10-1997

The Congregation: Critical Location for Faith and the Other

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Theologically considered, faith and the other, must be considered at the location where the primal face-to-face activity with Jesus takes place, the community gathered around word and sacrament: the congregation.[1] This necessity to consider faith and the other at the location of the congregation seems obvious from practical warrants alone, but these practical warrants are themselves founded upon epistemological and theological backings.[2] What follows is a painfully brief outline of the theological and epistemological backings for this practical necessity.

Logic of God

By theological backings, I primarily mean the logic of God, the interior permutations and combinations of that Being whose identity is communion.[3] God, according to trinitarian logic, is an ongoing face-to-face community. This face-to-face metaphor shows itself in the Latin concept of person as mask, the mask used by performers on stage to sound through their identities. The

Greek metaphor of hypostasis points more in the direction of God as conversations that constitute God and all being. These traditions balance one another: the one tradition emphasizes the persons of the Trinity in relationship; the other their being in communion. To say God is three persons in one being offers a significantly different image of person than the dominant one in modernity and places Christianity at profound

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[1] Here I use the term congregation "to speak of local religious assemblies in general," cf. R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations,* vol. 2, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 54.

[2] The terms practical argument, warrants, backings, etc. follow the work of Stephen Toulmin, *Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

[3] Regarding the theological concept of face-to-face community cf. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1985).

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odds with its environment. When Christians say "all being" they mean that God's creating adumbrates God's being in communion, the essential relationality of all being as being.

God, also, saves. The God whom we worship and trust in as Christians is "the God who raised Israel's Jesus from the dead."[4] This God did so as a response to Jesus having emptied himself into the form of a slave and an obedient slave, even to the creature. All of this takes place for the sake of the creatures, including the human creatures, so that we might enjoy equality with God.

Equality with God is being face-to-face in a conversation and relationship that Jesus enjoys as the Son of God. Notice that the equality with God that Jesus does not cling to for his own sake is not "sameness" in ontology but "sameness" in difference, identity in difference.[5] It is precisely in the face-to-face conversation of different persons that God is being. This face-to-face is the work of the Spirit,[6] the force field[7] that makes true the will of God,[8] even the will of God to be as communion.[9]

The ascension of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, embodies the freedom of that same Jesus to be physically present, that is, face-to-face, where he so chooses.[10] Jesus promises to choose to be present in word and sacrament always, though not exclusively, and sends the Holy Spirit as the power which calls, gathers, and enlightens by means of these face-to-face encounters of word and sacrament, congregations. Through such encounters we literally participate in the life of God who is such communion.

Epistemology

Epistemologically, I follow the lead of my doctoral advisor, Paul Ricoeur, when he teaches, first, that the truth of anything is found in attending to its phenomenology;[11] and, secondly, that its phenomenology is irreducibly embodied in symbol and metaphor.[12] For example, when he takes up the question of theodicy, he does not begin with the usual abstract syllogism, "If God is Good; and God is All Powerful, how can Evil happen?" No, indeed, he begins with the experience of Evil and he does so in its embodied forms, the stories of those who

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[4] Robert W. Jenson, "The Triune God," in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 79-191.

[5] David Fredrickson, "'Worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27)': The Ecclesiastical Significance of Christ's Political Agency," 1995, unpublished, all rights reserved; Robert P. Scharlemann, *The Being of God: theology and the experience of truth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981).

[6] See especially Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) as well as Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: on the foundation of the Crucified One in the dispute between theism and atheism*, trans. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann's Press, 1983), and Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.

[7] Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*.

[8] Eberhard Jüngel, "Zur Lehre vom heiligen Geist," in *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments: Einheit und Vielfalt neutestamentlicher Theologie: Festschrift für Eduard Schwizer zum siebzigsten Geburtstage*, ed. U. Luz and H. Weder (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1983), 98ff.

[9] Zizioulas, 74ff.

[10] Robert Jenson, "Spirit," in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 169ff.

[11] Edmund Husserl, "Phenomenology," trans. Richard E. Palmer, *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, 1927.

[12] Paul Ricouer, *Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

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suffer, and he examines the ruling metaphors within which they experience and speak their suffering. The symbol gives rise to thought. Begin with the lament not the syllogism. The syllogism will never get you to truth.

I also follow the work of Emmanuel Levinas who teaches us to avoid the temptation to totalization through abstractions; that the search for truth begins not with the question of metaphysics but with the question of justice and ethical reflection; it begins with the concrete attention to the face-to-face encounter with the other, the topic of our conference.[13]

Practical warrants

The practical reasons that I choose to begin with the congregation should be obvious. The congregation, the local church, can do the most about our relationship with the other, and it is all too often the place where the least is done. At one time, before the major changes in immigration policy in 1965, national offices for global mission and theological schools were the most likely location for the encounter with the otherness of the global community. However, since 1965 the world has been coming to the United States in greater diversity than previously, and our congregations are the site where the most intense, vital, and too often, deadly encounters with global community are taking place. No matter how wonderful our formulations here, if they do not consider the way the congregations actually function as human communities of faith and the other, we do far less good than the church expects from its teaching theologians.

For too long, those of us in this room and the institutions we represent have thought of theology as a commodity that we produce. We then wholesale it to our students and they retail it in their places of employment. We have both assumed and abetted the alienation of the people of God from producing their own critical theology. We have either left them to their supposed innocent, uncritical piety, or we have sent our students to make up an enlightened elite core of theologians in residence, either lay or clergy. As our primary task, we have not seen ourselves as the servants of the people of God as they go about the tough task of attending, asserting, deciding, and acting on the basis of their own theological reflection.[14] Any faithful and effective theological reflection on faith and the other must begin in such servanthood. For though we may think globally, we must act locally. And, if we expect any action locally, we must serve those who we would invite to action.

On the surface my theological premises may seem in direct contradiction to my epistemological ones. In the theological, I appear to begin with the metaphysical. However, if you read closely you will see that my description of the being of God follows from the particularity of Jesus in his irreducible difference from what western metaphysics teaches us is deity. Further, I describe the search for truth by way of the question of justice, a community of strangers, even in God. Linking these apparent contradictions follows.

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[13] Immanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Liagis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

[14] See especially Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: theological reflection and Christian ministry* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1980), and Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985).

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Hospitality to the stranger

In recent years I have found the symbol or metaphor that gives rise to the most fruitful thought regarding faith and the other is "hospitality to the stranger."[15] Several characteristics of "hospitality to the stranger" as a metaphor need noting.

First, I view it primarily as a pupil's metaphor rather than a master's metaphor. With a master's metaphor, the thinker or speaker remains master; a master's metaphor illustrates an abstract idea of which the metaphor is merely an example. It is mere rhetoric. This, incidentally, is the model of metaphor and rhetoric taught in most universities since the Enlightenment and became almost unquestioned by Victorian (whether English or otherwise) writing theory. This keeps the Enlightened self well in charge, ruling all that it thinks and speaks, the master of its own knowing and experiencing. The pupil's metaphor, by contrast, is a metaphor within which I know, experience, think, and speak. Such metaphors are alive; they cannot be reduced to examples or illustrations of an abstract thought. They rule rather than being ruled.[16]

Second, "hospitality to the stranger" is hardly a uniquely Christian pupil's metaphor. It comes to us Christians both externally, from other traditions, and specifically from within the Christian tradition. Surely, no one in the west could possibly claim that "hospitality to the stranger" is unique to Christianity. Clearly Judaism and Islam draw upon the metaphor. More interestingly, so do many of the ancient religions and cultures of the west. Who could read the Iliad and Odyssey and not see the power of this metaphor embedded in its story? Similarly, the metaphor is present in great Eastern traditions as well.[17] I spent a major portion of the summer teaching at Vancouver School of Theology with students from

several major Asian cultures who readily shared stories of "hospitality to the stranger" and offered rules of hospitality embedded in their culture. My experience with several Native peoples, including the Lakota/Dakota, Crow, Zuni, Navaho, Inuit, Inupiat, and Macaw communities confirm the power of the face-to-face encounter with the other and the themes of hospitality within these encounters.

Third, although it is hardly a unique Christian pupil metaphor, it is a major pupil metaphor within the biblical narrative. Once the metaphor came to my attention, I began to see its place within the basic woof and warp of Scripture and Christian tradition. This is especially true in the encounter with God, even the encounter of disciples with Jesus after his resurrection.

Fourth, and perhaps the most obvious, "hospitality to the stranger" as a pupil's metaphor is best understood as a freeze-dried narrative. If we forget that this metaphor, this symbol, only has life when embedded in a particular story, we lose almost all that we have gained in our work to this point. As common as the metaphor is, it cannot become an abstraction carried in one's pocket from culture to culture, tribe to

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[15] See my *Welcoming the Stranger: a public theology of worship and evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) as well as my "The other: hospitality to the stranger, Levinas, and multicultural mission" in *Dialog* 30 (Winter 1991):36-43.

[16] Paul Ricouer, *The Rule of Metaphor, multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language,* trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), and Richard Lischer, "What Language Shall I Borrow? The Role of Metaphor in Proclamation," *dialog* 26 (Fall 1987):281-86.

[17] Anthony J. Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers: Meeting the Challenge of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), especially chapters 4 and 5, pp. 84-110 and 110-138.

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tribe, neighborhood to neighborhood. It must be embodied in a particular and peculiar narrative, with particular and peculiar creatures, or we lose the disclosive power of truth found in plurality, ambiguity, and difference.[18] In short, if we do not do our theology locally, and become the servants of the people of God who are the primary theologians in particular, peculiar, and different face-to-face communities, we are not letting the pupil metaphor rule but have turned it and those particular communities, those irreducible others, into our slaves, mere examples of our ideas. We remain more captured by Plato's vision of the philosopher kings than by Jesus' vision of slaves who free others to govern themselves.

Over the past several years we at Church Innovations Institute have moved from a theoretical consideration of this metaphor to embodying it within a model of research and theological reflection. When thinking within this metaphor, we begin with members of local congregations functioning as participant interpreters. On the basis of their gathered stories and field notes, we then have reading teams who read with members of congregations (participant interpreters) through specific narratives gathered and interpreted by them from their own congregations. Each reading team member brings their own specialty to this shared process of interpretation. Some are church historians, theologians, biblical scholars; some family systems therapists, parish consultants, scholars of distance learning, sociologists, ethnographers, educators, and community organizers. What they share is a vision that sees themselves as a learning organization that functions as slaves for these congregations so that the congregations might have the leisure to critically reflect on God's activity within their lives.

As I have participated in such reading
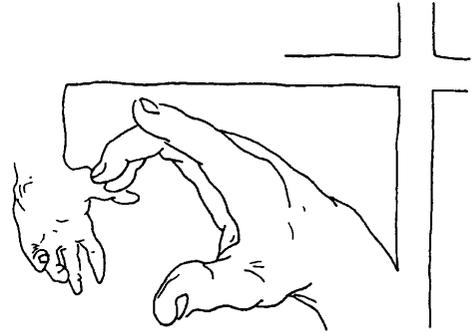
teams, I have followed the lead of Levinas in exploring hospitality to the stranger through three moments: the self as stranger; the other as stranger; and God as stranger. Allow me to share a few thoughts that have arisen from reading the narratives of some congregations as they encounter the other as communities of faith.

The self as stranger

As I read the stories of individuals and congregations and their encounter with others, a number of disillusionments show themselves. Their chief disillusionment is with the promise that modernity has made to them about the security of the unencumbered self, the free self of the Enlightenment. They speak of how they feel like they will never grow up, never really know who they are. They feel in a perpetual youth identity crisis, with new stages and passages[19] driven by forces quite against a

[18] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: hermeneutics, religion, hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).
[19] Gail Sheehy, *Passages. Predictable Passages of Adult Life* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976).

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supposed unencumbered will. They expe-
rience themselves as irreducibly other, as
stranger. They long to have themselves
secure and known, but the more they know
about themselves, the more they fail to have
themselves as fully known.

Psychiatrist and social critic Robert
Jay Lifton has followed this development of
the post-modern self over several decades.
Some of his initial work spoke of Protean
Man, drawing on the classical imagery of
Proteus who was a shape shifter long before
Deep Space Nine and Star Trek imagined
them. In his earlier work he bemoaned these
modern creatures and hoped that a true self,
an authentic self, an existentialist self might
emerge among them. More recently he has
attacked this very longing. He has found
that the drive of modernity had led man (and
we know it was man the Enlightenment
fathers had in mind) to seek an authentic,
fundamental self. However, Lifton says
such a self does not exist. And, even if it did,
it would not be suitable to the task of selves
in our time that need these protean capabili-
ties.[20] What he uncovers is the self as
irreducibly other to itself, self as stranger.[21]

This post-modern self does not experi-
ence the security of self control, self deter-
mination, self esteem that naturally wells
up within the self, even though all the self-
help books tell them they should. Congre-
gations that create space for such honest
having of one self as an other, that allow
such selves to attend, assert, decide, and act
without having it all together, without en-
joying self control, self determination, and
complete self esteem, thrive in our time.

Should we be surprised at the impor-
tance of the small group movement? Rob-
ert Wuthnow, now in three separate mono-
graphs, documents the "small group revo-
lution" that has powerfully transformed four
out of every ten Americans in the last 15
years.[22] Time and time again, our research

at Church Innovations shows how thriving
congregations that are able to reach the
unchurched and genuinely secular, rather
than just reintegrate already existing church
members from another congregation, use
small groups that attend to this profound
anxiety and anomie of the post-modern self.

These congregations with effective
small group ministry are places that allow
the publicly optimistic American to attend
to what Langdon Gilkey has recently called
the "radical ambiguity of our culture's life,
its deep levels of anxiety and of anomie, its
hidden layers of guilt, and its fear of death."
Gilkey holds that what the modern "secu-
larist does not see, nor perhaps even the
liberal, is this radical ambiguity."[23] How-
ever, he says, "to this radical ambiguity and
anxiety conservative [Christians] offered a
religious option visibly different from the
culture and thus capable of promising the
latter's rescue. To me, says Gilkey, only
this understanding of a culture whose cre-

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[20] Robert Jay Lifton, *Broken Connection:
On Death and the Continuity of Life* (Wash-
ington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press,
1979); *Protean Self: Human Resilience in an
Age of Fragmentation* (New York: Basic
Books, 1993).

[21] The obvious debt to Paul Ricoeur in
this entire analysis should be clear. Cf. his
Gifford Lectures, *Oneself as Another,* trans.
Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of
Chicago, 1992).

[22] Robert W. Wuthnow, *"I come away
stronger"*: *how small groups are shaping
American religion* (Grand Rapids: W. B.
Eerdmanns, 1994); *Sharing the journey:
support groups and America's new quest for
community* (New York: Free Press, 1994), and
"Small groups forge new notions of commu-
nity and the sacred," in *Christian Century*
110:1236-40 (December 8, 1993).

[23] Langdon Gilkey, "The Christian
Congregation as Religious Community," in
American Congregations, ed. Wind and
Lewis, 2:111.

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ativity (its rationality, moral ideals, toler-ance, devotion to freedom) continually lures liberals to accommodate their religion to modernity, and yet whose deep faults cry out for a noncultural religious response, can make sense of the paradox of a declining liberalism and a resurgent fundamentalism. The mainline churches apparently offered nothing different enough from the culture either to stem the slippage to the secular or to answer the religious problems generated out of the secular culture." [24]

The growing awareness of having one's self as an irreducible other opens the door for the Lutheran witness to its traditional stance on the goodness of the created self, the bondage of the will, and the power of the regenerated self that dwells in Christ by the power of the Spirit. All three realities need our witness in order for us to honestly, effectively, and faithfully offer genuine res-cue to the post-modern self, the self that has its self as an irreducible other, a stranger.

However, too many among us choose, in the name of metaphysical coherence, one or another of these three different construc-tions of the self. Some of us tacitly acqui-esce to the liberal sinless self thinking that the only real debate is between which part of the immoral society is the worst: big business and capitalism or big government and socialism. We create a social mani-chaenism that sees the liberal self caught in an immoral society and systemic oppres-sion. Such social manichaeans leave be-hind both the power of the created self to do much good, even though it is in bondage to sin, and the role of the law and wrath of God to accomplish much good for the stranger. Still others misappropriate the Lutheran teaching of the bondage of the will and use it as an excuse to privatize the life of the Christian, reduce it to the saved self, and lose the public community of faith active in love, seeking justice. Still others among us

neglect the profound need of the self to find its rest in God, in the Other, and instead offer all manner of psychological, self es-teem, self help programs in lieu of the death

Should we be surprised at the importance of the small group movement?

of the empirical self that is the beginning of the Christian life in Christ through sharing his death in baptism. Still others, appalled at the cultural chaos in family and work, jump over justification by grace, through faith, into a supposed third use of the law for Christians. They offer either a right or left wing list of virtues as the solution to the anomie and ambiguity of American culture, a quick fix to an enduring human crisis.

When all self is mediated before and through the other, think what such a deconstructed doctrine of the self would mean to the discussion of decision theology among us; and more importantly, the place of Christian transformation in the life of the individual and the community of faith. This brings to an end metaphysics and episte-mology as we have known it. It opens up new doors for conversation with certain Eastern religious thought, especially Bud-dhism on the death of the empirical self. [25]

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[24] Gilkey, "The Christian Congregation," 111.
[25] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie Band 3* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 608.

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The other as stranger

The possibilities for thinking theologically regarding faith and the other through the metaphor of hospitality to the stranger are perhaps most obvious in the other as stranger. However, most of our theological work in mainline Protestantism in this possibility has focused in denominational and supraparochial and extracongregational religion. We continue to do theology as if the impressive documentation and considerable length of scholarship of the declining significance of denominationalism had not been written.[26] We have decried the failure of congregations to concern themselves with the public life, reduced the public life to government, and presumed to speak on behalf of the church through so-called church social statements and lobbyists in legislatures. All the time ignoring the critical reality that discipleship and citizenship are primally and enduringly located in local communities of faith.

We have tended as a scholarly community to accept the judgment of scholars like Gibson Winter and Peter Berger in the 1960s and 1970s that congregations had become simply conclaves of the private. And we explain the success of growing churches to their acquiescence to this private enclave mentality and to individualism.[27]

There is ample evidence for the habit of most mainline congregations to live within private metaphors, the family being the dominant one. Our research at Church Innovations has shown how excluding this metaphor can be when it is the ruling metaphor for congregational life. From the side of clergy, it creates the model of the family home chaplain and a ministry based upon intimacy and personal presence. In its worst case scenarios it creates extremely fused emotional systems. These fused emotional systems not only exclude the stranger but

they also allow, aid, and abet the abuse of boundaries, physical and emotional.

Incidentally, the excellent work of family systems theories has been extensively taken up into the study of congregations. Many excellent and "how-to" books applying these theories to congregations are leading to healthier systems.[28] However, I find that most of the congregations with whom we work and who use these family systems approaches have not broken out of the family home ruling or root metaphor. As a result, they effectively use family systems theory to analyze their dysfunction but ineffectively try to use it as the dominant metaphor for healthy congregations. Congregations, at their primal best, are not families in any literal sense of the word. They are always more, much more, irreducibly and essentially more; they are public and private.

Be that as it may, many observers, though not most, are discovering the importance of congregations as more than conclaves of the private. They see the congregations as mediating between the public and private institutions of contemporary society. In the 1980s many who studied congregations spoke of congregations as mediating structures between the public and the private. Parker Palmer spoke of

[26] Robert W. Wuthnow, *Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), especially chapter 5, "The Declining Significance of Denominationalism," 71-99.

[27] Martin E. Marty, "Public and Private: Congregation as Meeting Place," in *American Congregations*, ed. Wind and Lewis, 133-66.

[28] Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: a family process in church and synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), and Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregation: a systems approach* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1996).

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them as bridges between the public and private dimensions of our lives. As such, congregations are critical to the life of the community. Many supracongregational observers increasingly see congregations as critical to delivering social services that in the recent past have been delivered by government agencies. Both the right and left have become interested in congregations in this instrumental manner.[29]

The theme of "the other" and hospitality to the stranger has been taken into the more traditionally liberal (and here I mean liberal in the sense that Ronald Reagan was the most liberal President of the United States in the 20th century) and abstract metaphor: inclusivity. "Hospitality to the stranger" as freeze dried narrative of the Scriptures has become in the hands of many of us a master metaphor to illustrate inclusivity, the ruling metaphor of our imaginations. In doing so we show ourselves more American than Christian; more modern, than either traditional or post-modern; more persons of privilege who can presume we are the ones to invite, welcome, and include. Within the "inclusivity ruling metaphor" the local, concrete, messy, irreducible otherness fades into abstraction. We can talk, talk, talk about doing it but can only blame the racism, classism, sexism, etc. of our members for why we change our lived reality so little.

God as stranger

In contrast to this using the image of hospitality to the stranger as a master metaphor for the abstraction "inclusivity," we should be ruled by the biblical image of hospitality to the stranger in which we are all strangers depending upon God's hospitality. God is the host; the critical, essential character of the congregation grows out of the presence of the Holy One who raised Israel's Jesus

Congregations, at their primal best, are not families in any literal sense of the word. They are always more, much more, irreducibly and essentially more...

from the dead. Too often all this talk of faith and the other, of hospitality to the stranger, and especially inclusivity, is covering our failure to trust that the essential character of congregation, and our life as Christians, grows out of the presence of this Holy One. We busy ourselves with growing churches, or filling food shelves, or renewing the liturgy, or endowing chairs at seminaries, or any number of good things but ignore the deep and profound spiritual crisis in our midst.

Langdon Gilkey, having noted the external decline of mainline Protestant denominations, identifies a much more powerful inner loss. "It is as if, now that they can no longer see themselves as the central nurturers and irreplaceable guardians of the nation's moral and spiritual health, they are now not at all sure who they are, what as communities they represent, and what their role in the wider community may be—as if, granted that their former sociological role is gone, no other sort of role, no "minority"

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[29] Cf. Marty, "Public and Private."

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Whatever else congregations are, they are face-to-face communities of faith.... Their one unique characteristic is that they offer a peculiar sense of the holy.

task, is open to them.[30] Whatever else congregations are, they are face-to-face communities of faith, they are religious communities. Their one unique characteristic is that they offer a peculiar sense of the holy.

Our research at Church Innovations both confirms the profound spiritual crisis, the inability to attend to the irreducibly other, to God, and our tendency to keep those moments when we do strictly within the private sphere. For example, in our Partnership for Congregational Renewal, congregations commit themselves to a three to five year process of spiritual discernment. As a part of this process, members of the Church Innovations staff who are mission developers converse and pray with key leaders in the Partner congregations. Time and time again, over 80% of the pastors within this setting reveal that they have no devotional disciplines. Their use of scripture is almost totally related to preaching, teaching, and other vocational ends. They experience a great spiritual wasteland and tie this wasteland experience to their profound ambivalence toward the essential tasks of mission and outreach into their commu-

nities. Why should they risk the anger and conflict that arises from moving from maintenance to mission, if they do not experience the gospel as true and regularly dwell in and attend to the presence of God in word and sacrament?

This last set of findings and questions returns us to Gilkey's observations around how we experience the Other, the Holy Presence, in our congregations. It drives us into the reality of God as the Other, perhaps the most neglected dialectic in our theology of faith and the other. It drives us back to where this essay began—the Trinitarian, theological backings for understanding the congregation as a necessary but not sufficient place for considering faith and the other. Our linking of practical warrants with epistemological and theological backings is complete.

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[30] Gilkey, "The Christian Congregation," 104.

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