

Stuck in the middle with you

By [Tripp Hudgins](#)

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My friend, Larry Kamphausen, posted an interesting essay on his blog recently. You can read it [here](#). He's struggling publicly with what it means to be stuck, caught between two (or more) ecclesial realities. He says:

I have felt stuck for quite sometime, truly seeking to bridge and mend the divide isn't really what most American Christians are really interested in. We are interested in our journeys, which makes sense. but I have to ask to what are we all journeying? Not that The Society is some grand thing to copy, the results of our conversations is perhaps under scrutiny ambiguous at best. Several of us became and have remained atheist or agnostic. I don't think any of us returned either to the Mainline churches or evangelicalism. Some of us remained where we were, other's returned to the ethnic and orthodox churches of their families. Christianity in some general sense failed us, yet that it seems is what we are still seeking a generalized Christianity that can wear one of the coats of American dualism in a way we are comfortable with. I think I have given up on Christianity, what I am looking for is the Church, the mystical and real and tangible body of Christ. My fellow disciples of Jesus wandering about in this barren landscape we call America I invite you on that search, and have to admit that if that is not what you are looking for we probably wont walk long together.

He summarizes my own struggle well enough.

And, of course, when I wrote to him about it, I reminded him of Bonhoeffer and his own "religionless Christianity." Bonhoeffer was struggling against the formalism of his own state church in 1930's Germany...and the decade following surely had it's impact on Bonhoeffer's

ecclesiology. If you have not read *Life Together* you might want to give it a shot. It's a short book. It won't take a lot of time, but if you are like me, it will stay with you. The short of it is that Bonhoeffer thinks of Christian community as something to be treasured because it is so very rare. I wonder if part of our trouble these days in the US is that we forget this singular truth of true Christian community. It is rare.

We are caught up in our poles. Liberal. Conservative. Free Church. Catholic. Which immigrant group does your tradition claim as it's origin? German? Irish? Some kind of English? We have so many identities attached to Christian identity that we can get confused or bogged down in how to be Church while also trying to be...Irish or liberal or middle class or...whatever. Our call is to be Christ...to be the body, to serve God. No more. No less. The rest is often a distraction.

I too spent time reflecting on the meeting of these great Tweets. A tweet-up is a fabulous thing. I'm glad we did it. I learned a lot. I want to get together again. But it also served to underscore just how stuck we all are (myself included) in the language of the American Christian landscape. The surprise that my brand of Baptist is mainline and other kinds of Baptists may not be, or that I was raised as a humanist (of sorts), the faith expressed in a Benedictine oblate who attends worship at Willow Creek, the struggle of the Pentecostal pacifist (I think?) who seeks a neo-monastic community...We're all combinations of these historical narratives now. We don't abide in just one very often any longer.

Larry's struggle is one with which I can resonate.

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