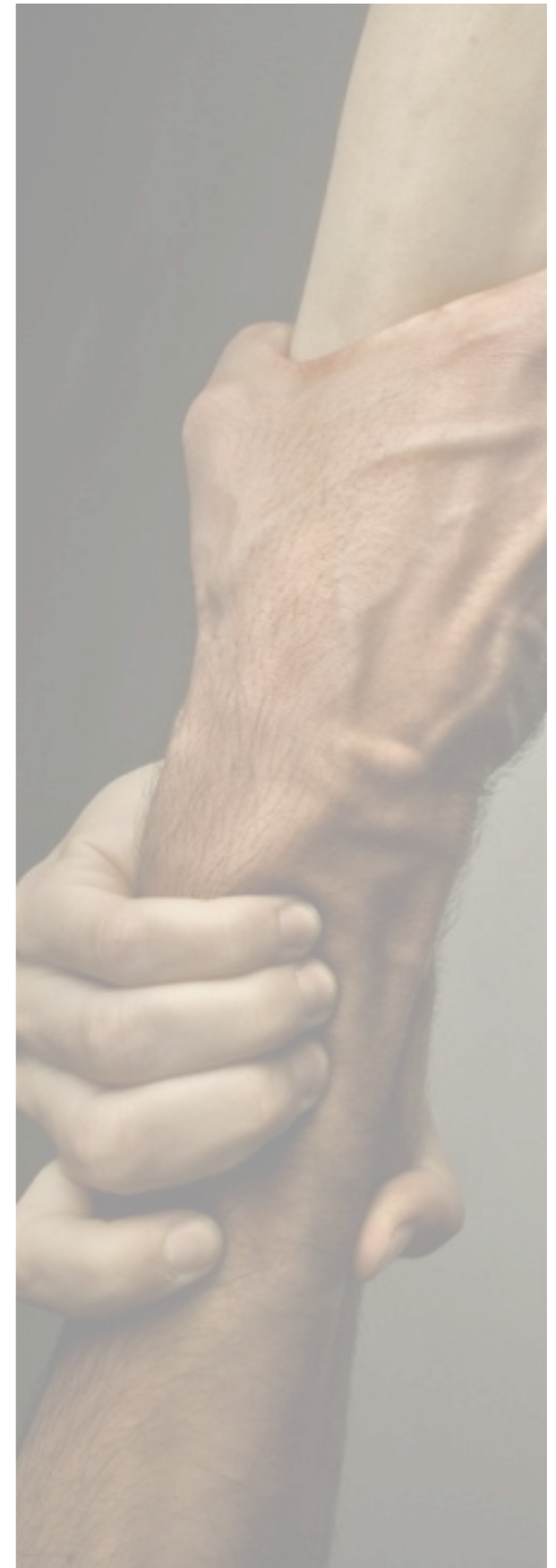


we all carry interpretive frames  
already

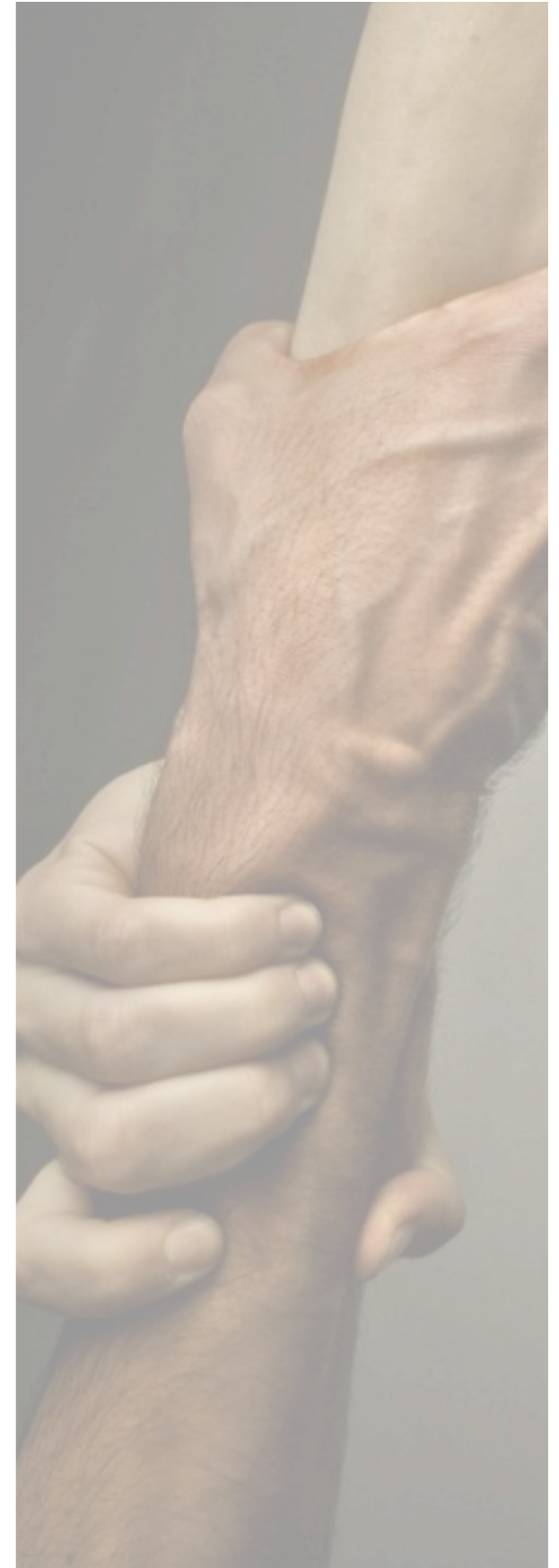


what is most real to me is likely  
*not* most real for you











what do you want to reinforce?  
what do you want to contradict?



part of what is so hard is that  
we want the Bible to matter  
to people *differently* from  
how it already does





confirmation is only the first step



raising and engaging  
contradictions is a crucial  
element of learning



“Word of God,” for instance,  
can help us here



# ELCA articulates Word of God in three ways:

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- Jesus Christ, Word of God incarnate
- the *kerygma*, the proclamation of *Law & Gospel*
- the Holy Scriptures

# Not a static object

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Shepherd contradicts River's idea of the Bible as a "static, fixed object" and argues faith is a crucial element of the Bible; we don't fix it, it fixes us



# Invitation, not a weapon

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Sin and forgiveness (law and promise) can all too easily become a weapon in the hands of some, rather than an invitation, a promise of God's enduring love.

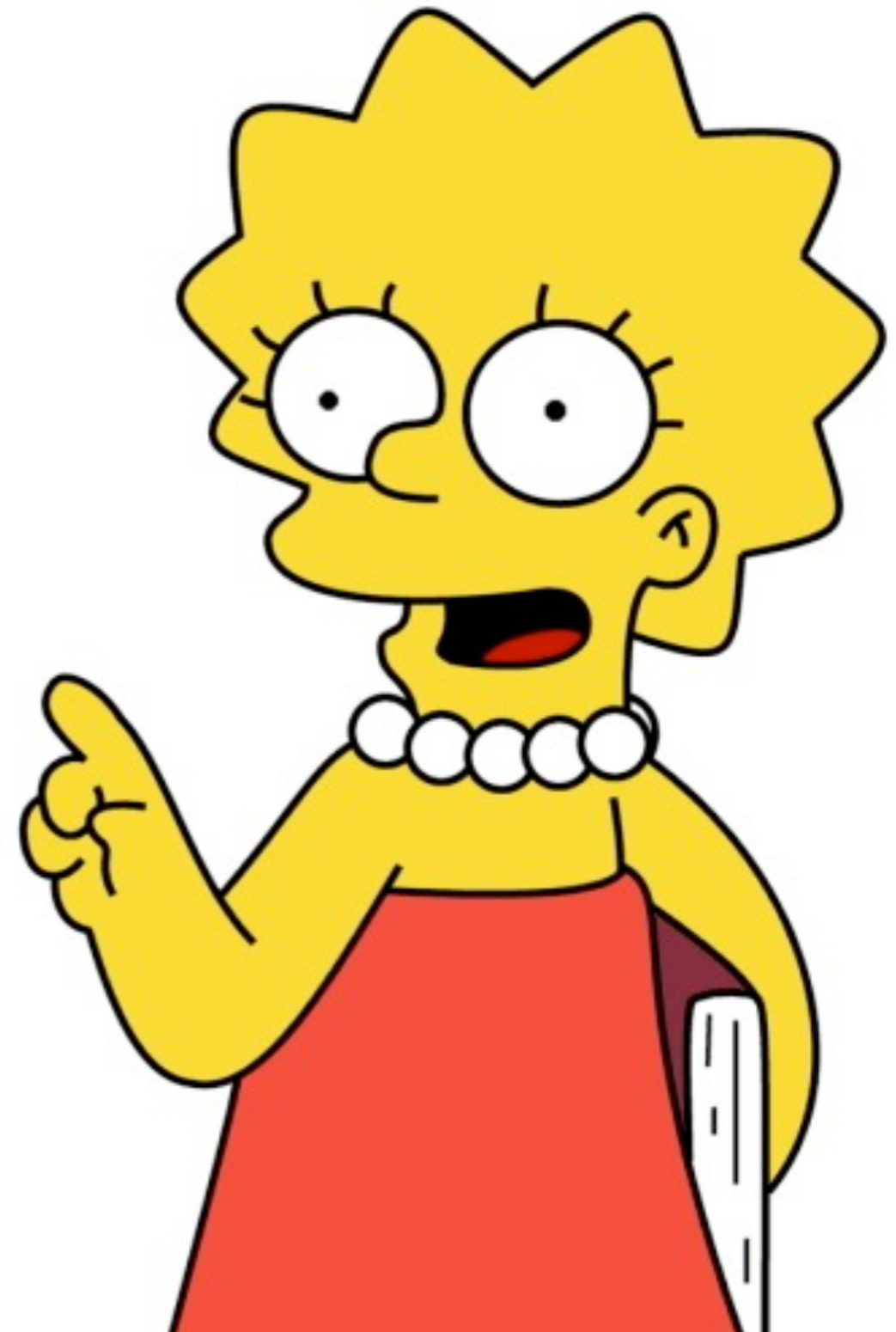


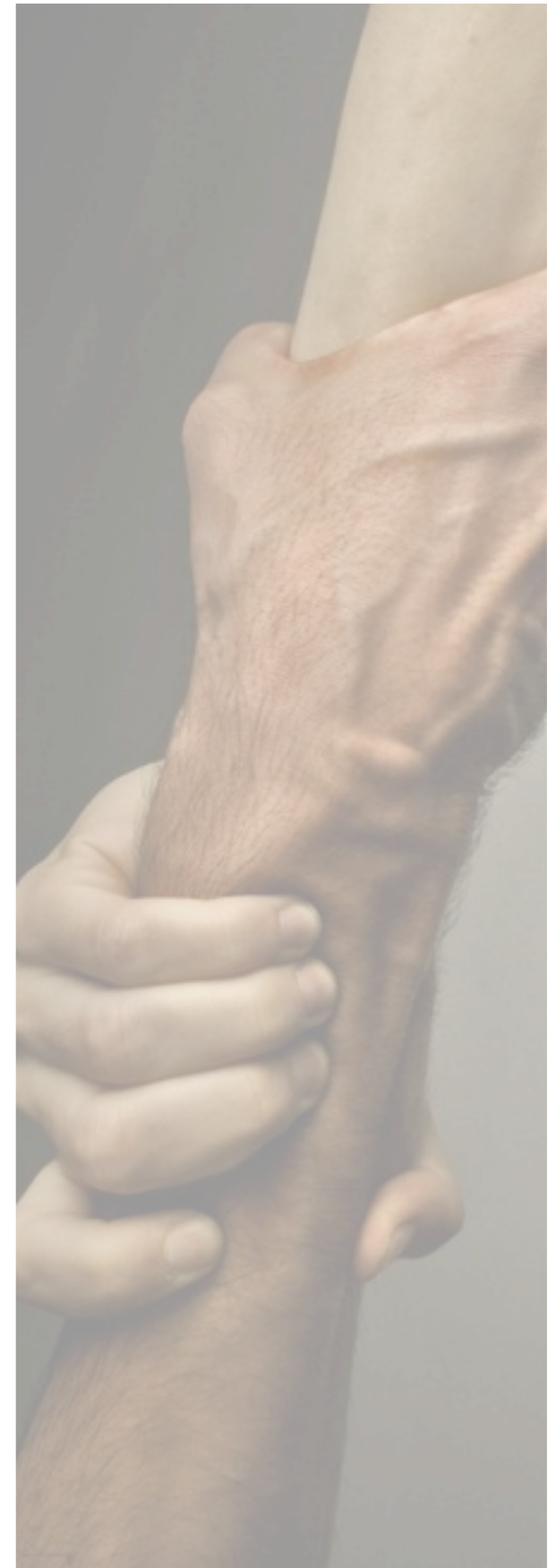


# The Bible can critique itself

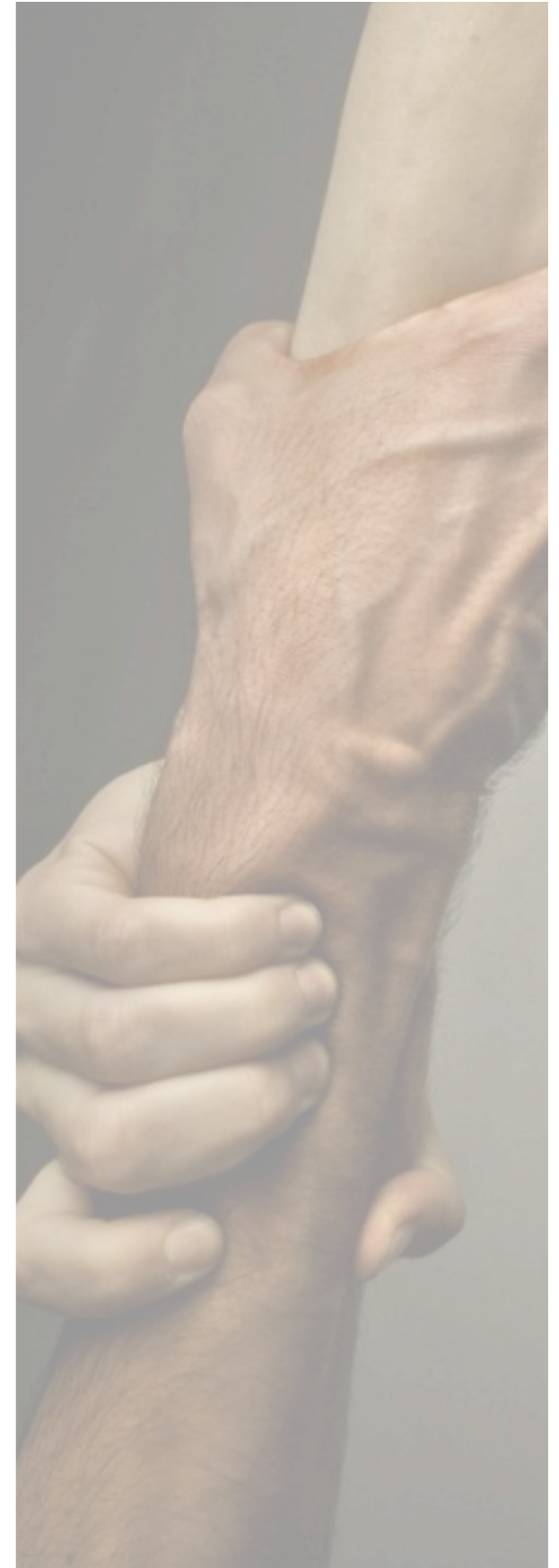
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Lisa argues that the Bible has integrity, and that it must be embodied. She draws analogies from the Bible itself to critique the church's transformation.

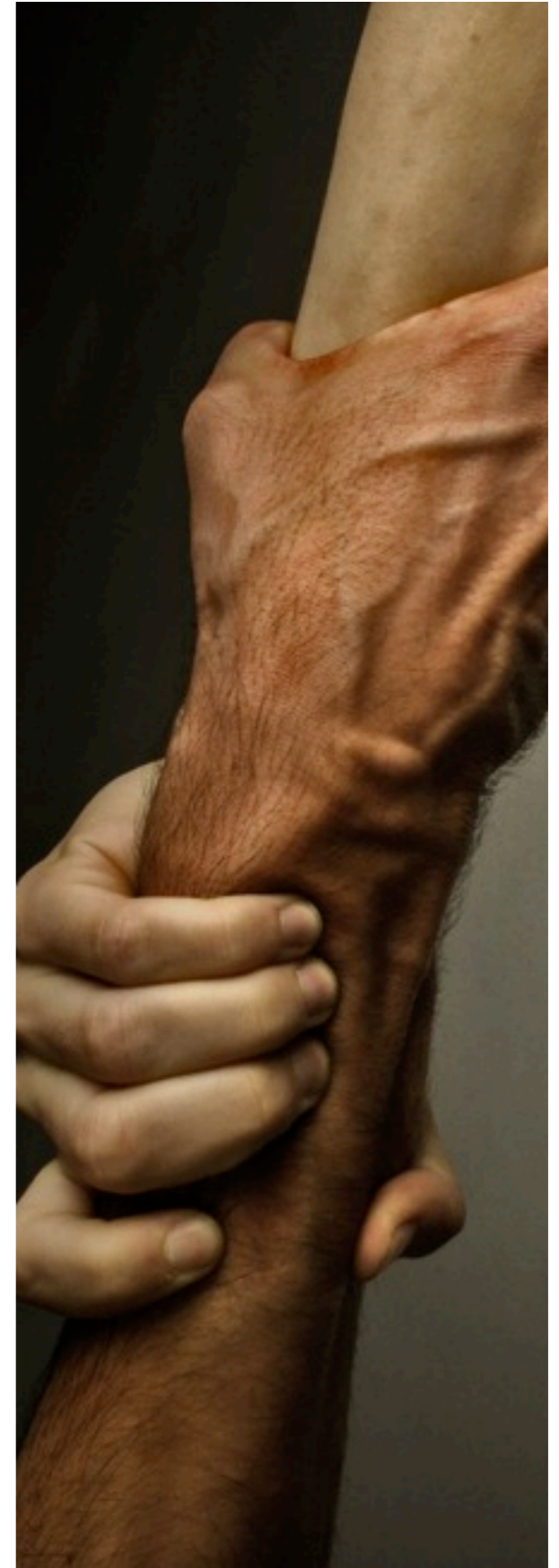


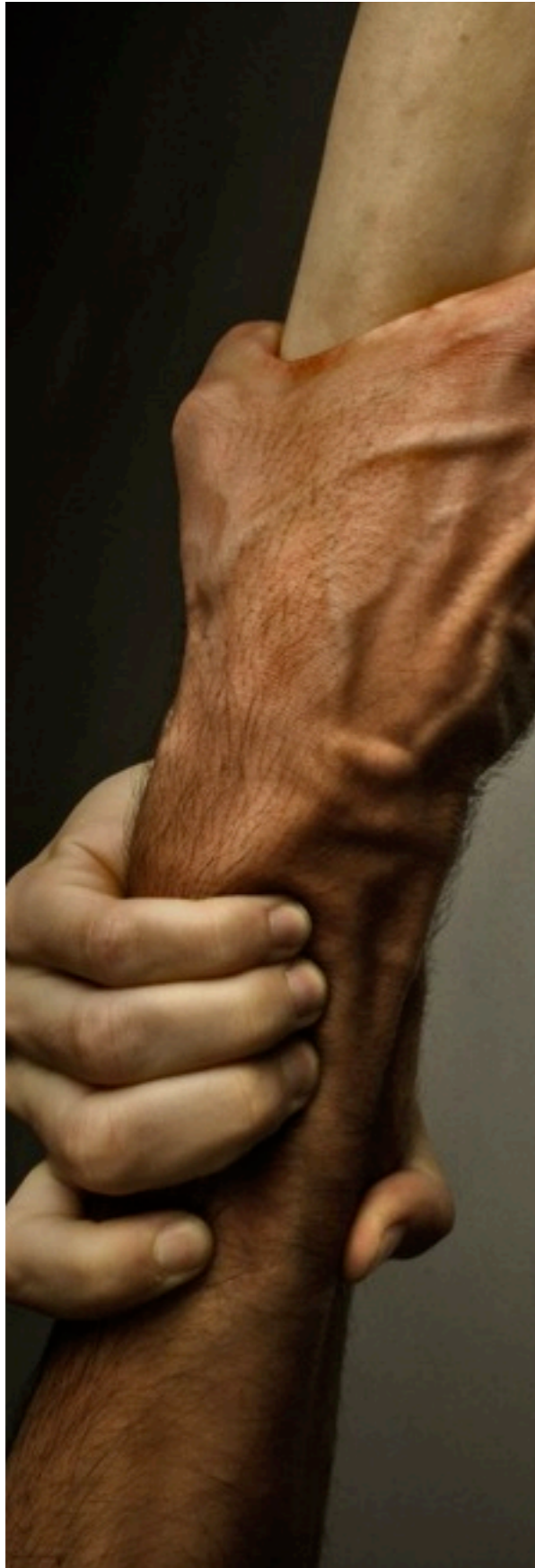








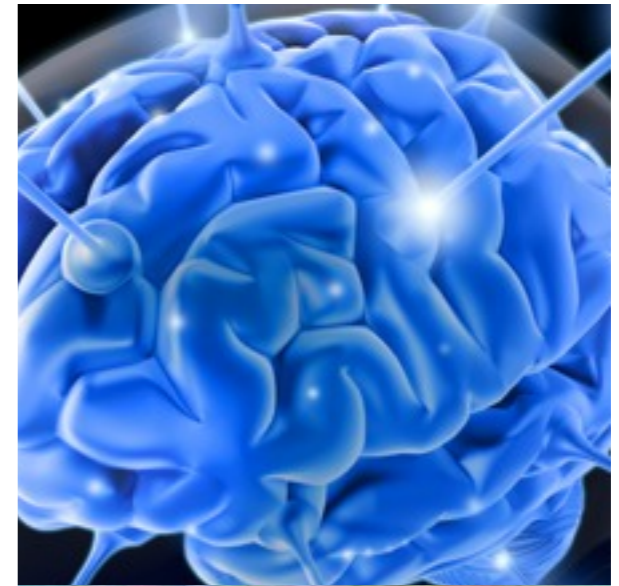




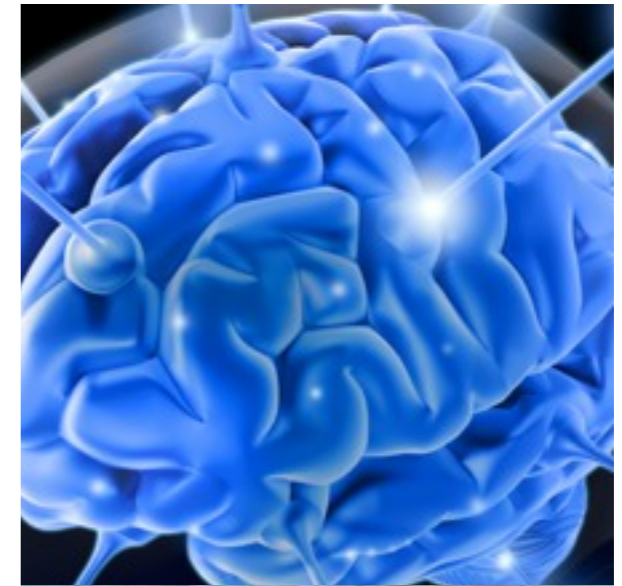
there may be no more critical challenge than providing this kind of continuity

Part Two: A deeper exploration of continuity





authority, authenticity, agency  
are shifting rapidly  
amidst media cultures





# attributes of the Facebook generation

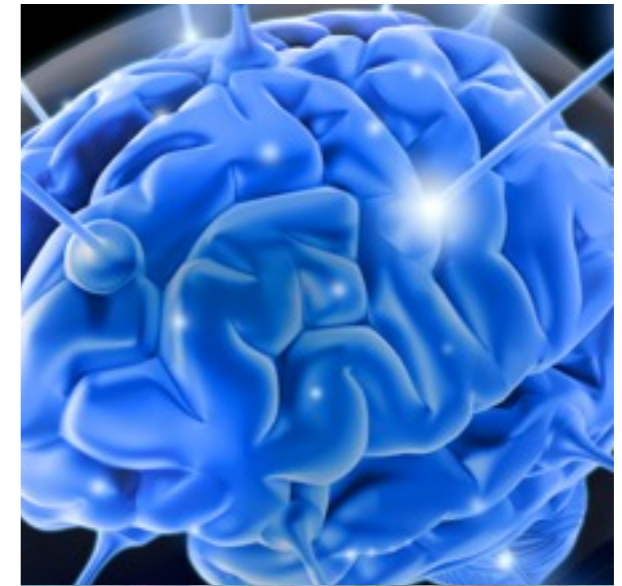
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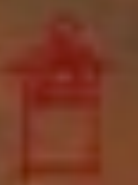
authority, authenticity, agency  
are shifting rapidly  
amidst media cultures





7

HARRY POTTER  
AND THE DEWTELLY FELLOWS



2

HARRY POTTER  
AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS



5

HARRY POTTER  
AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX



4

HARRY POTTER  
AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE



1

HARRY POTTER



3

HARRY POTTER  
AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN



6

HARRY POTTER  
AND THE BLOOD AWAKENING



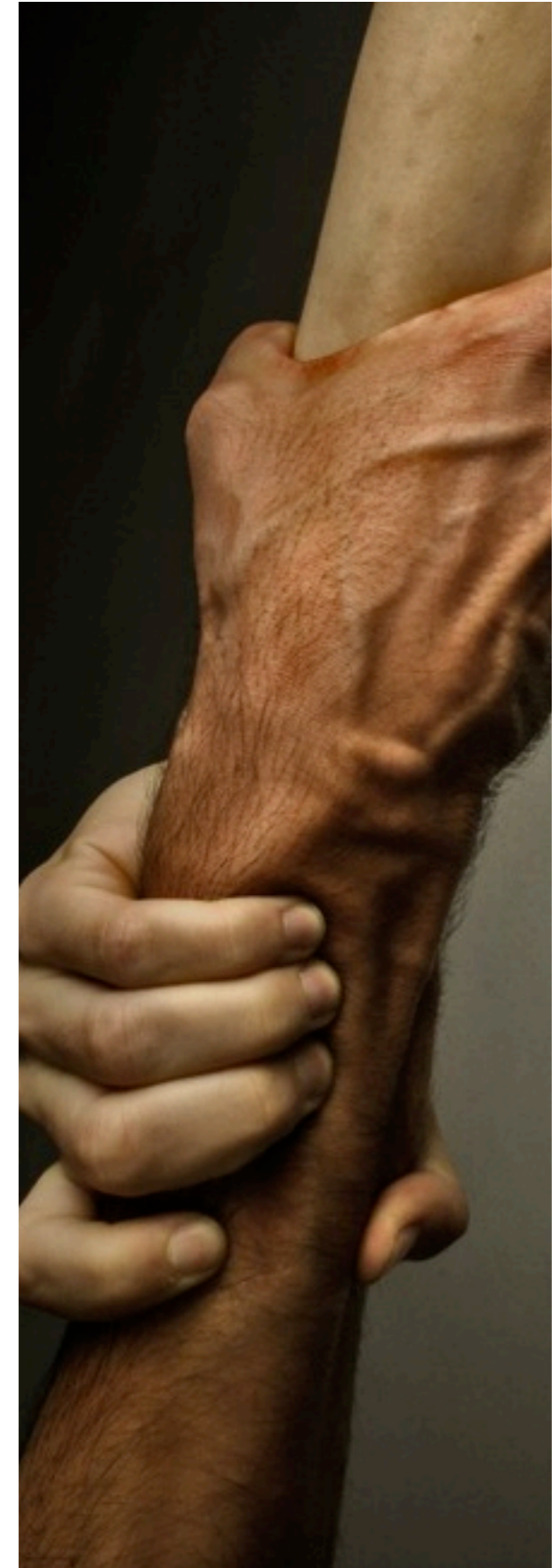


these shifts in authority,  
authenticity and agency hold  
both promise and challenge to  
us in religious community





they are also a key to what it means to provide *continuity*





## people say the Bible...

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- is best understood personally, in individual devotion
- creates divisiveness, *not* community



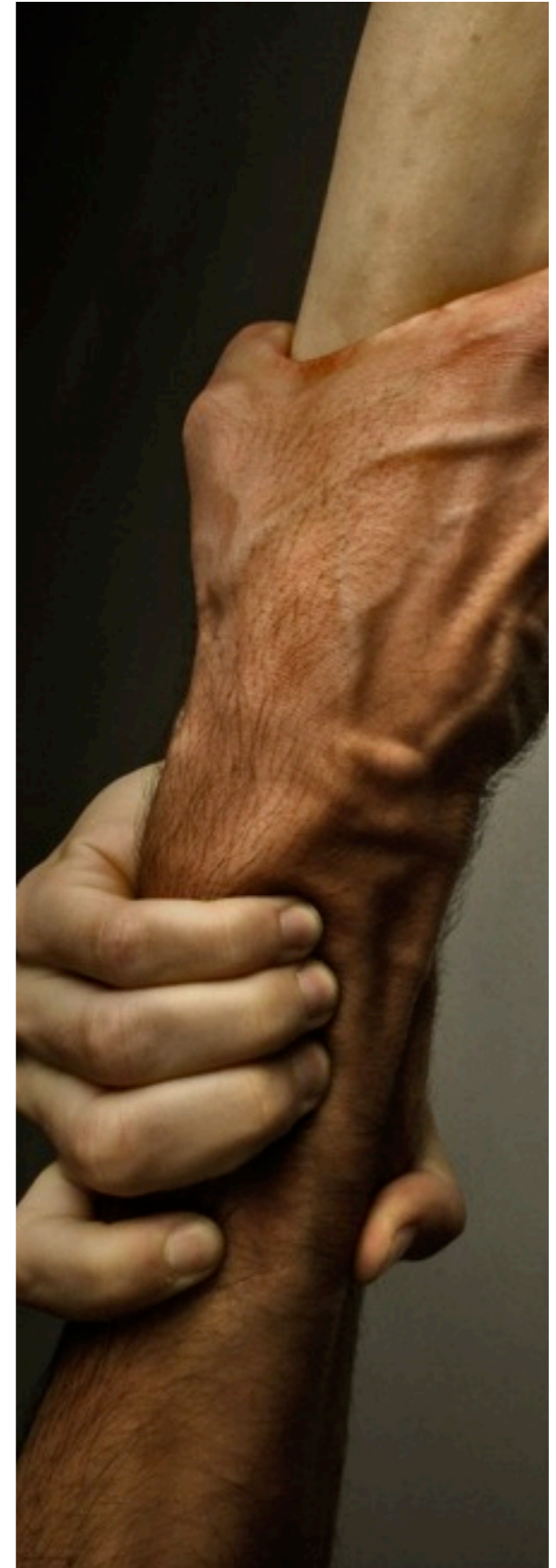
## engage that contradiction

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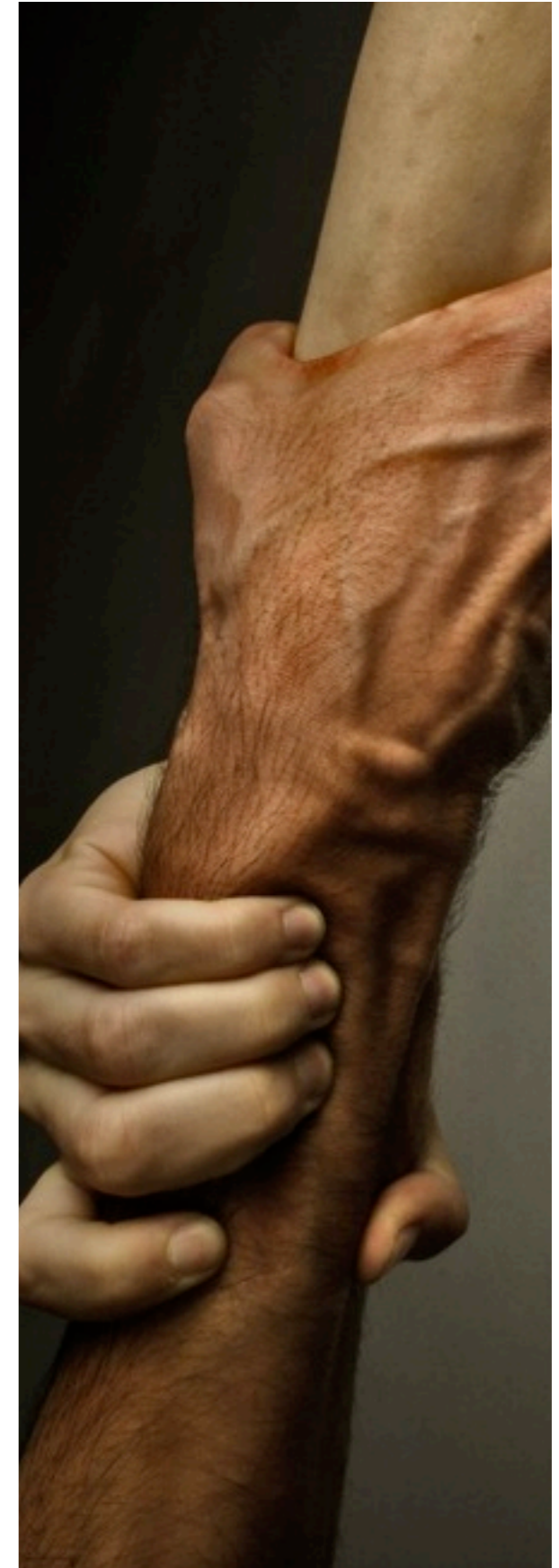
- accepting that the Bible creates community, but then understanding that community in very narrow, constrained ways — essentially the path that leads towards fundamentalism
- rejecting that claim but accepting the privatized, individualized forms of religious knowing “authorized” by certain kinds of pop culture — the path that leads towards relativism



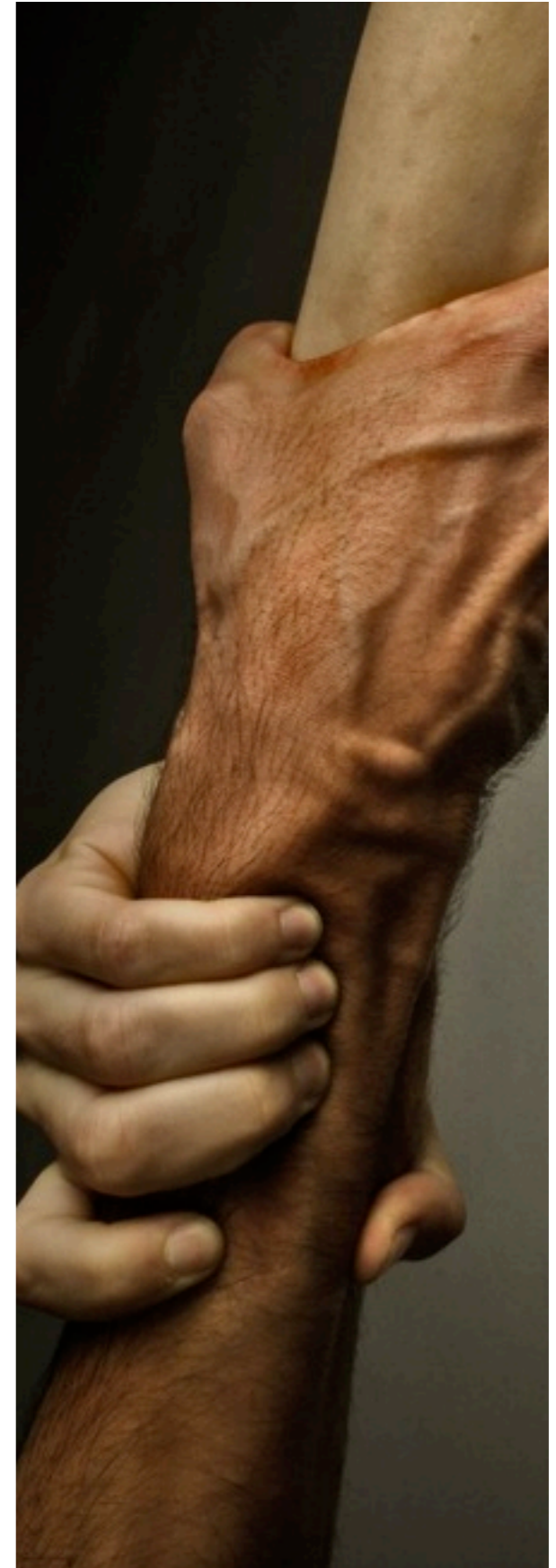
to go beyond either of these,  
we need to offer continuity  
in the face of the contradictions



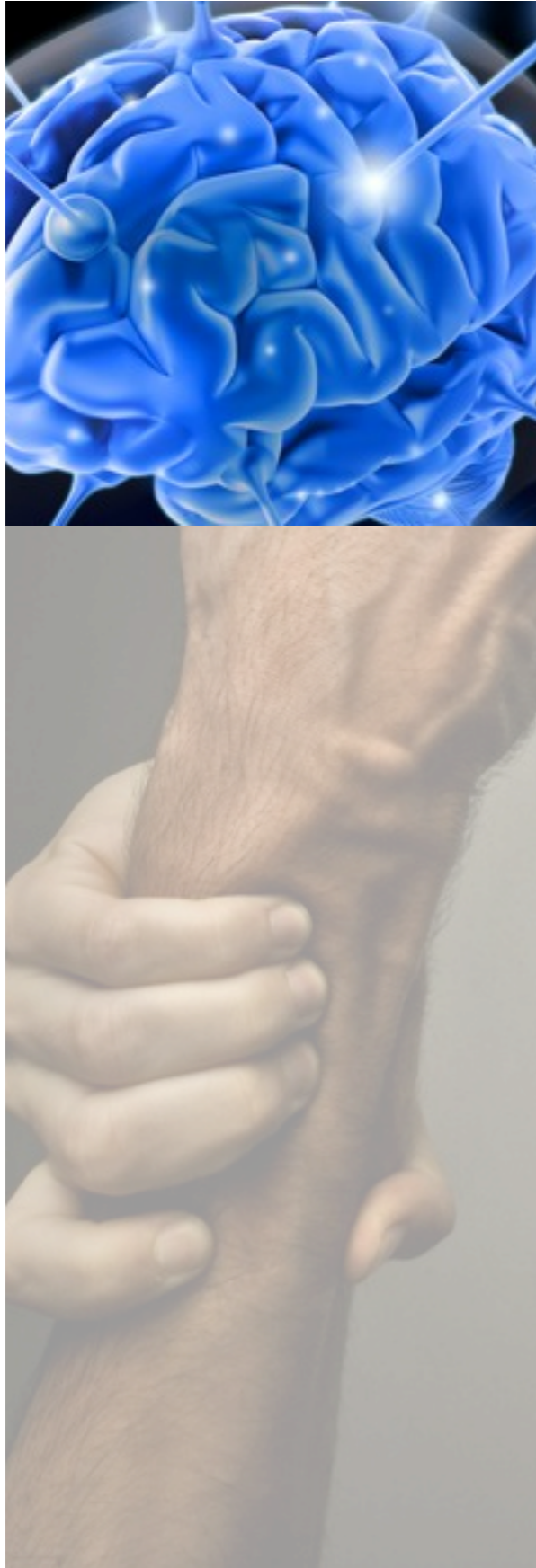
something from our previous understanding needs to be connected to a new frame that resolves the contradiction



in this example, we need to  
draw from personal experience  
that emerges from  
shared learning



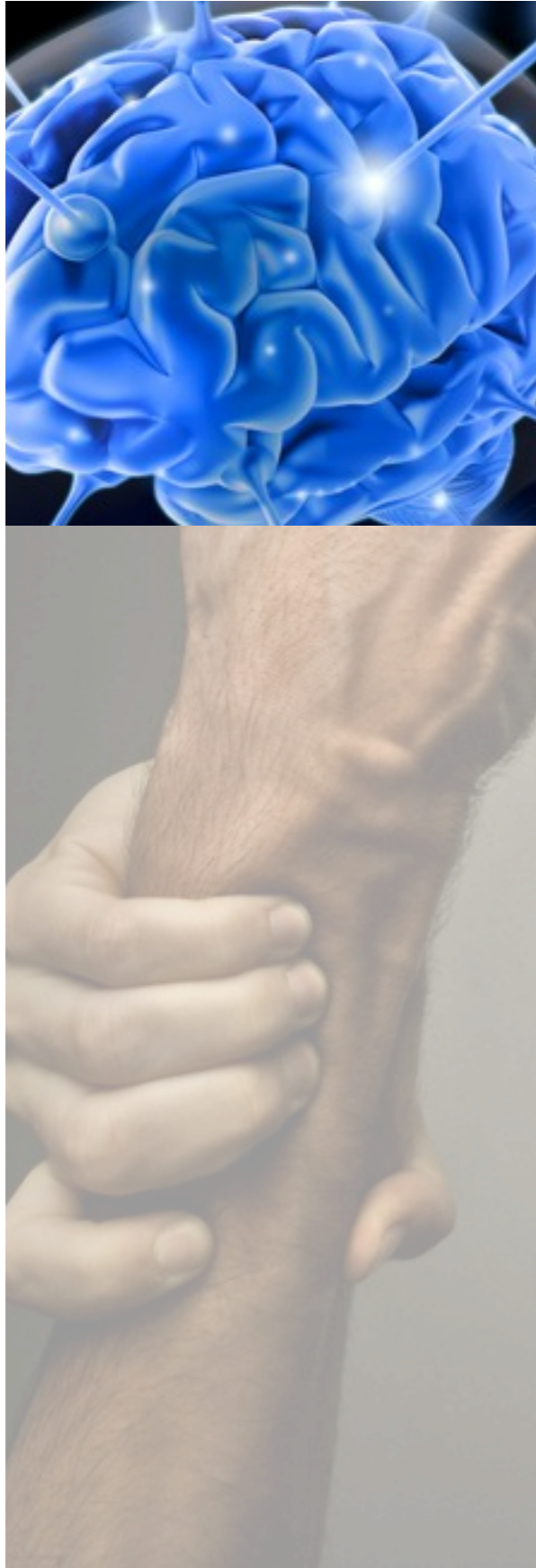




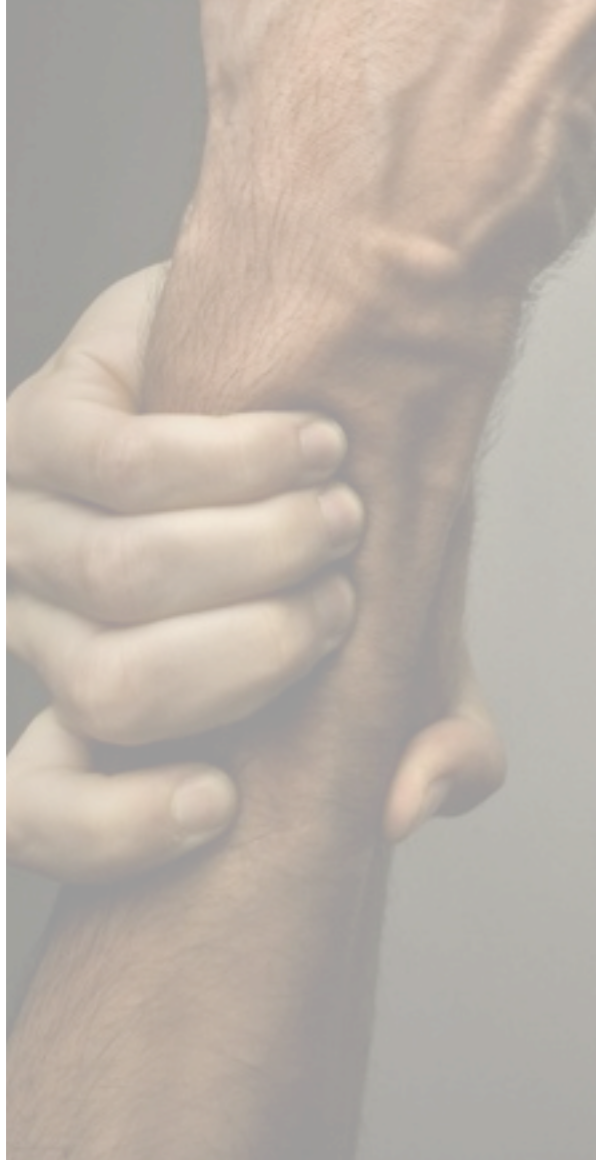
# communal forms of knowing

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- have resonance with authority emerging from, but not overly constrained by, community
- have dissonance if authority is understood primarily as heightening individualist forms of knowing

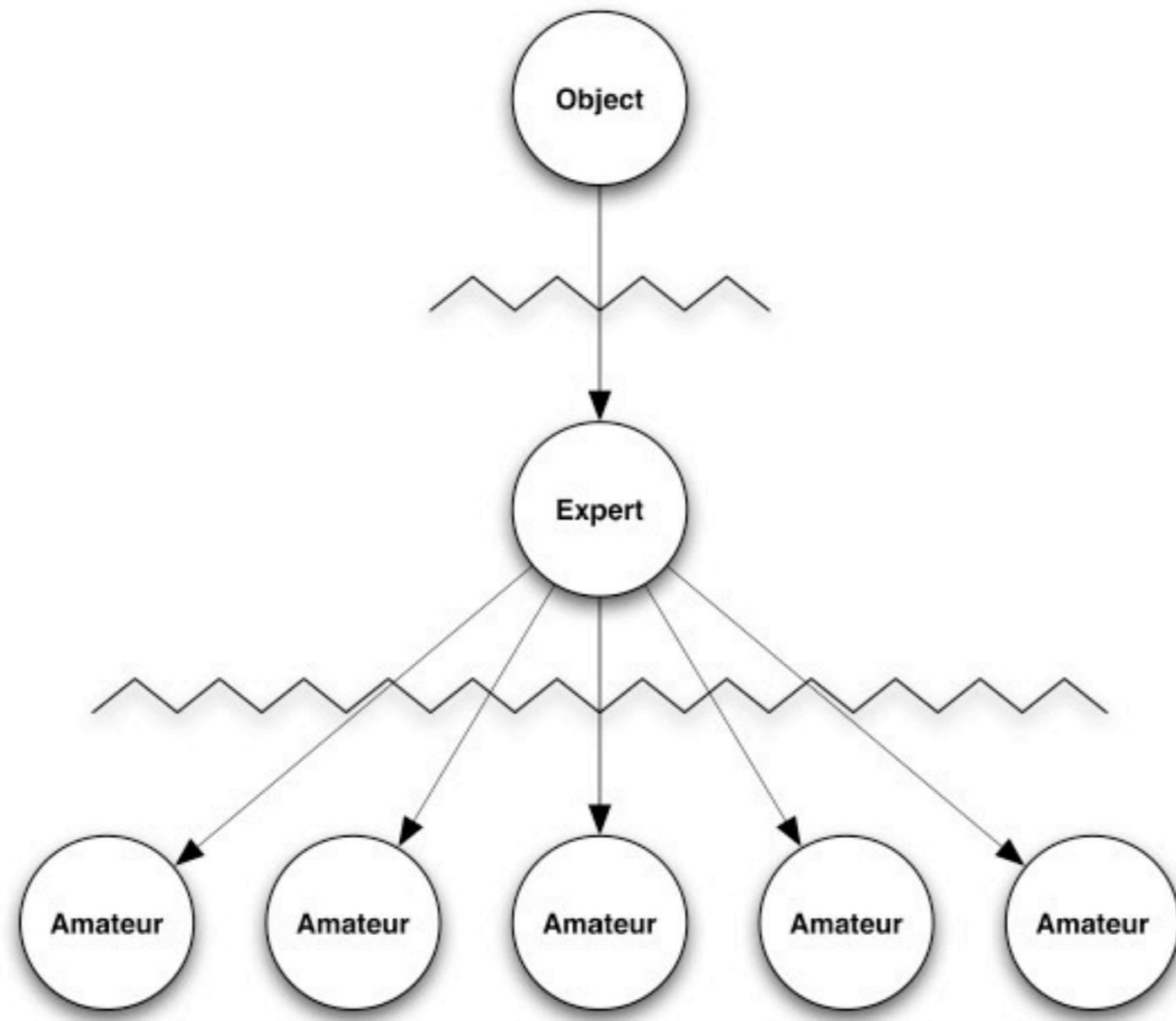


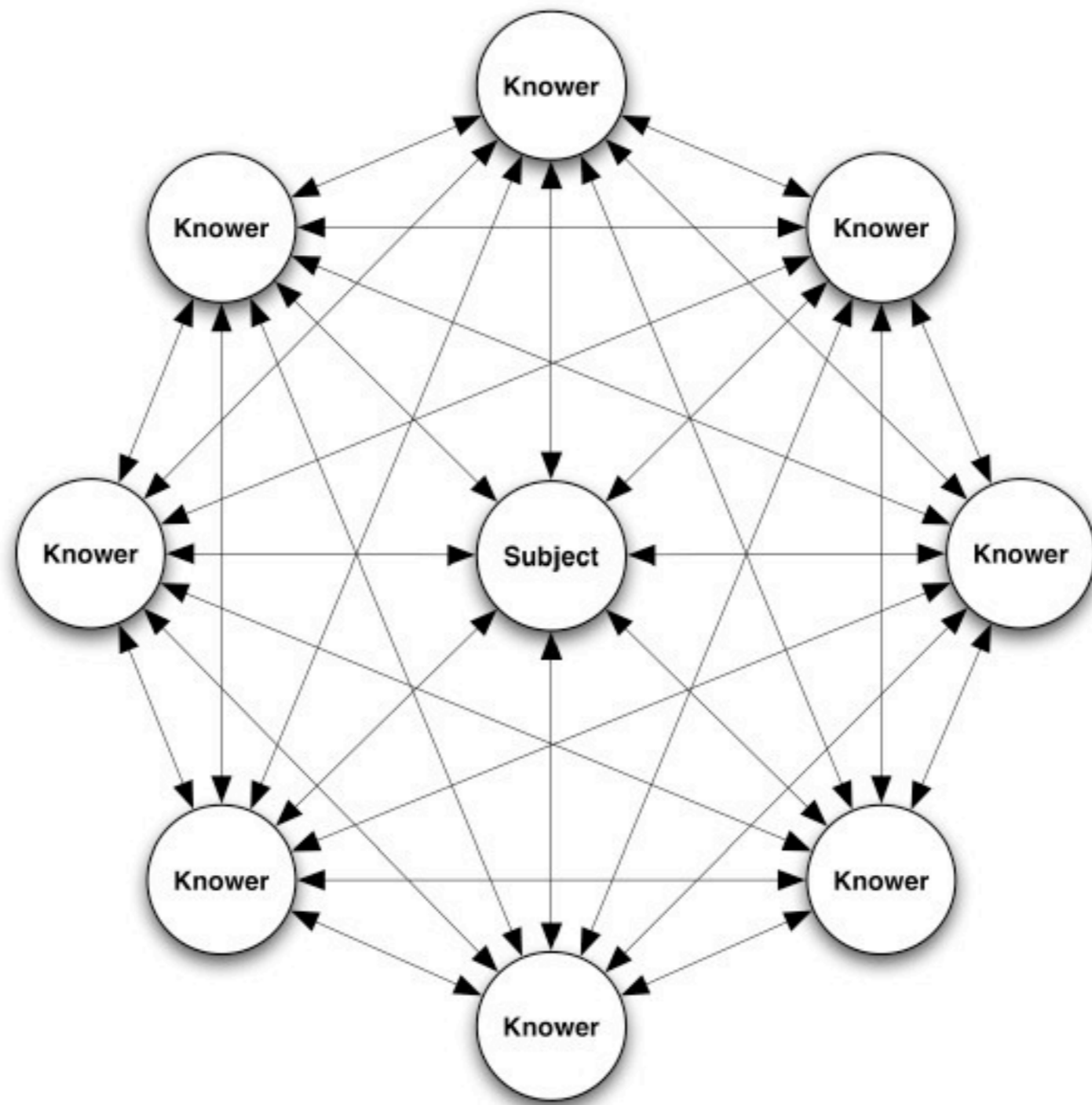
we need to support learning  
the Bible in ways that  
consciously and consistently  
understand authority in  
community-oriented ways that  
*draw out new meaning*  
rather than closing it down

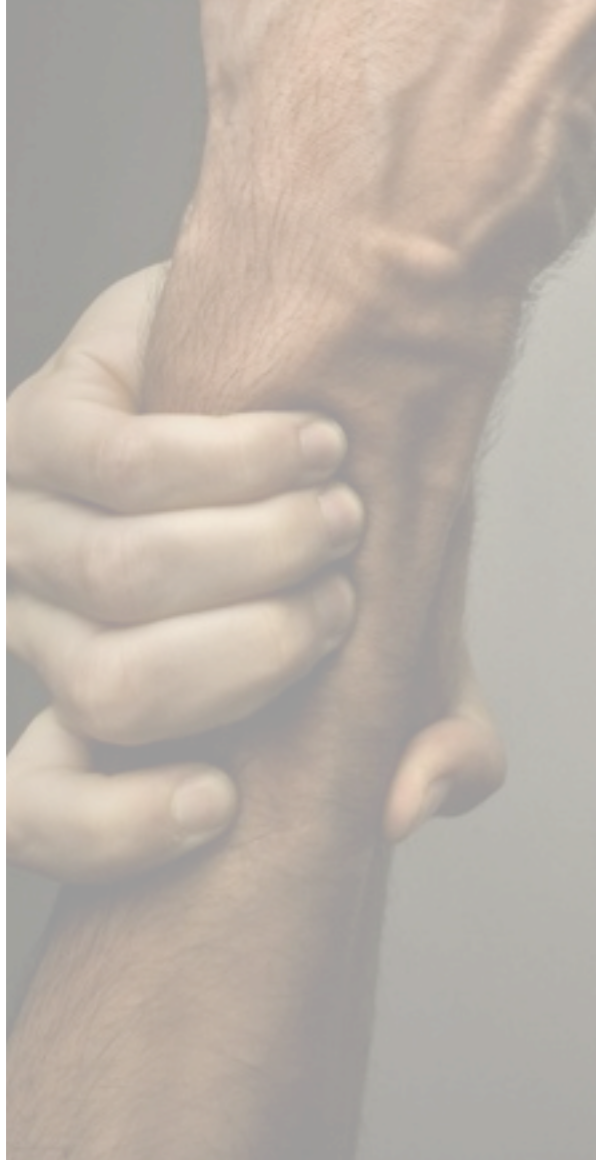


we have not done that well  
in the church



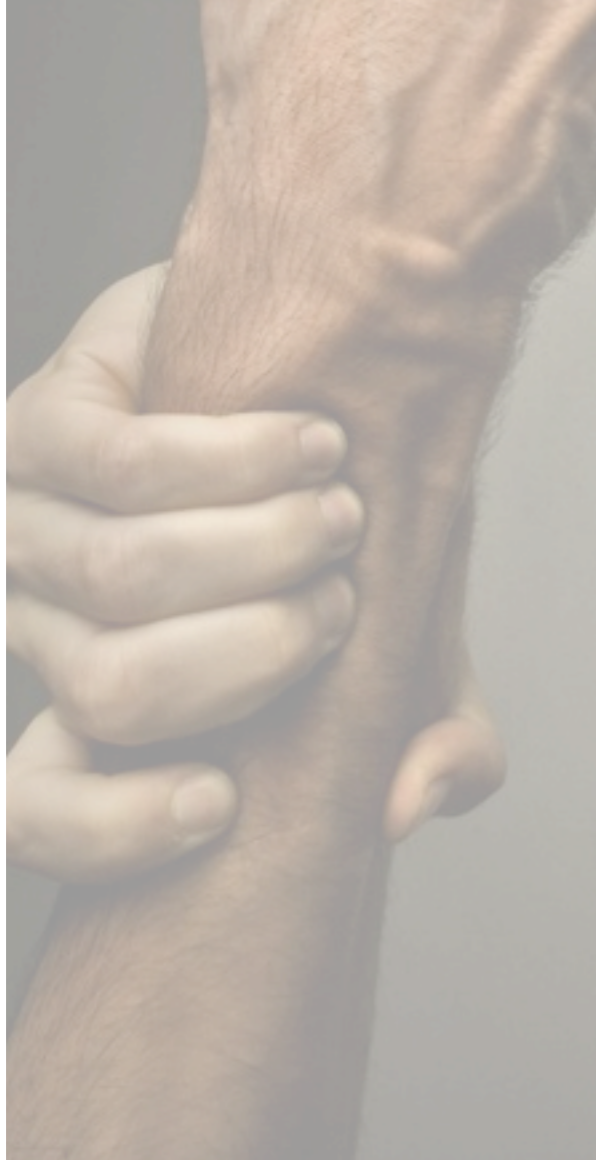






to teach is to create a space in which obedience to the truth is practiced





we create shared authority  
by supporting relationality



what about authenticity?



does our ability to “feel with”  
enlarge us or narrow us?





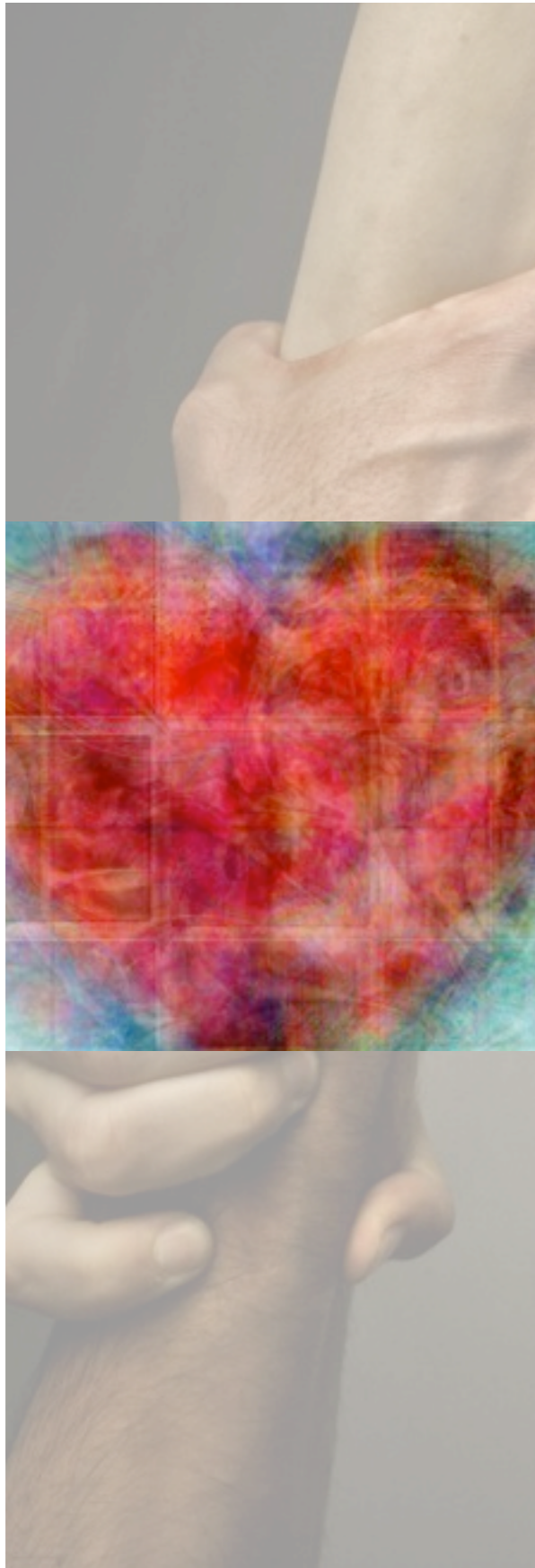
Today as well, we stand at the rich uncertain dawn of a new level of scientific innovation. ... Our technological arrogance mirrors more and more the Wellsian dystopia of dissatisfaction, while allowing us to feel safe and connected at all times. We can call, see or hear almost anything and anyone no matter where we are. For most people then, the only remote place remains within. “Know thyself” we do not.





our ability to attend to that embodiment, in all of its rich, confusing, and authentic diversity is key





the continuity we have to offer  
involves stretching  
our embodied knowing  
beyond sympathy to empathy

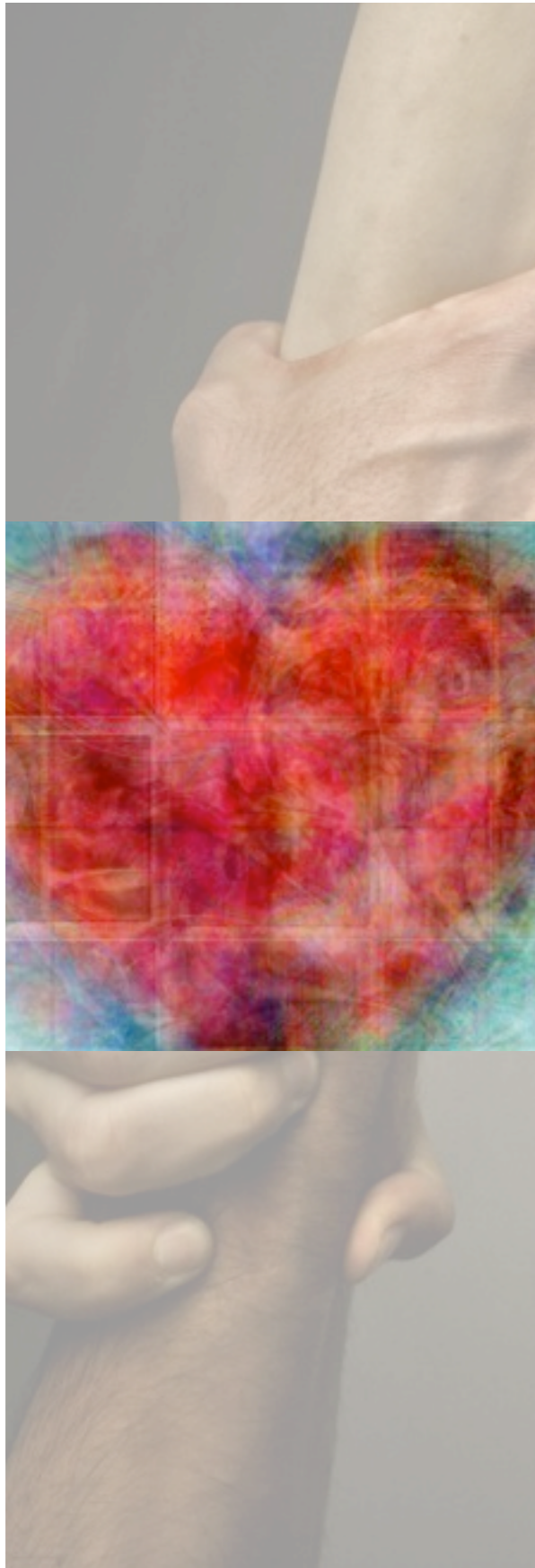






Parabolic narratives show the seams and edges of the myths we fashion. Parables show the fault lines beneath the comfortable surfaces of the worlds we build for ourselves. Myth may give stability to our story, but parables are agents of change and sometimes disruption.





mythic provides continuity,  
parabolic creates contradictions



the Bible demands *empathy*  
but media culture  
teaches us *sympathy*



empathy is a  
form of identification  
that does not merge





one can *empathize*  
without becoming the other

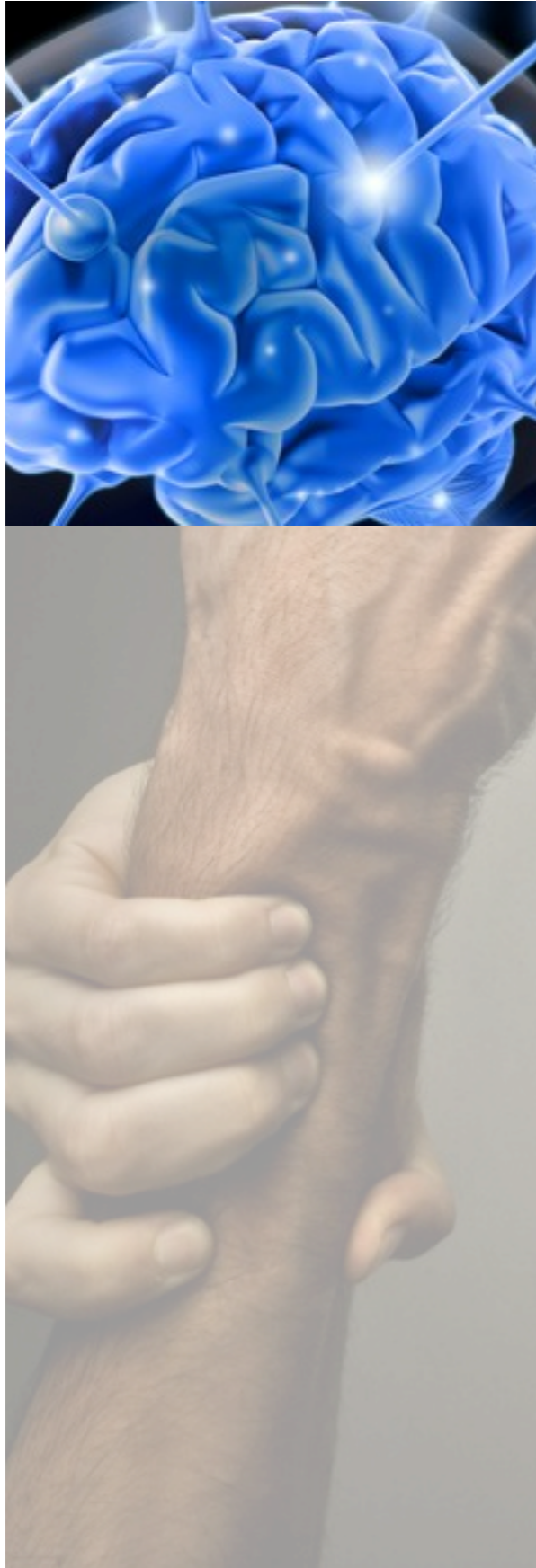


sympathy invites a kind of  
self-centeredness



the deeper call is to relationship  
with those from whom  
we are most separated





provide continuity through  
ongoing experiences  
of shared *authority*  
in participatory knowing



provide continuity through  
deepening *authentic* knowing  
from sympathy into empathy



a final element: provide  
continuity through *agency*







religious communities conceive  
of *agency* as granted by,  
empowered through, God





God's agency is highlighted,  
while human agency is intimately  
connected to God through  
community





yet many of these practices  
are increasingly unfamiliar  
to people even in vibrant  
communities of faith







we learn far more by  
telling our own stories





tell their own stories  
bound up in *God's story*





# we need to ask

---

- what do you/we think God is doing here?
- what do you/we hear God saying personally to you?
- what do you/we hear God saying to us?





we need to engage the  
responses in community





we need to help each other  
live in a God saturated world



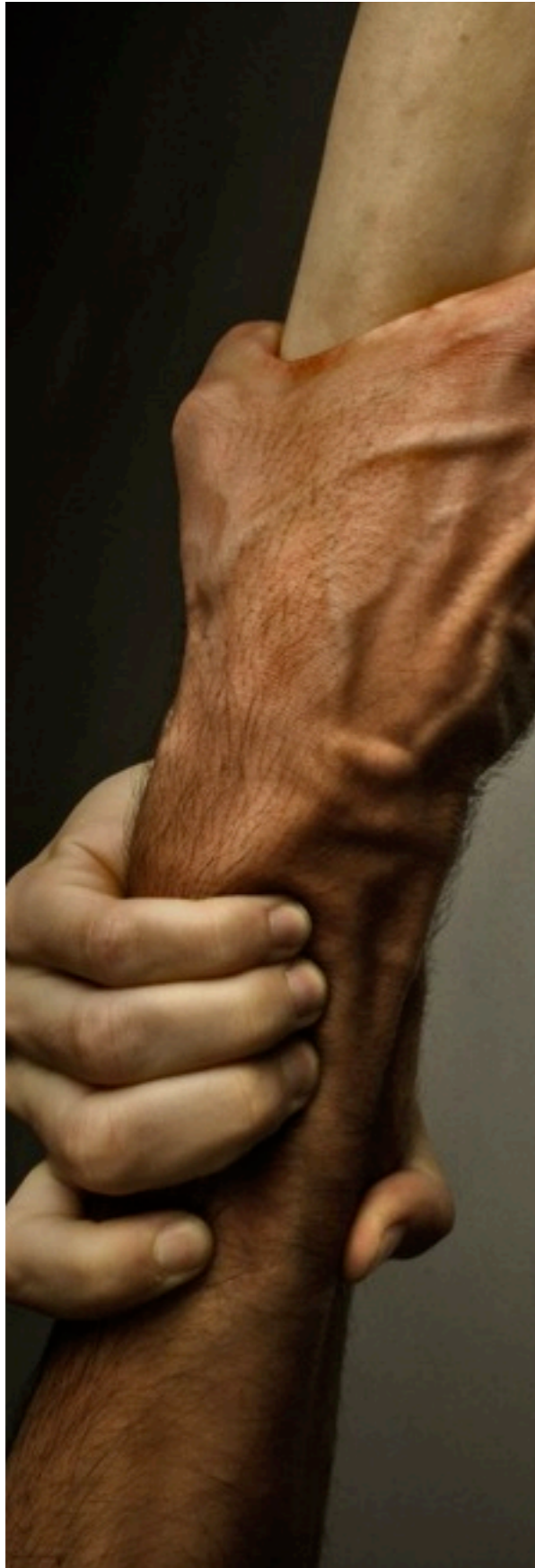


meet our learners  
where they live

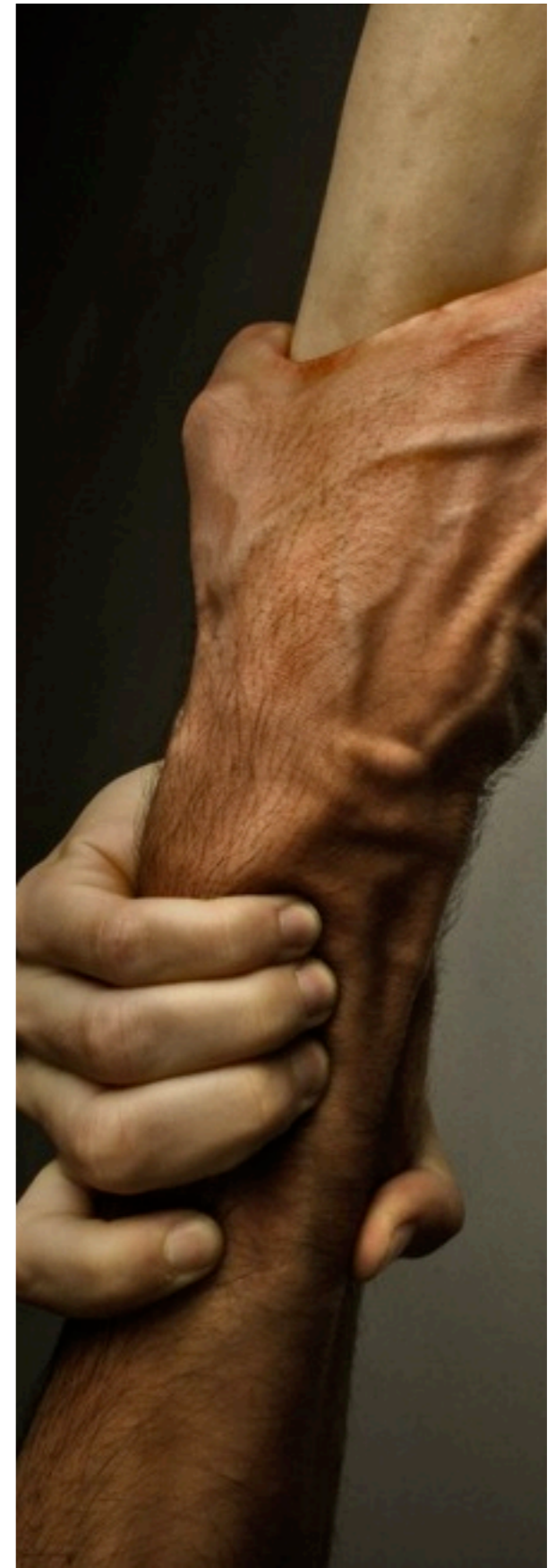




draw them more deeply  
into the contradictions

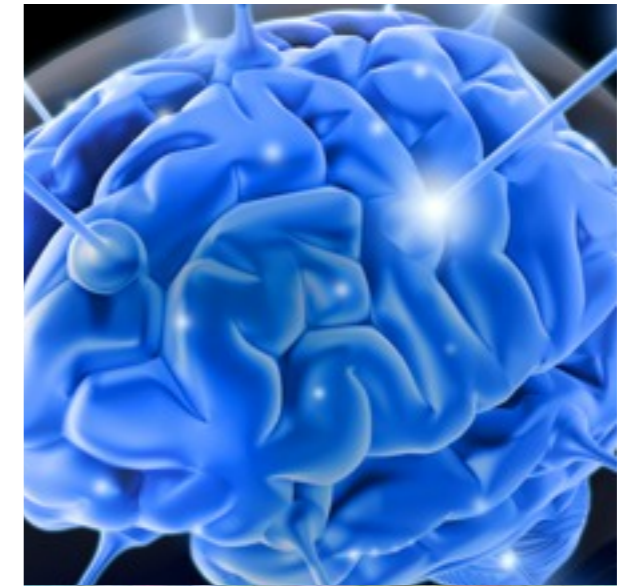


move together into  
our shared story





authorize, authenticate, take action



why learn the Bible?

it tells us who we are and who we can become

slides and citations available at  
<http://religiousused.org/heinfry>