

## THE 1993 H. PAUL DOUGLASS LECTURE

### TELLING CONGREGATIONAL STORIES<sup>1</sup>

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Although an occasion like the H. Paul Douglass lecture places one voice in a privileged position, it is also an occasion to remind ourselves that this is a time in the history of our discipline when we need to hear many voices, listening to the varied stories that describe the religious world today. In last year's RRA presidential address, Wade Clark Roof challenged us to recognize the power of narratives - challenged us to see their power to reveal the meanings and relationships in which they are embedded, to hear the implicit ordering of lives that narratives construct (Roof, 1993). I want to begin with that challenge, taking up the task of telling stories - both the stories that I have been hearing in my research lately, and the stories that shape us as a discipline.

And so I begin by telling a story of my own. It took place in 1992. A group was gathering in a large, unadorned, gym-like conference room in Pittsburgh. It was to be one of the few sessions at the American Sociological Association devoted to religion, and the topic was secularization. When I arrived, it was almost time for the session to begin, and I took a seat toward the back. There was a big crowd - not just the usual suspects. I thought, "Hmm, maybe there are more sociologists interested in religion than we thought." Or maybe they just came to reassure themselves that religion really is dying, and they can go on studying other more important things.

Then I started doing what my sociological instincts always tell me to do - I started checking out the demographics of the crowd. I tallied up the people on the platform first: five persons, all male, all white, all of European descent, all between 50 and 65 - not much variation there. Then I checked out the audience.

There were perhaps 200 people in the room and, to my surprise, they were almost all male, too. I could see no more than 25 other women. It was stunning. I quit counting, quit looking for other regularities. Where were all the women? Admittedly women are rarely a majority in any session, but surely there should be more than ten percent. Could it be that this topic is not of concern to women in the same way it evidently is to men? If so, why?

And then, as I listened, things began to make sense in a new way. Secularization, you see, is the core myth that defines our discipline. What began to sink in that day is the extent to which this - like all such stories - belongs to those who have the power to speak it.<sup>1</sup> It has been crafted to make sense of the lives of those whose lives "count" in ways that other lives do not.

The story goes something like this:<sup>2</sup>

*Once upon a time all of life was full of the sacred. Whatever could not be explained was chalked up to divine action. All social power was legitimated by sacred symbols and stories. Eventually all this sacred power was drawn together into offices and institutions that defined the moral, political, and social life of a people. Religious officials stood at the center of the society, either wielding governmental power directly or defining the boundaries within which others could wield such power. Whether or not any given ordinary individual had strong religious sensibilities didn't matter because the whole culture carried the meanings and mores of religion.*

*But then the evil beast of modernity arrived. [Or, alternative reading: Then the great white knight of enlightenment rode into view.] Slowly the sacred disappeared from view, taking refuge in the tiny crevices of the "private sphere." The authority of the religious leaders was usurped by scientists, and might and right were defined by political leaders and technocrats. "Public" life was disenchanting and, despite periodic rumblings from the "private" sphere, religion was forever robbed of its power.*

This is a compelling story. It is one we have told and retold, argued over and researched. It makes sense of so very much of what we see. But since that day in Pittsburgh I have found myself wondering over and over what would happen if we built our theories from the bottom up, if we started by listening to the experiences of those whose ideas never make it into libraries and whose practices simply get them through everyday life.

This task of listening from the margins is a task to which we are called by, among others, feminist and womanist sociologists such as Karen McCarthy Brown (1991) and Victoria Erickson (1993). They remind us that the first step in reconstructing what we think we know about the world is listening to the voices - the stories - of those at the margins. Patricia Hill Collins (1985) has written about the interpretive advantages of being an outsider. We simply see things others do not see. While the outsider, too, has a particular location, a particular filter through which the world is seen, the presence of the outsider's perspective in itself calls into question the universality of the supposed center, a process Dorothy Smith has been writing about for a decade and a half (e.g., Smith, 1979).

So, what if, instead of looking at the numbers in the establishment institutions, we looked at the practices that exist outside those institutions? What if, instead of looking at the grand theories of theologians to see how they have accommodated to the grand theories of scientists, we looked at the common sense and experience of everyday life? Would we still tell the same stories about the relationship between religion and society? I do not yet know all that those other stories might tell us. What I have to say has much more to do with the ways in which old stories do not fit than it has to do with any new grand theory that holds the new stories together. But then, the point is that grand theory never really does hold all the stories together.

Stephen Warner (1993) has pointed out to us many of the ways in which that old story - that old paradigm, in his words - no longer makes good sense of much of the data we encounter when we study religion. What I want to suggest is that it also fails to make sense because it is not - and probably never was - the story of everyone, either in Europe or in America. If we begin to listen to different voices, we may discover a very different story.

To begin to listen to different voices requires, however, that we recognize the way in which our core story has been framed in "public vs. private" terms, drawing lines that declare

"private" religious behavior insignificant for social life. Among the most cogent and eloquent of the spokesmen for this way of telling the story is Frank Lechner. He makes the arguments for secularization in a manner that is a model of intellectual coherence. His claim is that secularization theory is *about* institutions and the larger cultural sphere, not about the religious behavior of the masses. "The level of spirituality of the masses is not," he says, "decisive at all. If in traditional societies intellectual elites and ruling classes used religious faith to preserve their unity, to exert influence, and to define what ultimately mattered in the society then popular religiosity is simply not that important" (Lechner, 1991:1107).

Feminist scholars, however, would warn us to be careful of such a theory - both because it leaves us unable to account for some awfully interesting social phenomena and because it assumes that cultural life is defined by the official, elite, "public" institutions and ideologies of the day. While no one would want to discount those official social realities, we must, however, question whether they can be assumed to stand for the whole of culture and whether the so-called "private" sphere can be assumed not to shape behavior in the worlds of work, politics, consumption and the like. While on the one hand institutional differentiation seems an undeniable social fact, on the other hand, I am not sure we can assume either rigid boundaries around those institutions or a complete differentiation of consciousness, symbol, and narrative.

But enough abstraction. The time has come for more stories. A little over two years ago, with the support of the Lilly Endowment and working in conjunction with Peter Berger and the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University, my colleague Art Famsley and I launched into directing a project that would look at congregations in rapidly changing communities. We wanted to look at the relationship between religion and social change as it is experienced at the local institutional level. What happens when local communities undergo significant changes in their cultural and economic landscape? How is that change interpreted and acted upon in local congregations?

The communities we selected for study - located in Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis/Anderson, Atlanta, and Los Angeles - could have been almost anywhere. Change is no stranger to any of us. The communities we settled on simply give us a sampling of different kinds of change - economic growth and economic decline, immigration, the growth of recognizable gay and lesbian communities, and increasing stratification within the African American population. This list is admittedly not exhaustive of all the kinds of changes we could have examined, but it includes a sampling of both economic and cultural changes, "good" changes, ambiguous changes, and "bad" changes.

With the help of a team of eighteen researchers, the first stage of our project involved an inventory of all the congregations in each community and a survey of the demographic and institutional shifts they are facing. From the nearly 450 congregations we found, we selected eighteen for a closer look, and each researcher spent the next six months participating in the life of the congregation, interviewing leaders and members, and mapping out the patterns of action, the ideas - the stories - that capture that congregation's efforts to come to terms with its changed circumstances.

Along the way we talked to over 300 individuals and watched eighteen churches in action. Some of what we saw and heard looks a great deal like what our secularization myth might predict. Several congregations are filled with consumption-oriented people who are looking for a place to meet optional, individual, religious needs. At Carmel United Methodist,<sup>3</sup> in an

affluent suburb of Indianapolis, for instance, most members seem to want a place that will teach their children a little Christianity and a modicum of morality. But, as one parent noted, they certainly would not force their kids to go to church activities they were getting nothing out of. The older generation in that church probably would have forced the kids to go. That is just what one did. One man said, "the symbol of my faith is my mother...My mother would say, 'Where else would you be on Sunday morning? I don't understand where you'd go. What would you do? Just sit in a chair? Everybody goes to church.'" The older generation had a pattern of action that placed church at the center of a set of "civil religious" institutions, vital to being a member of the community. The current generation of parents still sees the church as important, but want a great deal more choice about how it meets their needs. Neither generation, in this particular church, can really explain *why* they or their children should be in church, except that it will make them better citizens of the community. Judging from our observations of the youth group in this congregation, the next generation may not be in the church at all (and they may not be particularly good citizens). What we see in this establishment church is a progression from a well-entrenched, habitual civil religion to a religion-of-choice to the abandonment of religion altogether. They seem to fit the secularization myth quite well.

These are people for whom religion is a tidy package, selected from the available consumable products, chosen to meet particular needs, mostly for assistance in child-rearing. Parsons would have been proud. Except insofar as religion has imparted a kind of moral conscience, these people do not organize their lives around their religious identities or their activities around a religious community. They are certainly not my fundamentalist Bible Believers (Ammerman, 1987). They even have a hard time finding any language to describe what their faith is, who God is, what, if anything God demands, or especially what it means to be a member of their particular denomination. Most of them say - quite explicitly that denomination means nothing. They would just as gladly be something else, if another congregation suited their needs better.

But those are not the only stories we heard. We have also heard dozens of people, from the most liberal to the most conservative, talk about how their faith has shaped how they live their lives. Not surprisingly, they tell us stories about how faith has sustained them and their families or helped them through a crisis.

A young woman in a liberal Lutheran church:

*I was very much alone. I finished my sophomore year of college...,and my marriage was breaking up. I knew one person in the entire county. And it was a rough time for me. And the church was a real port in the storm.*

An older white woman in a mostly-black Episcopal church:

*When I fell and I couldn't drive, there were several members of the church that came over and took Lynette to the grocery store and they offered to take me to church.... One member of the church takes me to the eye doctor every two or three weeks. A young wife and mother in a Church of God congregation:*

*What helped most was our Sunday school class. In their prayers, in their caring. I just felt that I was able to share real easily...I've sometimes felt that I went through all that infertility treatment for a reason...It's the hardest thing I can remember going through in*

*my life. I had people ask me, "Why aren't you mad at God?", because I wanted a child so badly. But I knew that it really wasn't God's fault that I wasn't able to conceive, and I thought that he would know when the best time is. And now looking back, I truly believe he knew.*

These are stories about "private" lives, but they are also stories that have to do with navigating a way through all the institutions that shape our lives - from friendships to grocery stores to the medical establishment. The everyday realities these women encountered were given both practical shape and meaning by their religious beliefs and associations. What it meant to be faithful included for them both prayer and action.

That combination of prayer and action is also heard in the stories that more obviously include what we have come to think of as "public." One of the members of Grace Baptist Church in Anderson, Indiana, is head of a UAW local. During a praise service one evening, he got up to report that his back was stiff from riding in the car - he had just gotten back from Detroit. He went there to talk to a Vice President at General Motors to ask what was going to happen to Delco and Inland Fisher Guide and the other area plants where he had workers. He asked, "Are we gonna be here five years from now?" The Vice President at GM told him they were asking themselves if GM was going to be here in five years. This union official was appealing to his church to pray about this. "There's a lot riding on these plants; they could affect 200,000 to 300,000 people in the spin-off plants. Please pray for this situation; it's critical."

What could such praying possibly mean? In this case, it certainly did not mean sitting by waiting for divine intervention. This official was active in leading his union to re-organize work in ways that would minimize their risks of massive cuts. He recounted later to researcher Connie Zeigler:

*They came in and did a study and it didn't come out too favorable for our work habits and managerial staff and stuff like that, so we took the bull by the horns and got some things turned around. When GM made the announcement a couple of weeks ago about the last of the plant closing for this round, we were supposed to have had some plants on that list. But because we were able to get out in front on the thing and turn some things around, they actually used us as an example of how not to lose your plant.*

Did praying with his fellow church members make a difference? At the very least, praying offered an opportunity to frame their economic dilemmas in something other than market terms.<sup>4</sup> He and others in his church often reminded themselves that "God is not spelled GM." In their scheme, God is infinitely greater than GM. And so, rather than facing GM in quiet resignation, they involved that higher power, daring to presume that God might be concerned about their work. No matter what else happened to those prayers, the very act of praying afforded an opportunity to critique the social order of this world and envision a social order in which people have work to do. And such a critique is often the precursor to action.

This man's church was perhaps the most conservative one we studied, but we heard a similar mixing of sacred power with this-worldly concern from the opposite end of the theological spectrum at First Congregational of Long Beach. In one Sunday sermon, pastor Mary Ellen Kilsby reminded her listeners that:

*We are to live as if we have an eternal arrangement with God. The vision is held up so we don't lose our way. The word of grace is spoken so we don't lose heart. Without God, we could disregard our neighbor, but God calls us to judge the condition of our government by its ability to assure the wellbeing of the most vulnerable.*

She ended her message saying, "God will give us the strength. God has already given us the vision." In an earlier message she had issued a no less powerful challenge: "Let us get on with it, First Congregational. We have a city to save."

This may not be the same theology we heard from the man in Anderson, but it is no less an engagement of this world and a world beyond, an immersion of everyday issues in sacred action. And, I would argue, this is an engagement that matters. Civic culture and political and economic and cultural institutions in Long Beach are simply not the same as they would be if First Congregational were not there.

In a variety of ways, then, we see religion retaining an influence in the "public" arena.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes it is through the sort of re-framing that takes place in religious enclaves and then carries over into community action. Sometimes it is through collective action organized through religious channels.

First Congregational is a particularly good example of such collective action. Like nearly all our congregations, but more vigorously than most, First Congregational participates in all sorts of partnerships that take it into the larger community arena. Researcher Brenda Brasher observed them working with other community groups in sponsoring an AIDS walk in Long Beach, persuading their other community partners to change the time so that the Walk would not conflict with Sunday morning church services. They helped to start a Farmer's Market. They worked with the League of Women Voters to sponsor the first debate in California's 1992 senatorial campaign. They host numerous cultural events in their building. One of their staff sits on the community council that works on issues related to homelessness. They have begun numerous programs for youth, including tutoring. And in nearly everything they do, they seek funding and volunteer effort from whatever quarter they can find it - governmental, business, and other churches, to name a few.

As Wuthnow (1988) has pointed out, much of the organized religious activity beyond the congregational level today involves such coalitions and networks and lobbies and other "special purpose groups." This voluntary sector is perhaps the primary way we have institutionalized the interaction of religion with the world of economy and politics. It allows a pluralistic society to take religiously-based values into account in the midst of the give and take of political life.

Congregations, then, provide an arena in which people can organize effective strategies of "public" action, but they can also retell the story of their individual lives - without discernable institutional boundary drawing - in terms they think their God would recognize. They ask for prayers and advice, and they organize to get things done. It is that combination of meaning-making and practice-creating that makes congregations such a powerful arena of social action.

However, the cultural work that goes on inside the congregation does not always emerge visibly into some larger "public." It is often, in fact, a powerful alternative to a culture that tries to exclude and disempower. We have probably seen this most clearly in the case of the Black

Church in the U.S. The congregation becomes an arena of power for people otherwise powerless, a place where strategies of survival can be created and enacted, a place where a sacred story of history always calls the myths of a dominating secular society into question (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Feminists, as well, have argued that under conditions of domination, separate spaces are important, both for survival and for preparation. In studying the Sanctified Church, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes notes that women's roles in the educational tasks of the churches were "not simply a form of female segregation; instead [they were] the basis for alternative structures of authority, career pathways, and spheres of influence" (Gilkes, 1985:689). Nancy Fraser (1990) has argued that when dominant hegemonic forces occupy the cultural center, denying access to what they have defined as "public space," subaltern counter publics are needed. These counter publics afford the opportunity to unmask the pretensions of the center and to develop skills of democratic participation that can eventually bear concrete fruit.

According to David Martin (1990), just such processes may now be underway among Latin American Protestants, mostly pentecostal. Daniel Levine has similarly captured the voices of Latin American Catholics, analyzing the inter-play between popular voices and macro structures. Both insist that what goes on in religious groups is not irrelevant, nor is it reducible to other social realities. Levine writes at the beginning of his book that religious groups have to be taken on their own terms, accepting that

*religious motives and values undergird other aspects of group life and keep them going in the face of possible adversity. Whatever else the groups examined in these pages may claim to be, whatever other ends they serve, their original and continuing identity is religious. The continuing power of religious belief and commitment provides a basis for enduring solidarities and the construction of meaningful vocabularies of moral concern. For this reason, if for no other, we must pay close attention to the content of popular belief and spirituality (Levine, 1992:15-16, emphasis in original).*

Both Martin and Levine insist that religious experiences and religious ideas must be taken seriously - that what happens in a religious context, apparently hidden from outside view, can have long-term political and social consequences. Recognizing such subaltern counter-publics acknowledges the real power of the center, but refuses to grant the center the power to define all of reality.

And so it is with our core myth, I would suggest. We have to grant its power to describe much of what has claimed to be at the center of the culture. But we cannot be fooled into thinking that to describe the center is to describe a universal pattern of social life.

Looking beyond the center may also help us to get past the zero-sum, either or character of our understanding of the relationship between sacred and profane, religious and secular. As we have been listening to congregational and individual stories, we find an amazing range of religious experience and non-experience. We find both intense religiosity and indifferent participation, people and organizations where sacred realities *are* the defining realities - across institutional lines - and places where religion is as safely domesticated as any secularization theorist might suggest.

What are we to make of such a mix? Is this a sign of being in a transitional state, on the way toward the irrelevance of religion? Or, is this mix perhaps the normal state of things? If we think the past was somehow "more religious" than the present, we will interpret these data

as indicative of transition and decline. But might it be the case that we see the past as more religious than the present *because* we have a theory that predicts transition and decline?

Certainly that is one of the lessons we might take from Finke and Stark (1992). They suggest that our pictures of a pious, Puritan colonial America are quite out of focus, and that we are far more "churched" today than we ever have been before. Going back even further, others have been suggesting that the Middle Ages were both less religious than we thought - if we assumed that everyone was a devout Catholic - and more religious than we thought - if we want to count the underground religiosity that seems always to have flourished.<sup>6</sup> In other words, if we were to look back at history from the margins, rather than the center, we might see history differently, too.

The hunch I am beginning to develop about the historic relationship between religion and society is that we may expect a kind of constant mix of sacred and profane, religious and irreligious, nascent and institutional,<sup>7</sup> "musical" and "unmusical" (to use Weber's terms [Gerth and Mills, 1946:25]). There may be slight fluctuations over time, but we should not take the fortunes of established religious institutions as an accurate barometer of religious atmospheric pressure. Nor should we take the respectable institutions of the center as representative of the future of the whole. When we begin to read the history of religion from the bottom up, we may see a constant "both-and," rather than a decline from all to nothing.

Finally, if we looked to the practices of everyday life, rather than to the theories and institutions of the culture's elites, we might not see a culture war. This story has not been around quite long enough to deserve to be called a myth, but it has nevertheless become very pervasive in our discipline. I have even been known to tell a version of it myself. When studying Southern Baptists, especially those fully engaged in leading opposing camps in a fight for the soul (and budget) of the denomination, it certainly seemed a plausible view of how religionists in America are organizing themselves (Ammerman, 1990).

But having more recently taken my research down an organizational notch - from denomination to congregation - I am no longer so sure the culture wars version of the story works. On a variety of measures, it *is* possible to identify most of our eighteen congregations as either liberal or conservative. If you went to Northview Christian Life, an Assemblies of God congregation in Carmel, I suspect you would immediately say, "This is a conservative congregation." And if you went to First Existentialist in Atlanta, you would probably think liberal was not a strong enough word. At the first, you might see flyers in the hall inviting people to participate in the Indianapolis "Life Chain" (a pro-life demonstration) and, in the second, you might hear glowing reports about the members' participation in the Gay Rights parade. They are, indeed, very different places.

But once we get past those polarizing issues, is there any middle ground? I think so. In fact, a lot. We distributed questionnaires in all of our congregations, asking among other things what actions and characteristics members saw as essential to being a Christian, what images they have of God, and what they think their church's priorities ought to be. There are, not surprisingly, clusters of items sufficient to construct scales measuring evangelical and liberal perspectives. Evangelicals are more likely to say that reading the Bible, praying, witnessing, attending church, and avoiding worldly vices are essential to the Christian life and that God is Savior and Judge. Liberals scored high on seeing the Christian life as a quest for social justice, caring for others, and bringing beauty into the world, and were more likely than others to see God as Mother. These scales have good robust reliability coefficients and a



good deal of internal coherence. And the culture wars hypothesis would certainly predict that they should be negatively correlated.

But they are not. In the whole sample - all eighteen congregations combined - there is virtually no relationship between them (a positive correlation of .08, to be exact). While there is great variation from congregation to congregation in the proportion of people who score high and low on each scale, in *no* congregation do the people who score high on one consistently score low on the other. In some congregations, there is no significant relationship between the two, but in many the correlation is actually strongly positive. Most of these people have simply not learned the ideological lesson that if they believe in promoting social justice, they should place less emphasis on witnessing, or - at the other pole - that if they believe in witnessing, they should be wary of calls for social justice. They were perfectly willing to affirm that *both* social justice *and* evangelism are important, or perhaps that neither of those things is as important as a life of prayer, Bible study, and high moral standards.

I would worry that we might have stumbled onto nothing more than a statistical fluke, an artifact of the peculiar congregations we selected. But if this is a fluke, it is showing up with a certain regularity. In their study of a wide range of denominational officials, Dan Olson and Bill McKinney report a similar large middle in which people are drawing on elements that come from both evangelical and liberal traditions (as well as some who just do not fit either).<sup>8</sup> In his study of congregations and social action, Carl Dudley found a similar lack of polarization (reported in Mock, 1992). And Penny Becker insists that "liberal" and "conservative" do not adequately describe the conflicts and decision-making of the congregations she is studying in Oak Park, Illinois.<sup>9</sup>

One of those Oak Park congregations is also included in our study. This congregation would certainly fit most people's definition of liberal. But there are some intriguing ways in which there is more to it than that. At the heart of this church's life are the many small groups that meet, usually in homes, throughout the week. Some share a common life situation - like mothers of small children - while others are intentionally-gathered "covenant" groups. They talk about big issues like national elections and small ones like the loss of a pet. They are not always sure *how* God acts in their lives, but they are pretty sure they have experienced that action. Their discussion sometimes sounds like therapy, sometimes like aging sixties radicals, but often like pious spiritual seekers. They are putting together an everyday faith out of multiple cultural elements, elements that sometimes sound pious, sometimes secular.

The same sort of bricolage can be seen at Berean Seventh Day Adventist church in Los Angeles, where the church's ministries include both evangelistic crusades and providing food and clothing and recreation for their troubled neighborhood. They know that social action and evangelism have to go together if they are going to make a difference.

For both of these churches, the changes in their communities pose a real challenge. Many in the Oak Park congregation are keenly aware that racial integration is still hard work and that economic integration is perhaps even harder. They know their church has not fully succeeded, and they are eager to find ways to increase both internal diversity and their genuine partnerships with others in the community. At Berean, many are ready to build on the international membership their Seventh-Day Adventist links have brought them. They want to reach out to the Latino immigrants in their neighborhood. But they are struggling, without pastoral leadership, so far unable to put together a convincing story about themselves-a convincing set of strategies for action.

In neither of these congregations is the shape of the future assured. Both are actively engaged in a creative process that draws on their own existing skills and habits, the symbols and stories that define who they are. But in addition, they draw on a much broader array of symbols and practices available to them from the larger culture, from neighboring churches' success stories, sometimes from stories latent in their own history. These stories simply do not fall neatly along the supposed fault lines between liberal and conservative.

After listening to the stories these congregations have been telling our research team, I am again convinced that people studying religion have often had their ears in the wrong places. If we assume there is - or should be - a cultural core, a central set of myths and values that define us all, then what we find are loud voices contesting the ideological content of that core. One set wants the society to be defined by conservative values; the other set wants liberal values at the core. The voices in this debate are largely those of people whose livelihood is defined by policy and ideological interests, people with access to the arenas defined as "public," access to the places that "count." Therefore, they can define the terms of the debate.

Others, however, whose lives are more defined by everyday troubles and joys, feel much freer to put together ideas and practices from a very large cultural tool kit. Just as Swidler (1986) reminds us that ideas function differently in settled and unsettled times, we might also note that ideas function differently inside and outside contested arenas, inside and outside the places defined as "public." While debates at the center certainly must be understood, practices at the margins may be no less critical - indeed may be more instructive for understanding what the future may hold.

So we return to the questions with which we began. What if we listened at the margins instead of at the center? And what if we simply quit assuming there is or ought to be a center? What if we took the activities of marginal people in "non-public" places seriously, rather than assuming a "public-private" dichotomy? What if we started trying to formulate new ideas that make sense of the stories we hear, rather than falling back on the old myths of secularization and culture wars?

As I warned at the first, I know more about the stories that do not work than I do about any new stories that do. But I hope that what we hear in the coming years is an increasingly rich store of narrative that comes from all the precincts of social life - the margins as well as the center - your stories as well as mine.

## **NOTES**

This lecture is dedicated to my Emory colleague and predecessor, Earl D.C. Brewer, former president of the Religious Research Association, who died during the summer of 1993, following heart surgery. Although Earl had been retired for nearly 10 years, he never stopped working. And to the end, he was looking toward the future, using his sociological skills and his pastoral vision to discern how we might create a more hospitable world.

A number of people have played a role in the shaping of the ideas contained in this lecture. Some of the important ideas and conversations will be named in the text, but I also want to thank Nancy Eiesland, Mary Jo Neitz, Lynn Davidman and the Emory congregational studies group for conversations that do not show up quite so visibly. And although some of their contributions are noted in the text, Stephen Warner and Art Farnsley have prodded

these ideas along in very significant ways.

1. Although he does not connect this to gender, Stephen Warner makes a similar point about how secularization is an account that makes sense of the lives of those who tell it (Warner, 1993).

2. It is important to note that this account is deliberately framed as a story and *not* as a careful theoretical argument. It draws on many of those arguments, but is not identical to any of them.

3. The congregations discussed here are identified by their real names and locations. Where church names are not used, we have not yet been given written permission by those congregations to identify them.

4. A further discussion of the functions of prayer is found in Ammerman (in press).

5. Building on the idea of "cultural power," as it is evident in the situations described in Demerath and Williams' *A Bridging of Faiths* (1992), I have argued that there are numerous ways in which religion retains influence in the "public" arena (Ammerman, 1993).

6. See, for example, Stark and Bainbridge's discussion of "The Illusion of a Universal Church" (1985:111-122) and Mary Douglas's "The Effects of Modernization on Religious Change" in Douglas and Tipton (1983).

7. Warner (1987) uses these terms to indicate the cyclical movement of religious organizations between periods of enthusiasm and periods of routine. I am appropriating them here to indicate a similar contrast, in this case between persons who readily perceive transcendent phenomena and those who seem only attuned to the materiality and routine of life.

8. The full report is forthcoming. Preliminary findings are reported in Olson and Carroll (1992).

9. The full report will be in her dissertation. This report is from personal communication.

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