PART TWO

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH
Whenever the church is confronted by a substantial change in cultural context, the question regarding the identity of Christianity becomes urgent. It is therefore understandable that when the European Enlightenment drastically changed the traditional life and worldview in the eighteenth and nineteenth century the well-known quest for the essence of Christianity developed that found its most eloquent expression in Adolf van Harnack’s, *Das Wesen des Christentums*. And when the first tremors of the spiritual earthquake started registering—of which the cultural Richter Scale reading is yet undisclosed and which caused the unsettled confusion that, up to this point in time, could not be adequately described, for which reason it has to be indicated by the indistinct and open ended term postmodernism—Jürgen Moltmann launched his often quoted analysis of the identity—involvement dilemma as characteristic of the theology of the second half of the twentieth century. These two examples should suffice to indicate that the question regarding the identity of Christianity and the church, which currently receives so much emphasis, is not new. It is in fact as old as the Christian church itself.

In the earliest phase of its development, the church was first confronted by the complexities and controversies generated by its relationship to Jewish orthodoxy and then by those stemming from its Greek and Roman contexts. The same type of problem repeatedly recurred...