Creative Transformation

Persons-in-Community/ Community Organizing

Resources

Creative Transformation . . .

takes its name from the belief of process theologians that God's work is always creative and always transformative; and that wherever creative transformation is occurring, God is there. This means that instead of clinging to past formulations of faith and the ways of action that used to work, we are striving to be co-workers with God by seeking new formulations and more effective ways of action. ~John B. Cobb, Jr.

Process & Faith *EDITORIAL*

Community organizing: what does it have to do with the church, much less process theology? For process-friendly churches, community organizing can become a natural ally. Given its bad press from various social quarters, we feel it is important to show how community organizing has a critical role to play in the creative transformation of our local and planetary relationships.

It is our hope that readers of this issue of *Creative Transformation* will initiate or deepen forms of community organizing in their respective communities-in-the-making out of inspiration of the real potential for transformation from what-is to what could-yet-be. This issue does not offer a how-to manual on community organizing but rather seeks to claim its relationship with a process perspective.

This issue has three primary pieces: theoretical explanations of persons-in-community vis-à-vis community building and development, hybrid overtures that link process thinking and community organizing, and a verbatim of what one type of community organizing looks like to put flesh on these philosophical bones.

We have included a previous article by John Cobb describing "person-in-community." For some readers, it might be helpful to start this issue by reviewing this idea as an important refresher. In particular, this is the image that drives Stout and Staton's initial connection with process thought and is the implicit motor at work in my article on mutual interest.

In the lead article, Stout and Staton give an overview of where the process approach is growing in local governance and community development work. In particular, they see resonances between Cobb's person-in-community with Mary Parker Follet's writing, which is gaining influence in public administration circles. When people are able to participate in their own self-governance through community groups, it offers them "the chance to make immediate changes to their daily lives and the lives of those around them."

Their second essay contrasts what they call market/bureau-oriented development with asset-based/settlement house-oriented local decision-making. They see parallels between the Progressive Era and numerous issues facing us today, while also noting the spiritual grounding of the Progressive Era settlement movement. Going forward by looking to past models, they suggest that community organizing now take a "back to the future" approach such as through interfaith coalition building.

Reyes begins a more direct conversation at relating process, church, and organizing. He recognizes that communities are not simply something we exist in: they take building—"they are the relationships one makes," all of which takes time and effort. He then explores notions of narrowness, width, and prehension to link process thought with the organizing technique of one on ones.

In my article, I propose that it's okay for love to be an interested rather than a selfless activity, and since we are interconnected, seeking the well-being of others literally makes a difference to us. Through community organizing, we mutually expand the possibilities for both our own transformation as well as the communities in which we participate.

We are especially grateful to Michael Jacoby Brown for giving his permission for us to reprint an excerpt from his book, which gives a concrete example of a one on one organizing interview. This helps us move from the more theoretical to listening in on a model conversation. For those of us especially interested in application, his entry is especially key.

To complete this issue, Justin Heinzekehr reviews Catherine Keller's most recent solo work, *On the Mystery,* and Marjorie Suchocki returns with her film review describing several movies on death and dying, one of which will be featured at the upcoming Whitehead International Film Festival.

Those who are interested in the nuts and bolts of organizing their faith community would be well-served to explore Brown's book, *Building Powerful Community Organizations,* as well as contact a local organizing group in your area (such as PICO or the Gamaliel Foundation). There are so many creative possibilities awaiting our engagement, so many expressions of healthy communities asking for our participation: let us take up this call, actualizing divine potentials for our own value and for the value of others as persons-in-community!

Timothy

Public ADMINISTRATION'S concept of person-in-community

by MARGARET STOUT AND CARRIE STATON

Margaret Stout

Carrie Staton

Traditionally, public administrators are those employed by government agencies. But increasingly, through contracting out and other forms of privatization and collaboration, public administrators are also employed in private nonprofit and for-profit agencies. Together, administrators in these various organizational contexts are charged with the work most directly influencing the quality of life in communities, much of which falls under the collective banner of community building and development.

While it has yet to enjoy a fully mainstream position, since the emergence of the field as a "self-aware" (Waldo, 1948/1984) area of study and professionalism at the turn of the last century, both scholars and practitioners of public administration have steadily promoted the concept of "person-in-community" (Cobb, 2007) from a process-oriented perspective. This is most clearly evident in the manner in which Mary Parker Follett's thinking has been carried forward in public administration theory and how the process approach to public administration is growing, particularly in local governance and community development work. This essay will provide a brief primer on this literature to set the stage for other essays in this symposium.

Carrying forward the nurturing form of public service exemplified by the Settlement movement, a number of contemporary public administration theorists promote the role conceptualization of administrator as facilitator, helper, or midwife of the process of participatory self-governance (see for example, Box, 1998; Catlaw, 2006; Catlaw, 2007; Farmer, 2005; King, 2011; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998; King, Stivers, & Collaborators, 1998; King & Zanetti, 2005; Stivers, 1990, 2000, 2002, 2008). These professional identities relinquish legitimacy based in expertise or the constitutional order, relocating it in shared sovereignty (if such a concept persists) and the situated process itself (Stout, 2012). In this way, government becomes a "good and no place" (Farmer, 2005, 189)—a convener that provides "the space and the process for working out understanding across lines of difference" (McSwite, 2002, 113). The function of public administration becomes "the generic name of the group of tactical-support" (Catlaw, 2007, 203) for sorting out how to live together.

This Collaborative Tradition of public administration praxis (Stout, 2006, 2012) is unique in that rather than focusing on partnerships among representatives of public and private agencies (see for example, Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005; Donahue & Zeckhauser, 2011; O'Leary & Bingham, 2009; O'Leary, Gerard, & Bingham, 2006), these approaches focus on collaboration among *persons* who share a purpose or place (Bryer, 2009; Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2006; Nabatchi, 2010). In this sense, the role serves both communities of interest and geography.

It is this crucial philosophical difference in identity—person as opposed to expert—that fosters the most successful community building and development efforts. For example, since Los Angeles added Neighborhood Councils to its city charter, the University of Southern California has engaged in action research tracking their collective progress (Bryer & Cooper, 2007; Cooper & Kathi, 2005). Richard Box (1998) studied local governance in several cities as both a development director and a scholar in order to formulate his theory of "citizen governance." Matt Leighninger (2006) chronicles participatory practices in a plethora of case studies of what he calls "the next form of democracy." Margaret Stout (2010a) provides an account of her more than fifteen years of community development work in Tempe, Arizona, juxtaposing the implications of practitioners inhabiting these different role identities. Veronica Elias (2010) recounts the experiences of one Akron, Ohio neighborhood in their process-oriented community building efforts. In several European communities, Koen Bartels shows how the process-orientation plays out in community-based planning led by scholars (2012) and in encounters between action researchers and citizens (2013). Collectively, these studies find that the greater the level of inclusion and authentic power sharing among administrators, citizens, and elected representatives, the better the community results considering both instrumental and normative criteria.

Many of these "pracademics" (Posner, 2009), action researchers, and theorists draw from Mary Parker Follett's particular blend of pragmatism and process philosophy, if not also from her contemporaries James, Dewey, and Whitehead. As a scholar of governance of public, for-profit, and non-profit organizations, Follett is generally viewed as a "process theorist" (Harmon & McSwite, 2011,

114). While her many lectures and her books *Creative Experience* (Follett, 1924) and *The New State* (Follett, 1918/1998) each explain concepts and case discussions that pertain to community development, the essay that most directly addresses both community and process thought is her *Philosophical Review* article, "Community Is a Process" (Follett, 1919) in which she challenges the shortcomings of both monism and pluralism in her call for an alternative.

Elsewhere, we have synopsized "Follettian governance" as "facilitation of a way of living together through a relational process of becoming unique individuals, collectively engaged in an ongoing process of harmonizing differences through interlocking networks, to progress as both individuals and a society" (Stout & Staton, 2011, 285). While our focus there was to explicate in detail how her concepts align with Whiteheadian process philosophy, here we would like draw out Follett's ideas most pertinent to the notion of persons-in-community. Specifically, we will explain her understanding of the holistic, dynamic, creative process of becoming and the type of social relationships it employs and fosters.

Throughout her work, Follett describes the process of integration as the way that individuals interweave with one another and their environment in a dynamic mutual influence she calls "the circular response" (Follett, 1924, 1995f). Our embodied state means there is no objectified individual or environment (Follett, 1924). Instead, there is simply an unfolding "situation" that is contiguous in time

> *Community itself is the process of integration.*

and space with infinite other "situations," similar to what is described by the concept of *gestalt* (Follett, 1924). In this way, Follett's ideas about integrative becoming closely resemble Whitehead's explanation of concrescence. "The idea is that everything that is arises out of multiple other things and has no existence apart from its relations to them" (Cobb, 2007, 568).

Furthermore, our socially situated condition means there is no objectified individual or society; there is only an on-

going reciprocal interplay among individuals and groups that creates them both (Follett, 1995c, 1995d). Through this relating, the individual and society are "forever a-making" one another (Follett, 1995c, 256) and through integration, "individuals and the situation within which they interact are co-created in an ongoing process of mutual becoming" (Stout & Staton, 2011, 274).

Follett describes the process of integration in a variety of situations, including government, business, and neighborhood illustrations. In her treatise on community, however, she describes community itself as the process of integration. In short, community is a "*creative* process . . . creative because it is a process of integrating" (Follett, 1919, 576, emphasis in original). However, Follett sees community as a particular type of integrative process—"that intermingling which evokes creative power" (Follett, 1919, 577). Through the intermingling of persons-in-community, something more ethical than dominance and greater than compromise can be discovered, as "all 'wishes' unite in a working whole" (Follett, 1919, 576) that dynamically forms and re-forms "personality, purpose, will, loyalty" (Follett, 1919, 577). She describes this creative energy of the group process as the "cosmic force in the womb of humanity" (Follett, 1918/1998, 342).

When considered from another angle, the notion of integration assumes *difference*. While Follett attributes difference to the existence of what Whitehead (1929/1978) would call actual occasions, when considered in the context of community, the image of people living in neighborhoods emerges. Based on her work in Boston's community centers, she notes, "In a more or less mixed neighborhood, people of different nationalities or different classes come together easily and naturally on the ground of many common interests: the school, recreational opportunities, the placing of their children in industry, hygiene, housing, etc." (Follett, 1918/1998, 197).

In *The New State*, Follett (1918/1998) discusses in detail the importance of an integrated neighborhood as opposed to homogenous conclaves. In short, neighborhoods should pursue "the finer enjoyment of recognized diversity" (Follett, 1918/1998, 199) and "recognize that

too much congeniality makes for narrowness, and that the harmonizing, not the ignoring of our differences leads us to the truth" (Follett, 1918/1998, 201). Indeed, the creative integrating of heterogeneous difference is necessary for both individual and social progress: "My individuality is difference springing into view as relating itself with other differences" (Follett, 1918/1998, 63) . . . "The essence of society is difference, related difference" (Follett, 1918/1998, 33)… "Synthesis is the principal of life, the method of social progress" (Follett, 1918/1998, 97). Once again we see a striking similarity to Whitehead's process thought. "In Whitehead's philosophy, difference is necessary for maximum enjoyment by actual entities and, ultimately, for the societies composed of them" (Stout & Staton, 2011, 284).

Active participation in community groups offers persons the chance to make immediate changes to their daily lives and the lives of those around them: "people should organize themselves into neighborhood groups to express their daily life, to bring to the surface the needs, desires and aspirations of that life" (Follett, 1918/1998, 192). Furthermore, by harmonizing our differences through these diverse community groups, we can attain "a training in democracy" (Follett, 1918/1998, 207) that will enable us to practice a new version of democracy—i.e., participatory self-governance, "a method which will revolutionize politics" (Follett, 1918/1998, 203). In short, practicing this method of democracy in the community prepares us to expand in ever-widening circles of integration, thereby growing our creative power all the way out to the global arena. Therefore, "community must be the foundation stone of the New State" (Follett, 1918/1998, 359).

> *The harmonizing, not the ignoring of our differences, leads us to the truth.*

A key characteristic of this revolutionary, participatory self-governance is the rejection of hierarchy, as described in Cobb's (2007) discussion of formal organizations. As Follett notes, "I am not dominated by 'others' because we have the genuine social process only when I do not control others or they me, but all intermingle to produce the collective thought and the collective will" (Follett,

1918/1998, 70). Instead of organizational and societal hierarchy, there is a network, "an infinite number of filaments" that "cross and recross and connect all my various allegiances" (Follett, 1918/1998, 312). Instead of static law and procedure, there is a dynamic "law of the situation" (Follett, 1995b) through which all concerned unite in discovering "what the situation demands" (Follett, 1995b, 128). Mutual influence within this social process produces legitimate "power-with versus power-over" (Follett, 1995e, 103), and power-with is considered the only "genuine authority" (Follett, 1995a, 154) in a democracy. Accordingly, in genuine leadership, "the leader guides the group and is at the same time himself guided by the group, is always a part of the group" (Follett, 1918/1998, 229). In sum, for Follett, "true democracy" is the process of evolving collective ideas and collective will (1918/1998).

Taken together, these ideas presume that in the process of community, there is no room for any single person or group to be dominant over another. "There is no above and below . . . The study of community as process will bring us, I believe, not to the over-individual mind, but to the inter-individual mind, an entirely different conception" (Follett, 1919, 583). Again, we see similarities to the Whiteheadian perspective. Cobb recognizes the need for formal structures or order in any group: "order must not be lost, but it also must not be dominant" (Cobb & Griffin, 1976, 59). However, "formal structures cannot represent the actual patterns of relations through which information flows and decisions are made" (Cobb, 2007, 576). The hierarchical use of power-over stifles the relational process required for communities to truly thrive and maximize diversity, enjoyment, and integration.

Follett describes this form of organizing as *unifying*, differentiating between the unified state as an object versus the unifying state as a process. The former employs a top-down manner of authority (power-over), while the latter proceeds from the Many to the One (power-with). It must be perpetually generating and all-inclusive while not being all-absorptive. The resulting Service State replaces the authoritative Sovereign State and pursues the service of all citizens and performs functions by which its worth is measured (Follett, 1918/1998).

We believe Follett's approach to the person-in-community and its process orientation provides a better grounding for democratic governance in the twenty-first century—a dynamic, globalizing, pluralistic context that has become deeply fragmented and competitive and in which claims to truth and legitimacy are regularly contested. We suggest that the integrative nature of Follett's conception of relational process ontology (Stout & Love, 2012) offers a set of foundational assumptions that are sufficiently dynamic to be non-colonizing and non-fundamentalist (Amoah, 2010, 2012; Stout, 2010b). In fact, its characteristics match the qualities Catlaw depicts as "a politics of the subject" (2007, 192-99): (1) neither unity nor atomism are acceptable; (2) radical difference must be accommodated within dynamic compositions; (3) becoming occurs through generative, situational processes; (4) governing is a process that cuts across human activity; (5) governing does not entail permanent social roles; and (6) governing focuses on facilitating the process. It is the combination of these qualities that make for successful community building and development efforts—persons coming together to simultaneously pursue individual and collective progress.

So, it is from this foundation that we call for a revolution in community as a process and hope, as Follett asserts, "it is upon those who can fearlessly embrace the doctrine of 'becoming' that the life of the future waits" (1918/1998, 99).

> *There is no room for any single person or group to be dominant over another.*

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Community as HOME:
the process perspective on community BUILDING

by Margaret Stout

Margaret Stout

In the lead article, it was suggested that process-oriented Follettian governance is grounded in the notion of person-in-community and therefore provides a fruitful foundation for successful community building and development efforts—"persons coming together to simultaneously pursue individual and collective progress" (Stout and Staton, 2012). This fits the Whiteheadian notion that "communities are societies that are held together by internal relations" among persons-in-community (Cobb, 2007, 567). While neither Follett nor her fellow pragmatists and progressives (i.e. William James, Jane Addams, John Dewey, etc.) in general were overtly religious in a traditional faith-based manner in their writing and Follett herself was more affiliated with the settlement, community center, workers' cooperatives, and labor union movements than church initiatives, her thinking is certainly grounded in spiritual beliefs. This essay will briefly describe this particular tradition of community-based organizing while exploring how it embodies faith-based assumptions in both theory and practice.

One might ask: Why focus on such an outdated philosophical perspective? I'll defer to the notion that history tends to repeat itself, and so going "back to the future" is sometimes a very fruitful approach to understanding and resolving contemporary issues (Stout, 2010). Descriptions of late 19th century urban conditions that spawned the American Progressive Era give one a disheartening sense of déjà vu:

> (Progressivism) evolved in response to social dislocation, overcrowding, environmental pollution, and wrenching poverty, which were byproducts of the new era of urbanization and industrialization brought on by the prior century. The laissez-faire capitalism that transformed society and created unprecedented levels of wealth also produced severe destabilization. Not only was a belief in public intervention widely held, it was deeply held, too. It was embedded in ideologies throughout the political spectrum. (Sclar, 2000, 1)

Perhaps because of the growing similarity to current economic and social conditions, in 2006 the MoveOn web-based democracy movement began referring to its platform as the "New Progressive Agenda" (MoveOn, 2009). Thus, we find ourselves six years later in an era characterized by attempts to re-engage what many now refer to as a new progressivism.

Because progressivism can be interpreted to mean substantively different things, Camilla Stivers (2000) offered a feminist re-reading of our late 19th and early 20th century history to clarify these perspectives. As discussed elsewhere (Stout, 2009), she provides a useful typology for quickly grasping fundamental differences in worldview imbuing varied understandings of the term "progress" in her monikers "Bureau Men" and "Settlement Women". Both the fields of public administration and social work more generally and the practice of community development more specifically took two distinct paths out of that shared historical moment. Programs that were brought into public agencies followed the municipal research bureau movement while efforts that remained in the community with grassroots efforts followed the trajectory of the settlement house movement. Borrowing from Richard Box (1998), these two perspectives can be called "Community as Market" versus "Community as Home"; they are fundamentally different in terms of their philosophical commitments and their logics give rise to differing sets of practices aimed toward both *people* and *place*—the two components of community in this discussion.

On the one hand, the mainstream government view of progress held by the "Bureau Men" (Stivers, 2000) is achieved through a behavioralist approach to efficiency, scientific rationality, and proceduralist principles. The men (and women) of the municipal research bureau movement viewed community as a business to be operated by government experts. This Community as Market perspective views *places* as commodities inhabited by *people* as consumers and workers. This has been the dominant view in local government since the first progressive era (Bridges, 1997).

Community development from the Community as Market perspective entails investment in *places* through build-ings and businesses, or through transfer payments to individuals in the form of various subsidy programs related to housing, education, and employment. In this approach, land becomes a thing to be developed according to its highest and best use, which is measured by developer profits and various municipal revenues. This is why city and county planners are driven to maximize density and intensity of uses and to expand transportation corridors such as highways and rail. Efforts are intended to grow the community geographically and economically by bringing new people to the location. Similarly, investments in *people* are meant to help them achieve economic self-sufficiency, without concern for social relation beyond its instrumental purpose. Individuals are supported in an isolated manner as consumers and workers without regard to their homes, families, and social networks. As Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) note, these techniques are needs-driven or deficiency-based. As such, the role of public service organizations becomes one of "doing for" or "doing to" the community. This perpetuates a transactional view of community.

On the other hand, Henry George (1929) offered a definition of progress as the betterment of all in terms of equality, liberty, and happiness through association. This egalitarian, human concern for social relationship and welfare reflects the predominantly feminine cultural characteristics of the "Settlement Women" (Stivers, 2000). In brief, the women (and men) of the settlement house and charitable movement offered a phenomenological and pragmatic alternative to thinking about public life, democracy, and the place of administration within it. The Community as Home perspective views the *place* of community as a particular and familial domicile, and therefore seeks to improve living conditions and humanize processes to make government more accessible, caring, and connected to the *people* living there. The persona of public adminis-

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trators (including social workers) is one of autonomous neighbor—a person with discretionary judgment guided by caring and participatory relationships with fellow citizens. The public interest is measured pragmatically and collaboratively by quality of life rather than mere efficiency or economic growth.

Community building approaches from the Community

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as Home perspective draw upon the strengths of people in relationship with their government as political sovereigns and with one another as neighbors. In this view, land becomes a thing to be developed according to its best use as measured by collective decisions among all impacted parties. Thus, development is designed first to serve who is there already, and secondarily to serve those who might choose to join them as neighbors. Through such processes, it is more common that needs such as mixed income housing, conservation of open spaces, preservation of historic buildings and sites, and sustainability or livability are fulfilled. In sum, these practices are "catalyst" techniques because they are meant to foster development through the people who do not just inhabit, but create community together on an ongoing basis. As Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) note, the approach is "asset-based", referring to the notion of growing the existing assets of the community, including both *people* and *places.* As such, the role of public service organizations becomes one of "doing with" the community. This is a relational view of community as well as citizenship.

We find an exemplar of this approach in Jane Addams, whose 1902 book, *Democracy and Social Ethics,* is an auto-ethnography of her experiences establishing and living in Hull House in Chicago, the first Settlement House in the United States. Her solution to urban problems was not to *act on behalf of* the people, but rather to "to help our neighbors build responsible, self-sufficient lives for themselves and their families" (Unknown, 2009, para. 1) as a neighbor. In fact, she understands democracy to mean a fully participatory practice and citizenship to be

a democratic impulse or social claim similar to that of a religious calling. She likens democracy to a giving up of oneself through which one obtains a life-giving power from the sense of being part of something bigger—the whole of community, or what she refers to as the "Great Experience" we all join upon death (1902/1964, 276). Addams suggests that to be open to this calling, individuals must develop a social morality based on the common interest which can only be legitimately determined through collaborative social process and interaction: "All parts of the community are bound together in ethical development" (1902/1964, 264).

Other progressives affiliated with the settlement movement share this spiritually informed approach to community life. For example, Follett's writings are salted liberally with such comments: "We believe in the sacredness of all our life; we believe that Divinity is forever incarnating in humanity, and so we believe in Humanity and the common daily life of all men" (1918/1998, 244). "We must know now that we are coworkers with every process of creation, that our function is as important as the power which keeps the stars in their orbits" (Follett, 1918/1998, 100). "God is the moving force of the world, the ever-continuing creating where men are the co-creators" (Follett, 1918/1998, 103). She asserts that as co-creators, people are responsible for forming a "group spirit" that should be "reverenced as an act of creation" (Follett, 1918/1998, 372). In this belief, Follett was particularly ardent:

> We surely to-day have come to see in the social bond and the Creative Will, a compelling power, a depth and force, as great as that of any religion we have ever known. We are ready for a new revelation of God. It is not coming through any single man, but through the men and men [*sic]* who are banding together with one purpose, in one consecrated service, for a great fulfillment. (Follett, 1998, 359-60)

> If we could believe in men, if we could see that circle which unites human passion and divine achievement as a halo round the head of each human being, then social and political reorganization would no longer be a hope but a fact. (Follett, 1998, 341)

John Dewey (1934) calls this belief a "common faith"

based on the *social bond;* a natural life force shared by all of creation (or at least humanity) that is expressed through mutualistic relationship, thought, and deed. Follett concurs "We are beginning to realize that the redemptive power is within the social bond, that we have creative evolution only through individual responsibility" (Follett, 1998, 341). Therefore, "community is that intermingling which evokes creative power. What is created? Personality, purpose, will, loyalty" (Follett, 1919, 577).

This relational foundation is what moves spiritual purpose into the realm of ethics and action: "I wish to urge in this paper actual group association—the *practice* of community" (Follett, 1919, 584). "Call it religion, patriotism, sympathy, the enthusiasm for humanity, or the love of God—give it what name you will; there is yet a force which overcomes and drives out selfishness" (George, 1929, 463). This innate sense of relation fosters empathy and a shared desire for well-being. As Dewey points out, "Men [*sic*] have always been associated together in living, and association in conjoint behavior has affected their relations to one another as individuals" (1957, 97). There is no pre-social state of independence that must be given up in exchange for imposed social order and its material benefits (e.g. the *social contract*). Instead, there is only a social state of mutual interdependence. "The fallacy of self-and-others fades away and there is only self-in-and-through-others" (Follett, 1998, 8). We are at all times socially situated selves (Dudley, 1996) and are thus mutually responsive.

Although such spiritual references abound, both Dewey (1934) and Follett often disassociate the social bond from religion or transcendental sources, instead describing it as a psychological phenomenon that enables a public or "group-spirit . . . the Spirit of democracy" (Follett, 1998, 43). This is not surprising given the historical moment. Dewey recognized that the social center of gravity in modern society shifted from religious and cultural institutions to institutions of political economy: "I believe that

There is no pre-social state of independence that must be given up in exchange for imposed social order and its material benefits . . . there is only a social state of mutual interdependence.

many persons are so repelled from what exists as a religion by its intellectual and moral implications, that they are not even aware of attitudes in themselves that if they came to fruition would be genuinely religious" (Dewey, 1934, 9). Therefore, he sought an alternative public faith that could establish a shared moral and ethical compass without relying upon specific religious convictions. In sum, this group of progressives believed the social bond and the democratic potential of co-creating social life in the pragmatist method would replace the necessity for approaching public problems through religion.

In terms of community development practice, this disentanglement of religion and state through a public ethic enabled the institutions of government to engage in community building efforts and to overtly support charitable efforts that sought the same ends. Indeed, this movement of morality into a public ethic and redefinition of acceptable spheres of influence enabled the first granting of tax exemption in 1894 in the United States Tax Code (Salamon, 1999), establishing government support of what had previously been a primarily faith-based domain of charitable activity. The more recent Executive Order from President Bush in January 2001 established policy that enabled government funding of faith-based organizations, shifting these lines of demarcation once again, creating a shared domain of government and faith-based community action.

In practice today, the Community as Home approach has been carried forward by groups like the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). These large non-government organizations share a common value of the importance of grassroots-driven community building and the interrelating among people and place. Perhaps the most overtly faith-based approach to community organizing is employed by nation-wide IAF affiliates that share a mission of empowering people to organize

toward self-betterment. Their principal approach remains person-to-person, to "initiate a public relationship and to re-knit the frayed social fabric" (Unkown, 2009, para. 3). Over a period of six years, Mark Warren (2001) conducted an in-depth study of how the Texas IAF works with and through religious congregations to cultivate the participation and leadership of typically marginalized persons. Similar to the settlement approach that preceded IAF founder Saul Alinsky's work in Chicago, interfaith leaders from poor communities of color collaborate with those from more politically powerful communities to build coalitions that construct affordable housing, create job-training programs, improve educational outcomes, expand public services, and increase neighborhood safety.

In his book *Dry Bones Rattling,* Warren (2001) asserts that this type of inclusive, engaged collaboration not only makes progressive change to crucial public policies, but offers the key to revitalizing democracy in a diverse society. In this sense, he is pointing out how community building efforts in the tradition of the settlement movement are indeed going "back to the future" to reconnect the spiritual and ethical purposes of democratic community building to the more instrumental goals of community development. Working from a vision of person-in-community and community-as-home, we are able to draw upon the social bond to establish networks of mutual care and collective action toward what will indeed result in not only the progress of both individuals and society, but the furtherance of co-creative experiences that may indeed be considered "genuinely religious" (Dewey, 1934, 9) if considering, as did Dewey and Follett, the divine as the process of uniting ideal ends with actual conditions.

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Building community—
ONE ON ONE

by Rafael Reyes III

"Excuse me, do you have a couple of minutes to spare? I would like to talk to you about . . . "

You have probably heard these words once before while shopping, or while walking on the street. They may bring to your mind the idea that someone wants to sell you something, or make you sign a form for or against a bill being proposed. You have probably crossed the street, lowering your heads and acting as if you did not notice their presence. It is the realization that one does not want to have a one on one conversation because it may take too much time, or that one is tired. However, by passing them on and not taking the time to talk with them, we also fail in one's desire to build community.

Are we building community?

One of the dilemmas we are faced with today is that we are too tired to work on community. We work long days, travel long distances to arrive home, spend time with family and/or friends, only to do the same the next day. We are too tired to build community. Rather, we may think that we live in community.

However, "community" is not something that we live in. We live in neighborhoods and cities. Communities are the relationship we develop among neighbors in and out of our homes and churches. They are the relationships one makes as you go to your supermarket, in the park, or on dog walks. Community is the process found in HIRL'S, the acronym popular on social networks for "hangouts in real life." It is the building of relationships when one is at work, church, home, and in specific locations where one meets with others. Community

is the feeling of relationships being made as we are in the process of making them. It is the process of opening ourselves to the lives of others, to be able to feel the reflections of others on ourselves. Community at best emerges from relationship, and relationships require time, work, and effort.

Community building is difficult because of the involvement of getting to know those around you, or maybe that we fear some of the people who live or congregate on their blocks. Even if we are building community, the next problem is who are we building with. Studies show that in poor communities relational ties generally don't cross social class lines. In other words, the poor associate with the poor, the middle class with the middle class, and so on.

One on ones

Building communities that are engaged in challenging the concerns of their neighborhood and city in a positive way require "one on ones," public yet personal interviews with other individuals that enter one into experience and in relation with one another. These interviews are personal in the sense that it often gets into quite intimate stories about someone's life. Of course, it is always up to the person being interviewed what they are willing to share. It is here where we the person asking to share the others story prehends the other, feeling the others feelings as they relate their experience.

The interviews are also "public" in that the goal is not to generate an intimate friendship (although this may also be an eventual result). In part, the aim is for the person

to be a part of the building of community, giving them and the community more influence in making changes they would like to see. You want a "public" not a "private" relationship with this person in which one can build community.

The question is this, how can process thinking help shape our understanding of one on ones?

Whitehead, narrowness and width

In *Process and Reality*, Alfred North Whitehead talks about how actual entities achieve satisfaction. I will define satisfaction as a determination of something, whatever it may be. In order for there to be satisfaction, there requires both width and narrowness, which I will describe briefly, and show how they are helpful when thinking about one on ones and community.

Width is the need for variety in the data of occasion. Width contains within it the inclusion of a large number of contrasts of diverse elements in the satisfaction (PR, 166). I would describe this as the vast amount of data that we are taking in at every moment. There are large varieties of contrasting information being given to us. Width is that large backdrop of data that we are prehending to come at a satisfaction, a choice.

In order for there to be a focus or concentration, narrowness is used. Narrowness is the result of concentrating on individual emotions about individual components in the datum (*PR*, 110-12, 166). This means that in the vast amount of data that we receive, narrowness allows one to focus on a particular piece of data, and sense or feel the emotions of that data. It is the coordination of that feeling for use. It allows us to feel the particular subject matter and make certain judgements on that subject. Whitehead states that if there is a lack of coordination, then the components of the datum are trivial, mere components of datum with difference, but no feeling to particular components of the datum. As an example, triviality would be the indecisiveness of everything we take in. It is just all the information there with no determined opinion about how we feel about a particular subject.

Width and narrowness are important together for they form the intense experience of harmony for satisfaction. It allows us to make determinations on what we feel about

certain issues. It requires the individual feeling about issues in the wider context of our lives, with family, jobs, church and community.

This is where I believe one on ones then become effectual. The reason that one on ones are effective ways of getting those within neighborhoods and cities to build community is because they allow the prospective participants to stop and reflect on their opinions of particular problems by sharing stories. Here we find the narrowness within the width of the person. Narrowness here describes the single issue happening within neighborhoods that the organizer wants you the participant to come to a decision to. The width is how that particular issue is in relation to the sum total of the participants life, how it has affected, is affecting and can continue to affect them in the future.

Prehension and one on ones

Knowing that the goal of organizers is to get participants to reach a harmony for satisfaction, to make a choice, one of the ways in which that is performed is by way of prehension. Prehension, for Whitehead, can be described as a relation of feelings; it contains two sides, what is being felt and how it is being felt by the subject receiving it. In an example, the organizer may ask the participant to

> *One of the dilemmas we are faced with today is that we are too tired to work on community.*

share a story while the organizer reacts to it by making connections from the story to the issue they are trying to raise. Prehension here is both the feelings of the story being shared by the participant, as well as the reaction from the organizer receiving the story. They both partake of it. As the organizer hears the story, they are prehending, feeling the feelings of the participant telling the story.

This in turns builds a relationship between the two, a relation that they both connect with. It is that relationship that allows for both the public and private relationship to take its course, and for the participant to enter into the process of building community.

Angela Davis in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* writes,

> it is extremely important not to assume that there are "communities of color" out there fully formed, conscious of themselves, just waiting for vanguard organizers to mobilize them into action. . . [W]e have to think about organizing as producing the communities, as generating community, as building communities of struggle. (161)

Producing communities requires width, narrowness, and prehension to help shape one on ones as a way of helping the participant focus on the issue of discussion, how it relates to their own world, and become part of the process of change. Process thinking helps to build that relationality, turning neighborhoods and cities into communities of difference.

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Persons-in-community

by John B. Cobb, Jr.

The idea derivative from process thought that I find most relevant to many social issues, is "person-in-community."

Although in any moment the inheritance from one's personal past is likely to be primary, each of those personal past experiences was partly shaped by what it received from its environment. Over time, we must recognize that how we think and feel and what we think and feel are very much a social product. We are not self-made individuals who are incidentally related to others. We are products of our societies who also, to some degree, transcend this social determination.

. . . Now let me say much the same thing in terms of discussions that are carried on in the broader community. There, some view human beings primarily as separate individuals. Society is simply the collection of individuals. This model is widespread in economic and political thinking. Marxists, on the other hand, emphasize the collectivities. In some Marxist thinking, and in characteristic policies followed by many Communist governments in the past, individuals counted for very little.

Process thought leads to a third way. Individuals are very important. They are, in fact, the only locus of value. The value of a society is the value of each of its members. Also, decision takes place only in individuals. On the other hand, these individuals are who they are, think as they think, and feel as they feel, largely because they are members of particular human communities. If we want to increase the value present in a community, we usually do better to improve the quality of the community and its life, rather than to focus on its individual members.

. . . The image [I find helpful] is a community of communities. Communities are essential to human health, but they can also be sources of terrible destruction. Nations are great communities, but devotion to them has led to terrible wars and even genocide over several hundred years. Local communities are of greatest value and importance, but it is crucial that they understand themselves as parts of a community of communities. The task is to find effective ways of instilling within each community its sense of community with others and of celebrating the community among the communities.

Excerpted drom P&F website, <u>*Ask Dr. Cobb, October 2006*</u>

Organizing for our INTERRELATED mutual interest

by Timothy Murphy

How do we relate to other people, such as other members of our church? In this brief essay, I would like to describe two ideas that show how process can help affirm congregational community organizing: a social ontology of humans and interested love. These two concepts can explain how through community organizing we can be enriched by making the interests of others our own.

Not your typical church social

Much of American church life is shaped by assumptions of the Enlightenment and a strong sense of individualism. Quite often, we talk about ourselves as a voluntary association of individuals or prioritize the essential autonomy we have in a church, thus parroting the dominant ethos of our culture. Our essential separation from others only makes sense to the extent that the primary way in which we relate to each other is through external relationships. What affects you, affects you, and what affects me, affects me, and only indirectly may these overlap with each other.

In contrast, process theology can affirm that everything we do, and everything others do, shapes us however trivial such impacts may be. In one of Whitehead's most direct criticisms that challenge our everyday assumptions, he writes, "The human being is inseparable from its environment in each occasion of its existence. The environment which the occasion inherits is immanent to it, and conversely it is immanent in the environment which it helps to transmit..."[1] While every-

Everything we do, and everything others do, shapes us.

thing is a 'thing' for itself, i.e. an individual, it is also a 'thing' for others, i.e. part of a community. In other words, who we are becomes a part of the environment for others.

Past events are "felt" by present ones as each contemporary occasion determines what it will become. Concrete facts are what have already become, and it is these that are prehended, both publicly and privately. In other words, we feel what they feel because we partially prehend internally what another person is feeling. The ensuing sympathy is not identical because the prehension, or feeling of another's feeling, is only partial and never determinative in one's constitutive self.

Douglas Sturm has affirmed the connection people have with one another through their internal constitution. Regarding what it means to be human, he says, "To be a self is to be in relation, to have loyalties and allegiances, responsibilities and associations which, taken together, enter into our individuality."[2] To experience the other is in part to have them impact who you are and who you can become for the future. Our encounters with others, such as church members, shape us in one way or another. Recognizing this can help us re-imagine what it means to love others as you love yourself.

Interested love

Traditionally, Christians have assumed that the relationship we should take towards others is one of *agape*, or self-giving love. How should we care for others? By denying

ourselves, and sacrificing our concerns for the sake of the well-being of our neighbor. Traditionally, this is the way we love one another.

Feminist theologians have long noted that the idea of self-giving love has too often been used as a tool to further weaken persons in precarious situations. When women or a group of marginalized people orient themselves to others primarily through self-giving and self-sacrifice, this perpetuates the diffusion of them as persons. Is the only love worth having a selfless love? What, if anything, is the alternative? Selfish love?

Process theology suggests that a third option is possible: one can have a *kind* of interested love. I have noted that humans are constituted in part by their environment and experience of it. When a piece of that environment is destroyed or diminished in value, a portion of one's own potential life is also lost.

Each person-event has value both for herself and for others. When we encounter other people, we are positively prehending certain aspects of them and negatively prehending other aspects. Let me focus in on these negative prehensions. Negative does not automatically imply bad. In fact they are surely inevitable, for we remain unknowable to each other in any complete sense of the word. Otherwise there would not be a relationship but an identity between people. The essentially infinite ways we are constituted by a multitude of other centers of experience and value, each indescribably complex in themselves, prevents the possibility of a total positive prehension of another center of experience. At any rate, not everything can be integrated into a complex harmony: some elements must be cut out in order to *make a decision*.

What is troubling is when we negatively prehend an aspect of another that would have been available for us to integrate into ourselves into what could be called a more harmonized contrast of intensity. This simply means that we could have become something internally richer, transformed in a potentially healing way. When we have the chance to care about another person, to learn from their experience, hopes, or fears, we can potentially encounter creative transformation. However, when that possibility is rejected, we have not simply missed an opportunity with neutral impact. Rather, that decision bears its own

marks. As Whitehead puts it, "A feeling bears on itself the scars of its birth."[3]

These scars do not have to be at the level of self-consciousness; they can simply be intuitive feelings. This occurs all the time in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, such as cultural racism. Let us take as an example a middle-class white American man walking down the street. His family and friends would consider him a decent and caring person. However, he is not used to encountering members of another race because of the neighborhood in which he dwells. When he sees a group of dark-skinned teenagers walking down the street in his direction, certain responses may crop up. There may be a vague sense of discomfort or awkwardness. His defenses may perk up. He may even feel a tinge of shame at getting defensive in the first place. He does not know these teens, and he has no conscious animosity to them. As far as he's intellectually concerned, there is nothing suspicious about them. Nevertheless,

> *Who we are becomes a part of the environment for others.*

there is a response, a scar stemming from the lack of previous encounters. The lack of positive encounters leaves him vulnerable to cultural racism.

Certain experiences and assumptions of our culture have constituted our relevant worlds to the extent that we are inclined to respond in one way or another to random encounters. Based on the location of where we live, whom we associate with, or where we goes to church, we may not have any countervailing experiences with which to respond to what our culture has presented us. In encountering others, and more specifically when we learn about each other in intentional and open ways, we can heal ourselves and offer that value to others who encounter us.

Process thought encourages us to want to not merely have positive feeling for others in a benevolently paternalistic way but to recognize that our wellbeing is tied with one another. We are not separated but are citizens of the world

in a co-constituted commonwealth of nature. Process does not seek to negate self-regard for oneself, for one is a locus of value. But you are also a value for others as are they for you (this is not to dismiss the value of other living creatures, which John Cobb has reminded many of us). Each of us is part of an interwoven matrix that sees its possibilities and existence partially constructed through its environment. Once again, Sturm says that "community is evidenced in empathy in the strict sense of the word as 'suffering in,' that, the bodily apprehension of the feelings of others as if they were one's own."[4]

The alternative is to recognize that we are mutually implicated in the becoming of one another. Simply put, what affects one of us affects another. St. Paul and Martin Luther King both recognized this inherent relationship, this indwelling of one in the other. Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning the body of Christ: "If one part suffers, all suffer together; if one flourishes, all rejoice together."[5] In his letter from Birmingham Jail, King writes, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."[6] Our concern for one another does not have to be disinterested to be genuinely Christian. We have a stake in the wellbeing of others, because *process says that their experience enters into us*.

To the extent that we exclude the possibilities of becoming for others, we are reducing what we ourselves can become and what we can offer to others. To the extent another has relevant possibilities of transformation available to them, the more that novel relevant possibilities become available for us as well. When someone else's life is made better and that value becomes available to others, *my life is literally affected too*.

Community organizing as value-intensifying

When done well, community organizing enables us to discern not only how we are connected to each other but also how our greater interests are mutually implicated. As part of each other's environment, we shape the possibilities for one another in more creative or destructive ways. Seeing the world as isolated entities, each seeking to maximize itself without regard to each other, goes against the grain of the universe. By intentionally encountering one

another's hopes, dreams and concerns through community organizing, we expand our relevant world of concern in ways that past scars of negation or hard-heartedness can be smoothed out though not erased. Though it may produce conflict as different values and intensities stand in dynamic tension, through our desire to follow God's call, momentary conflict can produce something new and beautiful for our communities.

I am suggesting that we need to make the concerns of one another our own because what we do truly affects one another and is in our greater self-interest to do so. From a process perspective, even God has an interest in the flourishing of creative actualities. God is not disinterested in how the world becomes but guides it through the primordial vision towards novel, intense harmonizations. This interested vision shapes the Eros to which relevant possibilities are expressed. These values are taken into the ever-expanding Harmony of Harmonies which also has a stake in who we become together. If it is legitimate to say that God's love is interested, then surely human love can be so, too.

Endnotes

1. Alfred North Whitehead. *Adventure of Ideas.* 1933. New York: Free Press, 1967, 63.

2. Douglas Sturm. *Community and Alienation: Essays on Process Thought and Public Life.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, 170.

3. Alfred North Whitehead. *Process and Reality.* 1929. Corrected Edition. Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, 1978, 226.

4. Sturm, *Community and Alienation,* 109.

5. 1 Corinthians 12:26.

6. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 1963.

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Building POWERFUL Community Organizations

by Michael Jacoby Brown

[Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from Brown's book that gives an example of a one-on-one. It can be found in Michael Jacoby Brown, Building Powerful Community Organizations (Arlington, MA: Long Haul Press, 2007), 157-66. Reprinted with permission.]

Listening in on a model dialogue

Here is a dialogue of what such a conversation might sound like. In this model one-on-one visit I am trying to recruit someone into a hypothetical group, "Interfaith in Action." This is an organization of congregations that works to improve the schools, build affordable housing, and improve other conditions in the city. Your organization may be different. The issues may be different. You may meet in a kitchen, a pizza parlor, an office, or workplace. However, the principles of listening, not selling, remain the same.

In this example, I ("Organizer") am a member of a religious congregation, and I am recruiting someone I have seen at services but do not know well. Let's call her Alix. During the after-service coffee, I invited her to meet me at a diner for a cup of coffee. So I am in the diner with my coffee.

The dialogue might go something like the following. My commentary on the dialogue is [*italicized*].

Your body language counts. Be relaxed, but attentive. You also want to share enough about yourself so that the conversation is two-way. You cannot expect the other person to reveal much about herself or himself if you don't share much of yourself.

Michael (Organizer): Hi, thanks for coming. I know I have seen you in church often, but I have never really gotten to know you. I have been a member here for about twelve years now. I grew up in New York, but this is now my home. My wife and I have two children, and I like this place, but I wish it would be more of a community—although I know at times it has been. When our last child was born, my wife was pretty sick and a lot of people in the congregation helped us, cooking, bringing groceries, dropping them off on the porch. But I worry about the schools, with the state budget cutbacks; they now charge for band and sports at the high school and my third grader's class has 28 kids, which I think is too many. Could you tell me a little about yourself?

You want to leave off with a simple open-ended question to start her talking. An open-ended question is one that does not take a yes or no answer. You are looking for clues about what she says about herself.

Alix (Potential Member): Well, I moved here from Detroit, and have worked mostly for public relations firms in advertising. I always liked to draw and put together ideas on paper. I have worked for Morris & Morris for about eight years now, and I live with my husband and two sons, ages six and ten, in East Cloverdale, near the racetrack. I have been coming to the church for about four years.

Michael: And what brought you to this church?

She has stopped talking. You want to get her talking again, so you ask her about something you have in common. Again, ask an open-ended question. You ask this because

you want to find out something about her values. Why did she join the church? Is it a major family tradition? You are trying to find out more about her and what the church means to her.

> *You need to understand where she learned her values, as well as what those values are. People who acquired their values in childhood from their family often have values that last.*

Alix: Well. I was looking for someplace that was spiritual and community-oriented—nothing too fancy—and I liked this place.

She made some crucial points: "spiritual and community-oriented." This indicates that "spiritual" things and being "community-oriented" are important to her. This is a good sign that she might be interested in a community group. She might have said many other things. She might have said she joined for her husband or for her children. You need to listen between the lines. You are trying to understand what matters to her. She isn't talking much, so you will have to gently pry a little more. Go easy.

Michael: What did you like about it?

Alix: Well, the people were friendly and I liked the fact that the minister and some of the members were interested in social action sorts of things.

Here's a big clue. She said members were interested in "social action sorts of things." This gives you a good idea that she is interested in the community and possibly the political situation. She looks like someone who might be good for your organization. So you can follow up with a more specifc question to clarify the social action business.

Michael: Oh? Does that interest you?

Alix: Oh, yes. I have always tried to get involved in the community, although it's harder now that I'm working full-time and I have the two kids.

Another big clue. She is interested, but her time is limited. She is giving you a clear indication that she will not like to

have her family time heavily invaded. Go slow and show her that getting involved with your organization won't jeopardize the relationship with her two children. This also indicates that her two children are important to her. She is very open about this.

Michael: I can understand that. I have two children myself. I know how much time it takes and how important it is. The older one has been interested in politics, at least for a while, but now she seems to be exploring her artistic side. You never know where they will end up. I only hope that they do what they are meant to do. But, tell me, where did you get your interest in social action?

Don't remain an aloof stranger. You are a real person with a history, self-interest, and story of your own. You want her to get to know you as well. You should share enough of yourself to help her feel comfortable talking about herself The relationship should be two-way. On the other hand, don't draw the conversation primarily back to yourself.

Alix: Well, actually it comes from meditation I do and some reading, as well as from my parents, who always were involved in the community. My father was a banker, but the old-fashioned kind, the kind who loaned money to people because he knew them and knew they would pay it back.

Another clue. You are interested in her values. Your organization is based on values and sustained by the values of its members. You are looking for people who have values that you share: concern for the community welfare as well as for one's own welfare. This clue tells you that she learned something from her father. Many of us learn our values from our families. Not good lessons all the time, but the values that we learned from our family are often deeply held. You need to understand where she learned her values, as well as what those values are. People who acquired their values in childhood from their family often have values that last. This also helps you to know how to motivate her. If she received values from a teacher of literature, then literature may be a way to her heart. A comment like the one above tells you a lot. You would do well to follow up. Again, she is not talking very long.

Michael: Really? What my parents told me still sticks with me to this day, too. My mom, who was a social worker, always told me how there was a right and a wrong, and

that was that. Not much middle ground. Some things were just right, and you did them. Other things were just wrong and you did not do them. I also watched them work hard, so just from their example, I think I learned something about the value of hard work. What kinds of things do you think your parents taught you?

Again, another open-ended question to find out more about her family values. You want to find out if she is interested in community issues out of a sense of charity or if she is out for herself as well. People who do well in organizations care about their own welfare. They are not selfless do-gooders who only think they are doing good for others.

Alix: Well, !:hey always told me that we should try to give back something to the community. Whatever we had, we shouldn't just hold onto it for ourselves.

Michael: So have you done things like that in the past?

Here you are trying to find out what she has actually done in the past. Does she only talk a good game, or has she actually done anything? One of the best indicators that someone will contribute to your organization is whether they have done something similar in the past. You want to know whether they have put their values into action before.

Alix: Yeah, with the church in the last place I lived, before my husband got laid off and we had to move back here. But lately, no, not so much. I've really been too busy. With the kids and work, my husband, the family, and my mother hasn't been too well lately. Since my dad passed away, I've been trying to spend more time with her.

Again, here are more important clues about her availability. All this information about her helps you to think about her and her needs and also about the organization's needs. How can they both be met? Part of the job in building a community organization is to build the community part. This includes caring about what goes on in people's lives beyond the issues of the organization. As a member and leader of the organization you should check in with people about their lives. This information about her family is valuable. You will want to remember that her mother is sick and that she wants to spend more time with her. You may want to

find things for her to do within the organization that she can do at home. She could stuff envelopes or make phone calls from home.

Michael: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Alix: Oh, it was a couple of years ago, and he was very sick for a long time.

Michael: Well, what do you think of the city here? You said you haven't been here that long.

You want to draw her back to the present and her concerns and opinions. Another open-ended question can do this. It helps to show that you have been listening.

Alix: Well, when I was little I actually lived here. My grandparents were from here, used to be farmers. We moved away when I was about ten. I still have some cousins nearby, but I don't see them much.

More good information about her roots in the community. These roots give her credibility in a community that values personal history. Now you move to another area where your organization has been very involved.

Michael: You said you have two children. What do you think of the schools here?

> Part of the job in building a community organization is to build the community part. This includes caring about what goes on in people's lives beyond the issues of the organization.

Alix: Oh, they are okay, although my oldest, I think, has too many children in his fifth grade class—there are about 28. I think that's too many. I like the teacher, but I don't see how she can pay attention to all those kids.

Michael: Have you been involved in the PTA or anything?

Alix: I actually looked for one, but I don't think there is one in the school.

Michael: Sounds like you might like to make things a little better there, if there were some way to do it.

This is a leading question. I am stretching here, trying to see how much she might be willing to do.

Alix: Well, maybe, but I'm not much for that. I might help out, but I'm not really going to do much, especially now, with my mother sick. I really still need to pay attention to her. She is really pretty sick.

Time to back off, although she said she might "help out." You should be thinking about how she could do this and still not draw too much attention away from her mother.

Michael: I am sorry to hear that. I know what that can be like. My aunt is dealing with some health problems, and I know at any time I might be called to take care of her. [*A brief discussion about Alix's mother's health follows. Then I direct the conversation back to the purpose of this one-on-one.*] You said you went looking for the PTA. Which school was that?

Alix: The Garfield School.

Michael: I know that school! What do you think of that school in general?

Alix: Oh, I like the principal and most of the teachers I've met. I think they try hard, but with so many kids I am not sure there is that much they can do to make things very much better.

Michael: I know you said you went looking for the PTA, so I thought you might like to know that I am involved with Interfaith in Action. We worked to get the city to open the swimming pools in summer for the kids and are trying to get the voters to pass a bond issue to fix up the high school and two of the elementary schools. We're also trying to get the banks to fund more affordable housing. You know they could do more to allow people to buy homes and make the neighborhood more stable. Are you interested in any of that?

Here you are looking to match her interest with the work of the organization. This is a pretty direct question. You are testing out what kind of work she might be willing to commit to.

Alix: Well, I am interested in the schools of course, because of my kids, but I really hadn't heard much about the bond issue. I don't know much about housing, although my dad used to talk about loans and mortgages, but I never really listened much to the details.

Michael: Well, there is a short discussion group after

church in two weeks for about an hour, with some of the people from Interfaith in Action, including me. Would you like to come to that?

Here you make an explicit pitch for her to take some action. It is not an outrageous request. She is already a member of the church. The discussion group is a low level of commitment. It is only an hour. You make that clear. You know she guards her family time closely.

Alix: When did you say it is?

Michael: In two weeks, that's Sunday, March 20, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. It's right after the service, in the basement. You can get to know a little more about these things then.

Alix: That sounds okay, I'll see you then.

Debriefing: what did the recruiter do?

The recruiter (in this example, it was me) modeled specific strategies in the sample dialogue. These techniques will be useful as you conduct your recruitment meetings. Let's highlight a few of the key principles:

1. I spoke about what we had in common (our children), although I did not focus the conversation on my interests and my life.

2. I followed up on my questions, encouraging her to think about herself and talk about herself.

3. I did not force her to commit to anything or pressure her. I simply suggested a specific follow-up action that seemed well within her area of interest and her time constraints.

Michael Jacoby Brown has worked as a community organizer for over 30 years. He has recruited and [trained] hundreds of volunteers and professional community organizers, conducted dozens of workshops, worked as a staff organizer for several community organizations, and started some organizations himself. He has organized hundreds of community meetings in dozens of church basements and storefronts to build organizations with volunteers from a wide range of ethnic and racial backgrounds. He holds a B.A. from Columbia University and an M.P.A. from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In his work and in his writing, he has tried to bridge the academic world of theory and the daily reality of practice at the community level.

Critic's corner: BOOKS

On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process, **Catherine Keller (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2008), $17.00**

reviewed by Justin Heinzekehr

Catherine Keller's *On the Mystery* is a timely and creative book that draws the reader into the process worldview. She avoids technical theological language in this work (although she writes with her usual poetic style), and yet manages to introduce the deepest insights of the process perspective. This book would be accessible and edifying for laypeople, pastors, and students. The structure of the book, tackling one theological topic per chapter, would easily lend itself to Sunday school or small group settings, and it would also be a useful textbook for undergraduate or seminary classes.

The goal of the book, as Keller states, is to explore a way of understanding theological truth that avoids the polar extremes of religious absolutism and secular relativism. Keller suggests that, too often, especially here in the United States, religion gets caught in the same dead-end conversation: one either clings to an unchanging Truth, or one reduces "truth" to social construction, language, biology, etc. As Keller says, this doesn't give us much of a choice: the two positions end up simply mirroring one another's fundamentalism and indifference to creation. Although this book is a few years old now, the problem of polarization is a perennial one, and *On the Mystery* continues to be pertinent in our polarized government.

In the face of this stalemate, Keller proposes a "third way," or perhaps a "way out of no way." Rather than imposing or shrugging off truth, might we look for a truth that emerges out of relation—a "truth in touch" with the world around us? This kind of theological truth would respect the mystery of God and the world, but would not rest content with simple "mystification." Keller invites us to go "on the mystery," pursuing theological questions with wonder, purposefulness and adventure. In this paradigm, truth is an ongoing process. It is open-ended and self-critical, but also constructive.

After introducing this way of thinking, Keller applies it to seven common theological categories: truth, creation, power, love, justice, Jesus, and eschatology. Drawing on the example of characters such as Pontius Pilate and Job, Keller argues that the biblical notion of truth has more to do with trust, vulnerability and witness than it does with any specific *belief*. She discusses the chaos of Genesis as a nonlinear, self-organizing system—a "cosmic collaboration" rather than a unilateral "fiat." She redefines divine power as a flow of influence that opens up channels of vulnerability and empowerment.
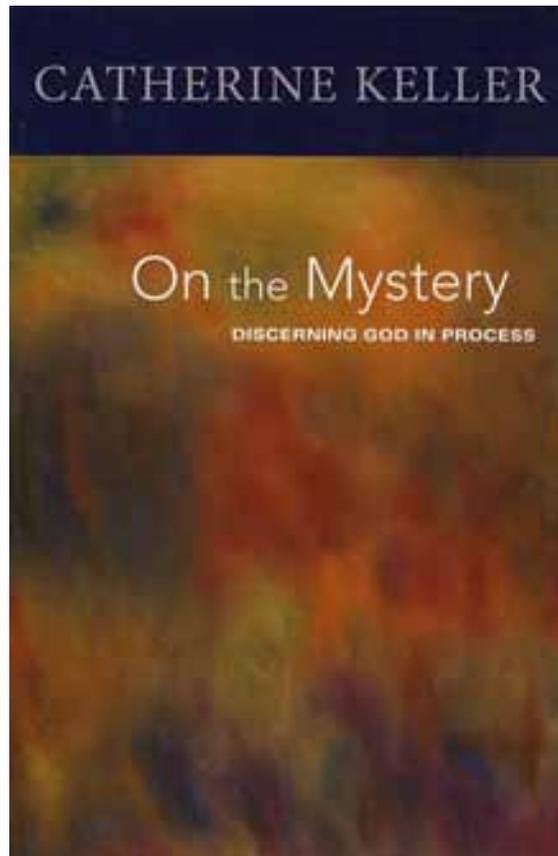
Lest this "persuasive" power become sentimental, Keller discusses love and justice in consecutive chapters – love as divine desire and creaturely response, and justice as the persistence of this love that pushes against the status quo. In the final two chapters, she points out that Jesus and the Spirit at their best point toward a redemption of relationships. Jesus' demand for a new economics in the *basileia*, for instance, reverses the tendency toward individual accumulation. And the Christian tradition has, at its best, pictured the Spirit pushing communities toward a more intense life, greater justice, and new beginnings. Even the eschaton, Keller notes, was originally an "unveiling" (*apocalypse*) of a renewed earth, not an annihilation of it.

Given Keller's emphasis on relationality, I was a little disappointed not to have a section on ecclesiology. It would have been interesting to include a chapter on "The Church in Process." However, her understanding of the church is woven into many of the other sections. In one place, she uses Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara's notion of the church as "members of one another." The community must navigate conflict with "an ever-evolving structure of justice." In the last chapter, Keller uses one

> *The goal of the book is to explore a way of understanding theological truth that avoids the polar extremes of religious absolutism and secular relativism.*

church's efforts for eco-justice as a model for her theology of becoming. With these clues, Keller helps to envision some concrete ways that our own communities could begin constructively grappling with mystery.

On the Mystery is a rewarding book, not only because of the concepts it articulates so gracefully, but also because of the invitation it extends to the reader. The sense of adventure is contagious; it inspires one to rethink old assumptions, attend a little bit more closely to the world around us, and make theology a personal endeavor. Whether or not a student or church member ultimately finds compelling the specific framework of process theology, Keller's work embodies the "lure" as it encourages them to develop thoughtful and compassionate theological frameworks of their own.

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Critic's corner: Film

Choosing DEATH: 3 Films from the Montreal Festival of WORLD FILMS

reviewed by Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki

Angfang 80/Coming of Age. Austria, 2011, 90 minutes. Directors: Sabine Hiebler, Gerhard Ertl.

De Goede Dood/The Good Death. Netherlands, 2012, 83 minutes. Director: Wannie de Wijn.

Top of the Hill People. China, 2011, 90 minutes. Director: Wanfeng Han.

An interesting phenomenon emerging in a number of films shown at the Montreal Festival of World Films this year is a focus on death as a natural and acceptable part of life, rather than on death as the feared enemy of life. Chief among such films are the three mentioned above, one of which—*Anfang 80*—was selected for the world competition. Not incidentally, its 81-year-old protagonist received the festival's "Best Actor" award.

The story proceeds by quickly making a main point: 80-year-old Rosa is left forgotten in front of the X-Ray machine in a hospital—forgotten and invisible, as is often the case with the elderly. To her "Can I go now?" the nurse with a start remembers her and releases her, whereupon Rosa gives her a good slap in the face: "There. Now you'll remember me," she says, and leaves. Later in the film, Rosa says that most younger people regard older people as dead folks whose legs still work. The elderly are too often ignored, discounted, or barely tolerated by the younger generations.

The film makes clear that to age does not mean to lose all the feelings, passions, and characteristics formed through one's lifetime. Indeed, to some degree these are intensified by the very awareness of the passage of one's time towards death. In Rosa's case, she refuses to be institutionalized because of her terminal illness, even though her cancer diagnosis gives her but six more months of life. When Rosa goes home from the hospital, it is only to find that her niece has released her apartment, assuming Rosa will be institutionalized for her final months. On the sidewalk outside her former home, Rosa meets Bruno, who stops to help her. "I'll just have to think of something new," says Rosa when asked what she will do now.

Bruno is intrigued by Rosa and her notion of "something new," even in the face of illness and death. He tries to invigorate his own 50+ years of marriage by suggesting that he and his wife do something new—remodeling? Traveling? But it is difficult to dig one's way out of a rut so deeply woven. By chance he meets Rosa again; they go for coffee and conversation; they fall in love. Bruno leaves home to live with Rosa in an apartment.

Meanwhile, Bruno's actions cause consternation and anger in his adult children; his son has him declared

> *The film makes clear that to age does not mean to lose all the feelings, passions, and characteristics formed through one's lifetime.*

incompetent. A critical scene in the film has Bruno meeting with a psychiatrist appointed by the court to determine incompetency.

> *We are shown differing responses to death, and through these responses, to the complications entailed by death.*

Because we are old, says Bruno, we are not taken seriously. But we, too, can fall in love; we, too, can experience passion and physical fulfillment; we, too, care deeply and passionately. And because we are so fully human, we are declared incompetent? The psychiatrist hears him, and the incompetency ruling is overturned.

Relative to issues of death, Rosa has asked Bruno to help her when the pain from her cancer becomes unbearable, and he has promised. The film takes us through the joy of their time together to the issues raised as Rosa's health steadily deteriorates, to the final scene of her death. But in no way does the film suggest that the death is tragic. Rather, it is part and parcel of what it is to be human, an acceptable part of life itself, even with the grief naturally attendant upon loss.

The second film comes to us from the Netherlands, where assisted suicide is a legal option. We are given the last 24 hours of Bernhard's life; he is suffering from terminal lung cancer, and has asked his good friend, a physician, to help him end his life. His two younger brothers, his lover, and his daughter all spend these hours with him, and we are shown their respective responses to Bernhard's impending death.

In contrast to *Anfang 80*, the film does not focus on aging, but on death itself. We are shown differing responses to death, and through these responses, to the complications entailed by death. Bernhard's next youngest brother Michael is a businessman, whose reaction to Bernhard's intention to hasten his death is almost frantic. He alternates between attempting to stop the assisted suicide, and worrying about the will and what he will gain or lose from it. Ruben, the youngest brother, is autistic and in some respects childlike. Music is his fundamental vehicle for expressing his own fears about losing someone so essential to his own emotional well being. When others attempt to protect Ruben by having him elsewhere when the lethal

injection is given, he adamantly protests. Whatever the cost, he will participate in his brother's final moments.

Bernhard's lover (or perhaps now his wife) is the ex-wife of Michael—certainly a complicating factor in this end-of-life scenario. She and Sammy, the daughter, are emotionally close to Bernhard, and each wrestles with the impending loss in her own way, but both respect Bernhard's wish. Robert, the physician, makes it plain to all that inevitably the next phase of Bernhard's cancer will be the prolonged pain of drowning from the liquid in his lungs. It is not a question of whether the cancer will kill him, but of when, and of how much pain Bernhard should endure. Even so, administering the relieving dose to his friend instead of to one who is simply a professional responsibility has its own cost; it is hard to participate in the loss of a dear friend, for whatever good reasons.

We the viewer become the sixth person present. How do we feel about assisted suicide? Is it better than unrelievable pain? Is it better to die when one still has one's faculties and the capacity to make such decisions, or to wait for the cancer to take its devastating toll? For the sake of those, like Ruben, who depend emotionally on the continued presence of the ill person in their lives, should death be delayed as long as possible? Bernhard himself is clear about his answer: he has lived his life long and well, and he will help his body complete the process of living and dying. Postponing the moment of loss by several months will not save one's survivors from the loss which they must inevitably experience. We in the audience who watch can empathize with all viewpoints in the film; leaving the film, we continue to live with the questions concerning Bernhard's choice.

The third film in this brief series takes us to a quite different culture—the Qiang people of rural China. They live in the Sichuan province, where a deadly earthquake took 68,000 lives in 2008; these people are no strangers to death. The story is set several years later; rebuilding is still in process, and village life at the top of the mountain continues much as it has for centuries, even though the people have many interactions with the people, schools, and shops in the town that is further down the mountain.

Transportation between village and town is an arduous trek by foot.

The religion and rituals of the people harken back to a pivotal event several centuries earlier: a mighty general saved the people from a military threat that would have plunged them into exile and slavery. The event was so traumatic that in ensuing generations it evolved into stories giving the people their meaning. Ritualized dances, with the people in their finest and most colorful dress, celebrate the freedom of their life together.

Within this colorful scenery, we are introduced to the focal point of the story: a 70-year-old woman's decision to die. She is weak and ill, but not in the debilitating way we have seen in the other two films. Widowed, her devoted son and her friends and neighbors care for her. Clearly she is well-loved, a highly valued member of this close-knit community. A legend had emerged in the culture that to be summoned to death by the general is a great honor; those so summoned were interred in a revered part of the land at the very top of the mountain. Our protagonist has a dream, where first she sees her dead husband, and then, close behind him, the general. The general calls her, and takes her into a wooded place, and the dream fades. On awakening, the woman marvels at the honor done to her. Sharing the dream with an elder in the village, he appreciates the honor, and tells her she will be buried at the top of the hill.

And so the woman prepares for her death. She visits each neighbor to say goodbye; she gives gifts. Most importantly, she asks her son to take her down the mountain to a distant prison, where her other son has been incarcerated for criminal activity. Throughout his incarceration, she has been receiving weekly letters from him; she treasures these letters, brought to her by her other son.

Meanwhile, of course, there are complications within the story—problems of trauma still endured from the earthquake, problems of relationships, problems of employment. We see scenes of these daily issues interspersed with scenes of the woman as she prepares for her death. Finally, her son puts her onto his back to take her to the prison for one last visit with her other son. He carries her down the mountain, and by bus and by foot they journey to the prison—only to be denied entry. And so they begin the long journey back. Along the way, the woman tells her son that she knows it is he, not her imprisoned son, who writes her the weekly letters—but they mean as much, because she knows her two sons well.

In the process of her preparation for death, the woman has been a catalyst for resolving several of the problematic issues presented in the lives of villagers and townspeople. Even though her final act of attempting to see her other son results in failure, she accepts the failure—the attempt itself was enough. As her son carries her on his back up the mountain to the village, she dies. And of course she is buried at the top of the hill, full of honor.

This film, more than the other two, suggests a seamlessness to life, a continuity that has its natural phases of youth giving way to a long period of one's life's work, giving way to one's role as an elder, and then death as the completion of life. This natural cycle of life is contrasted with the more traumatic experience of lives interrupted by the earthquake, creating havoc in the lives of the survivors. It is as if life itself is ideally like a fine piece of fabric, moving beautifully from beginning to end; early death rips the fabric, leaving ends that must be rewoven with difficulty into the whole in the ongoing life of the community. But it is the work of the community, particularly those whose lives reflect the wholeness of the fabric, to do this work of weaving.

Three films, offering three depictions of death chosen as the completion of life. These were certainly not the only films dealing with death among the more than four hundred films screened in Montreal this year (2012). Within the eighteen competition films alone, there is death enough: *Invasion* (Germany-Austria, dir. Tito Tsintsadze), *Flower Square* (Cvjeni Trg, Croatia, dir. Krsto Papic) *The Wild Ones* (Els Nens Salvatges, Spain, dir Patricia Ferreira), *Orange Honey* (Miel de Naranjas, Spain, dir. Imanol Uribe), *Bad Seeds*

> *Natural death is a part of life; as such, one can accept it and sometimes faithfully assist it.*

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(Comme Un Homme, France, dir. Safy Nebou), *The Innocence of Clara* (L'Innocenza di Clara, Italy, dir. Toni D'Angelo), *Manhunt* (Oblawa, Poland, dir.

Marcin Krzysztalowicz), *Expiation* (Iskupleniye, Russia, dir. Alexander Proshkin), *The Last Sentence* (Dom Oever Doed Man, Sweden, Jan Troell), and *Where the Fire Burns* (Atesin Duestuegue Yer, Turkey, dir. Ismail Gunes): ALL dealt with death—not death occurring naturally as the end of life, but violent death inflicted by gunfire or poison. In these films, death is indeed chosen—but the deaths of others, not the death of oneself. In contrast, the competition film *Anfang 80* and the other two I have lifted up are radical alternatives. Natural death is a part of life; as such, one can accept it and sometimes faithfully assist it. Perhaps it is the case that as the population as a whole ages with the longer life spans now possible, film makers (themselves aging) begin to consider the phenomenon of death occurring naturally and positively, life's final transition.

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Faith & Film CLASS
with
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