



An Overview of Integral Congregational Ministry

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AQAL perspectives provide a uniquely comprehensive holding environment for investigating the various approaches of Christian “confessional theologies”—those understandings of the Divine that are lived within; and “comparative theologies”—those inquiries into the ultimate spiritual values and goals of all human life as perceived and expressed in a variety of religions and wisdom traditions. The authors use the AQAL analytical framework to unite the interior, exterior, individual, and collective dimensions, and to explore aspects of specific lines, levels, states, and types associated with Christian ministry.

Why Congregational Ministry?

A number of names were considered for this Integral Institute center before settling on congregational ministry. In particular, Integral Pastoral Care and Counseling was discarded because many now understand pastoral care and counseling narrowly, as a reference to clergy members’ one-on-one assistance of individuals in distress. While this view represents a stereotype that masks a fuller truth, the common connotation remains something less than the Integral vision.

The Integral Congregational Ministry Center will deal with subjects from many fields, including pastoral theology, practical theology, pastoral psychology, the sociology of religion, the philosophy of religion, biblical and historical theology, world religions, new religious movements, spiritual theology, and others. All of these subjects provide valuable perspectives. The other centers at Integral Institute (www.integralinstitute.org) offer numerous cognate disciplines to draw from as well. However, all of these subjects are considered ancillary in that they are being used in the service of the concrete praxis of on-line congregational ministry.



Ministry

Ministry is used in the title with the understanding that most churches affirm that the ministers of their congregations are the members, and not simply the ordained clergy who serve as pastors. We are interested in enhancing the ministry of all Christians in a way that is open to learning from other faiths, disciplines, and wisdom traditions.

Congregation

The word congregation is meant to differentiate itself from an audience or a spiritual community, where people might show up for some optional program that interests them. Since the 1960s an increasing number of spiritual seekers place importance on the sacred or transpersonal while having no interest in, or perhaps even an aversion to, organized religion. A congregation implies organized religion insofar as it is a group of people who have committed themselves to a formal covenantal relationship with each other, and who seek to worship and serve the Divine in a particular tradition.

View

The tradition of the Center's Co-Directors is Judeo-Christian, widely conceived. Under this broad umbrella are the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches, and their derivatives. Within Protestantism, there are a variety of historic denominations related to Lutheran, Calvinistic, Wesleyan, Quaker, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, and other roots, as well as those worshippers who consider themselves independent or non-denominational.

In the aggregate, the congregations of this Judeo-Christian tradition involve some 60% of the 291 million people in the United States. The largest segment is middle-class with an average household income of \$63,000; 24% are college graduates; 32% are non-Anglo; and the fastest growing racial/ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino. The average age of this group is 37, and 30% of households are headed by a single parent. Across the United States, 35% of households report no



faith involvement, but are often part of the over 90% who report having spiritual experiences. Thus, this center's activities and resources address a significant segment of the population.¹

Audience

People from other religious traditions may benefit from the information of this center and want to join us in furthering exchanges for mutual learning. It is also possible that other centers may develop for other specific religious communities. In any case, we look forward to hosting a lively exchange of ideas within the Integral framework.

Why Integral?

Integral refers to the Integral Theory developed through the writings and recordings of Ken Wilber and others. AQAL is a partial acronym referring to “all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states, and all-types,” which we begin to relate to Christian ministry in this article.

Theology-Philosophy Dialogue

Over the centuries, the Judeo-Christian tradition has been in constant dialogue with the philosophies of different eras and places. This is natural for a tradition that stresses the incarnation of God's Spirit in concrete, historical time and space.

In the early days, much of the church's theology grew out of the dialogue with the Platonic tradition, as with Augustine. More toward the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas delved the church deeply into the Aristotelian tradition. In recent centuries, there has been dialogue with Idealism, Empiricism, Scottish Common Sense, Realism, Animism, Existentialism, Linguistic Analysis, Process Philosophy, Postmodernism, and more.

For the church there is a constant tension with all these conversation partners between finding ways to learn and to make itself understandable and credible to the people with whom it is in



ministry, while not reducing itself to a sub-set or illustration of the prevailing philosophy, and thus losing its identity, character, and power.

One important distinction promoted by theologian John Macquarrie is that while there are constructive relations with philosophies that can provide neutral and useful perspectives from outside the community of faith, a theology comes from inside a community of faith. It proceeds from, is informed by, and is understood from within a community. This understanding of theology is similar to the postmodern ethos that points out the limitations of grand, universal perspectives, while contending that immediate, participative knowledge of such things as the Christian tradition can only come from local immersion in the particularity of the Christian narrative and culture.

It is possible, however, as John S. Dunne describes in his book, *The Way of All the Earth*, to cross over into other religious traditions, and then return to one's own with new insights.² We will explore, for example, aspects of Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, and Sufi philosophy and expression, looking for ways to expand, enrich, and communicate Christian understandings. While it is possible for such dialogue to help explicate the deeper structures that underlie surface or culturally bound expressions of faith, it is problematic to be religious in some general sense without engagement with a living tradition.

In addition to learning from other religions and wisdom traditions, there can be useful dialogue with other disciplines, most notably psychology, anthropology, sociology, medicine, and other sciences—as long as the conversation does not result in simplistic reductionisms. Most, if not all, of these disciplines and many others will eventually be represented at Integral Institute. The congregational ministry welcomes dialogue and learning explorations with the many sources of knowledge representing the four quadrants of every subject described below. This mutual sharing will, in turn, help build the platform for Integral investigations from within lived Christian theology.



Integral Dialogue Partner

Genuine AQAL Integral philosophy is useful on a number of levels as a dialogue partner for the Judeo-Christian tradition as it applies to congregational ministry. For example, AQAL theorists strive to integrate the many aspects of what it means to be human in a descriptive way without prejudicing or reducing humanity to any one perspective. Thus, Integral Theory values every serious approach to studying the world, while not assuming a stance that preemptively rules in or out any particular philosophy or theology. This results in some powerful descriptors of life that present the Judeo-Christian tradition with general categories to take into account in its own theory and practice.

Individual in Community

Much of what Integral Theory outlines is highly compatible with the wisdom of the Judeo-Christian heritage. For instance, a fundamental proposition of Integral Theory is that individuals are always individuals-in-relationship. There is both an individual and collective aspect to every life. This concurs with the bedrock affirmation of Hebrew Scriptures that individuals find their identity in the people of God, and the Christian affirmation that individuals are understood as many members of one Body.

We have found that Integral Theory provides a uniquely comprehensive holding environment for investigating the various approaches of Christian confessional theologies (understandings of the Divine that are lived within) and comparative theologies (inquiries into the ultimate spiritual values and goals of all human life as expressed in a variety of religions and wisdom traditions). The AQAL model articulates a simple but elegant analytical framework that brings together the interior, exterior, individual, and collective dimensions of reality in a balanced and systematic fashion. The essential message of this model is that for a sentient being, *every* occasion arises in these four quadrants *simultaneously*.



The four quadrants derive from two axes, as shown in figure 1: individual and collective (Upper and Lower) and interior and exterior (Left and Right).

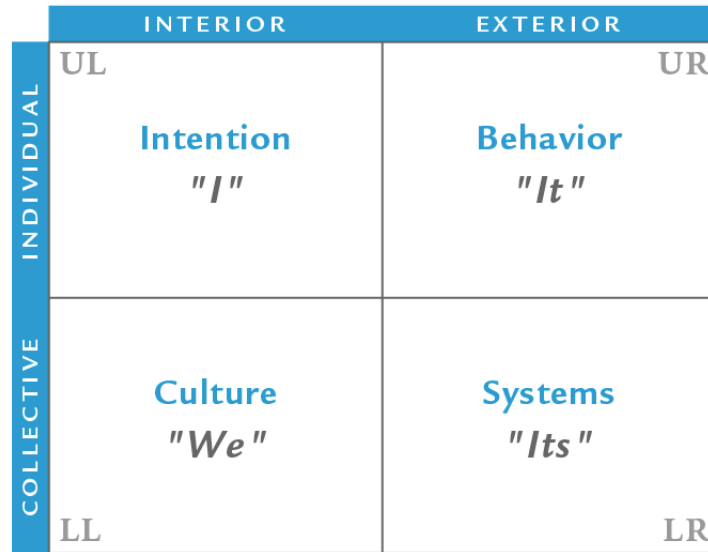


Figure 1. The Four Quadrants

Interior and Exterior

In addition to the individual and collective aspects of reality, there are two additional dimensions to consider: the observable, measurable, exterior aspects of life that can be studied from without, and the inner, subjective aspects that can only be known from within. In other words, people have an externally observable brain, but also a subjective mind; people exhibit external behaviors, and these are frequently motivated by internal intentions. There are material realms as well as realms of consciousness each with their appropriate sciences and validity claims. Here Integral Theory argues forcibly against all narrow reductionisms that would limit “real” life and science to that of materialism, to systems of atoms in motion, as much recent thought has tended to do. Likewise, Integral Theory considers Spirit to be the ground of all quadrants; it cannot be reduced to any one.



When the dimensions of the individual and the collective, the exterior and the interior are placed opposite each other, the results are four quadrants that outline essential, inseparable aspects of life. As shown simplistically in figure 1, the Upper-Right (UR) quadrant anchors the specific actions that people take—the observable form and behavior, as well as the material neurological and biochemical substrates. The Lower-Right (LR) quadrant anchors the systems and processes through and with which people interact. These include, for example, observable structures such as marriage and family arrangements, and other observable social groupings. Here are also the encoded structures that anchor economic and legal systems, housing arrangements, educational and political systems, and more. While these physical manifestations *themselves* are not conscious, they are the forms or artifacts resulting from and even influencing the ideologies, perceptions, and behaviors of people.

But there is a second, stronger connection to the consciousness interacting in this dimension: individuals are in relationship not only through actual physical touch but also through the exchange of artifacts. These artifacts include written/spoken communication, body language, and the exchange of material signifiers, such as money, architecture, literature, or film. These collective systems are composed of the individual members of the system *and* their exchanged artifacts. One essential distinction is worth making here: the individuals are *members* of the system, not parts of it. In other words, they are inside the system but not constituent elements of the system. It is the exchanged artifacts, some of which are listed above, that constitute the internal structure of social systems.

The Lower-Left (LL) quadrant anchors the communal beliefs and ethics of a particular group, namely the cultural values, morals, ethical standards, and principles that guide a communal entity. The Upper-Left (UL) quadrant anchors the interior dimensions of an individual person (e.g., their intellect, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, spiritual development, and so forth).



Holons

In this Integral scheme, a shorthand way of referring to the four dimensions of any sentient being is the term “holon.” A holon is both a whole and a part, or a whole/part. It is a whole that is made up of parts, which in turn is part of a larger whole, where every level of the system has an interior and exterior manifestation. A human holon, for example, is made up of body, mind, soul, and spirit, but each human holon also interacts with and is a member of larger groups such as their family and their faith community. We would expect to hear them describe a variety and range of conversations and values depending on which of these groups they were interacting with.

Non-Reductionism

Part of the functional beauty of the four quadrants is that they give every explorer of knowledge a rightful and honored place but do not allow any field to reduce the others to itself. This clarity helps Christian ministers, teachers, leaders, and thinkers to organize and focus their dialogues with the various fields. Wilber also uses it to clarify muddled discussions of religion where confusion often results from participants using different, though valid, definitions of religion from different quadrants.



<p>INTERIOR-INDIVIDUAL</p> <p>Christian imagination Biblical consciousness Compassion Spiritual complexity Prayer/meditation Emotional maturity Moral development</p> <p>Intentional (I)</p>	<p>EXTERIOR-INDIVIDUAL</p> <p>Christian behavior Worshiping, giving thanks Living in right relationships Pursuing peace and justice Living healthfully Studying, learning Contributing, sharing</p> <p>Behavioral (It)</p>
<p>Cultural (We)</p> <p>Christian fellowship Preaching Spiritual formation Historical memory Group ethos – tradition Biblical/theological meanings</p> <p>INTERIOR-COLLECTIVE</p>	<p>Social (Its)</p> <p>Church Administration Political structures Worship/liturgy Lay/clergy leadership roles Church-related schools Financial systems</p> <p>EXTERIOR-COLLECTIVE</p>

Figure 2. The Four Quadrants of Congregational Ministry

A Way of Understanding

The four quadrants offer a way of understanding where various aspects of Christian life and ministry are centered, with the understanding that every aspect is interrelated and interdependent. One cannot talk for long about something in one quadrant without soon incorporating aspects of the other three.

An Historical Lens

If we look at church history through the four-quadrant lens, it gives us a tool for understanding the relative effectiveness of various developments. For instance, the Friends or Quaker movement pioneered by George Fox was quite effective because Fox gave sufficient attention to issues in all four quadrants. He developed prayers and meditations that helped his followers discover the inner light of God within themselves (UL). He fostered values of community and



love that countered excessive individualism (LL). These values, in sync with the experience of inner light, encouraged and empowered specific behaviors (UR) such as pacifism, working for peace, providing humanitarian aid to enemies, and the refusal to swear oaths. The social structure (LR) organized followers into meetings of Friends, where decisions required consensus based on the leading of the Spirit, which is discerned through the medium of silence. This structure embodied the values (LL/UL) of those drawn to the Quaker expression.

Fox's success in influencing numerous followers, as well as the larger society, can be contrasted with the experience of Jakob Boehme. Boehme had profound visions and spiritual experiences (UL) that celebrated the freedom of the spirit and the richness of the inner life. However, he remained a cobbler, did not preach to others, and had few followers in his lifetime. His writings eventually fostered a modest Boehmenist movement.

An Integral analysis makes it clear that those who deal seriously with all four quadrants, such as John Wesley and the Methodist movement, make a much more serious impact on individuals and society than those such as Emanuel Swedenborg who do not. Interestingly, it is probably the evangelical Protestants in our own day who are most cognizant of the importance of dealing more fully with the aspects of reality represented by the quadrants.

Levels of Development

Another essential point of Integral Theory is that there are levels of development within each quadrant. Biblically speaking, the church has always affirmed the need for members to develop, to grow up into Christ, to move from being babes in Christ to mature sons and daughters of God. In the last two centuries, Christian educators have developed sophisticated age-appropriate curriculums that address the developing child's level of comprehension.

Integral Theory presses this issue for adult development, pointing to both ancient and contemporary models that show the possibility of reaching levels that go beyond self-realization



to embrace self-transcendence, which is accompanied by less ego and more Spirit. The Integral approach challenges the church to consider more seriously the biblical injunctions to grow up into Christ. This injunction is to have the mind of Christ Jesus, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, and emptied himself. It is to be someone not conformed to this world but transformed by the renewal of our minds, to be one with God just as Jesus and God were one.

Empirical Verification

The empirical, scientific side of Integral Theory stresses that the church reflect upon itself objectively to verify whether people are in fact growing in grace. For instance, there is a biblical injunction that members become as compassionate as Jesus said the heavenly Father was. However, the only person Christian scriptures refer to as having such compassion is Jesus himself, or characters such as the father of the prodigal or the helpful Samaritan in parables Jesus taught. The Greek translation of compassion means to be physically moved in the guts by the situation of others. Or as Thomas Merton put it in the 20th century, “compassion is a profound sense of the interdependence of all things.”³ Compassion is thus a rare quality indeed. Integral Theory prods the church to notice whether it is being true to the deepest part of its own tradition. It pushes the church into serious study, experimentation, and development of concrete spiritual disciplines that foster growth toward compassion and other fruits of the Spirit.

Lines of Development

Another Integral perspective is to note that growth happens unevenly along various lines of development. Howard Gardner, at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, enhanced the developmental thinking of pioneer Jean Piaget with what Gardner called “multiple intelligences.” The seven intelligences that Gardner proposed (musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) were highly influential in the awareness that people have sets of separate capacities. Other intelligences, or “lines,” that



Gardner did not incorporate, especially the moral and spiritual lines, are of particular interest to any Integral exploration of Christianity.

A person's intellectual intelligence and their emotional intelligence, along with their moral-ethical sensitivity, might not be at the same level of maturity. Wilber points to numerous systems that outline growth along various lines, including the stages of faith described by Christian theorists such as James Fowler. The church has always known that intellectual knowledge of theology might not be consistent with a person's heart. In fact, as early as 1697, Bishop Francois de Salignac de la Mothe Fenelon wrote in the condemned "Maxims of the Saints":

The holy soul may be said to be united with God, without anything intervening or producing a separation, in three particulars.

First: It is thus united intellectually; that is to say, not by any idea which is based upon the senses, and which of course could give only a material image of God, but by an idea which is internal and spiritual in its origin, and makes God known to us as a Being without form.

Second: The soul is thus united to God, if we may so express it, affectionately. That is to say, when its affections are given to God, not indirectly through a self-interested motive, but simply because He is what He is. The soul is united to God in love without anything intervening, when it loves Him for His own sake.

Third: The soul is thus united to God practically; and this is the case when it does the will of God, not by simply following a prescribed form, but from the constantly operative impulse of holy love.⁴



Dialogue with Integral Theory will stimulate the praxis of ministry to pay serious attention to these various lines of development, as well as to the concrete practices that might encourage growth.

Types

Likewise, the AQAL model makes room for the plethora of typologies of humankind. There is the danger of missing a person's unique organicity and organization when typing them as a "Mary" or "Martha," and a similar danger of pathologizing through applying labels which reduce a person to an "it." However, the responsible use of typologies helps us understand important aspects of human differences. They can help us see how grace needs to be made specific when dealing with individual situations. Gregory the Great's classic book, *Pastoral Care*, offered a number of polarized characteristics, along with the pastoral advice that treating one on the assertive end of a polarity the same as one on the non-assertive end could be harmful.

More recently, there have been several excellent bodies of research that inform detailed understanding of people. The Jungian Myers-Briggs typology, for example, is quite useful in understanding a person's preferences for introversion or extroversion in interactions with others. Ministers, teachers, and counselors have access to numerous testing instruments that can provide insights into a person's tendency to intuit the world around them or to rely on their five senses; whether they prefer to think through their problems or feel their way through. Becoming more aware of these and other personality differences allows a minister or counselor to meet the other person more accurately and then empathetically serve them more effectively.

An increasing number of Christians find value in some approaches to the Enneagram, a scheme that identifies nine basic types of personality, with a varying degree of finer detail that depends on the particular theorist. Different types of prayer or ritual may be more nurturing or challenging to specific types of Christians.



In addition to personality typologies, there are those that consider masculine and feminine sexual essences. David Deida has articulated one of the more compelling and practical views—the feminine essence in all people manifests as light and flow, and the masculine manifests as consciousness and presence. The majority of people have some mix of these essences with one more prominent than the other, although there are rare individuals who are either completely balanced between the two or who have virtually none of one of these essences. On a related but slightly different tack, we will also explore people’s many sexual expressions from an integrally Christian framework, from homosexuality and heterosexuality to alternative sexuality and celibacy.

States of Religious Experience

St. Bernard, the founding abbot of Clairvaux Abbey and the Cistercian order, was one of the most commanding Church leaders in the first half of the twelfth century as well as one of the greatest spiritual masters of all times. He taught that love is itself a knowing. For Bernard, the light by which we see God will always be love.

In response to an official request from Rome, Bernard wrote a treatise called “On Loving God”⁵ in which he presents his theology on the soul’s journey toward God and describes the experience of God that is possible in this life. He asserts that the reason for loving God is God, because God is the efficient and final cause of our love. God is love and cannot be other than love. God has planted love in our very nature, and the Christian religious experience unfolds and matures through degrees of love, which Bernard describes in this way:

What are the four degrees of love? First, we love ourselves for our own sake; since we are unspiritual and of the flesh we cannot have an interest in anything that does not relate to ourselves. When we begin to see that we cannot subsist by ourselves, we begin to seek God for our own sakes. This is the second degree of love; we love God, but only for our own interests. But if we begin to worship and



come to God again and again by meditating, by reading, by prayer, and by obedience, little by little God becomes known to us through experience. We enter into a sweet familiarity with God, and by tasting how sweet the Lord is we pass into the third degree of love so that now we love God, not for our own sake, but for himself. It should be noted that in this third degree we will stand still for a very long time. I am not certain that the fourth degree of love in which we love ourselves only for the sake of god may be perfectly attained in this life. But, when it does happen, we will experience the joy of the Lord and be forgetful of ourselves in a wonderful way. We are, for those moments, one mind and one spirit with God.⁶



Figure 3. States of Religious Experience in Christianity



Purgative

Once a person has chosen to seek Christ through conversion or confirmation (the first door on the illustration), they have access to states of Grace that aid the struggle with aspects of doubt and fear, and provide a nascent sense of hope. St. Thomas Aquinas referred to this as guarding and protecting the charity that was infused into the soul at baptism.

Specific states may include, for example, speaking in tongues, being “slain in the Spirit,” forms of ecstasy such as St. Theresa’s, or auditory or visual hallucinations, such as those that inspired Joan of Arc and Rainer Maria Rilke. It is important to notice cues to distinguish organic or other biochemical causes for these events, such as schizophrenia, various manias, depression, or simply incidental emotionality.⁷ Even in periods of biomedical emergencies, religious states may arise and provide powerful insights, as was the case with Julian of Norwich.

Whatever the specific experiences, people do come to love God; it is primarily for their own benefit and not yet for God’s sake, in much the same way that the apostles responded to Jesus early in their experiences with him prior to the resurrection. In these beginning states, it is people’s own needs that motivate them to pray, fast, read, and worship. But because God has initiated this love, She reveals herself gradually in this kind of familiarity and thus becomes lovable.

At some point, however, most people’s faith is tested. It can be broken or it can be annealed. This crisis point also has its counterpart in the experience of the apostles, as they lived through the crucifixion and resurrection. Those whose faith has been strengthened have likely gone through some version of what St. John of the Cross called a dark night of the senses. On the other side of this passage, new experiences of grace are available, and these tend to aid the continued blossoming of “fruits of the spirit:” faithfulness, love, joy, peace, kindness, self-control, patience, goodness, and gentleness.



Illuminative

In purgative state experiences these fruits become more tangible. St. Thomas Aquinas refers here to the increase in charity that comes through a life of virtue and good works in Christ. Specifically, in addition to the state experiences we have already covered, people may begin to experience states of rhapsody—a grace-inspired form of heightened awareness. States in the illuminative category tend to involve a softening of resistance in the human heart. People discover that God is good and wonderful in Herself, beyond the good that She can do for us humans. They begin to love God as God, and not merely as the great benefactor of the self. In much the same way, the post-resurrection apostles came to know Jesus Christ in a much deeper and different way.

In the illuminative state of love, the more frequent seeking of God through prayer, fasting, meditation, and liturgy brings about an intimacy that Bernard describes as “tasting and discovering the sweetness of the Lord.”⁸ Now, people come to God not for their own sake but for *God’s* sake. Beginning to respond to the pull of God’s love, they surrender their reliance on themselves, and the sweetness of the taste of God’s love entices them ever closer toward pure love.

Unitive

St. Bernard believed that the unitive state was the highest degree of love that could be attained in this life. But there are those individuals who move through a third doorway, which St. John of the Cross called the “dark night of the soul.”⁹ Following Pentecost, when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to live the full lives given to them for the glory of God. For Aquinas people grounded in this state were to enjoy and live and remain in charity in a life of sanctity.

Unitive state experiences tend to represent the ultimate advance of the Created loving Creator, in which we no longer even love ourselves except for God. The self has been transcended.¹⁰ The



Created, in this the highest degree of love, is mindful of, but no longer preoccupied with worldly desires, instead resting completely in God. As Mark described such a state, one is: “Absent in the Body and Present with Christ.”¹¹ Human nature is absorbed by the spirit and revealed as Divine nature. St. Bernard and other doctors of the Church point out that this experience is *never obtained by human effort* but rather is given freely by God to those he chooses. Consequently, the unitive state experience tends to be short-lived and is exceedingly rare. We do recognize, however, that contemplative practices seem to prepare people to be more receptive of these gifts of Spirit. Dionysius the Areopagite pointed out that those in contemplative states are “occupied with the pure or spiritual Divinity.”¹² Bishop Fenelon expanded this notion:

That to say, [the soul] is occupied with God, in distinction from any mere image of God, such as could be addressed to the touch, the sight, or any of the senses. And this is not all. It does not satisfy the desires of the soul in its contemplative state, to occupy itself merely with the attributes of God; with His power, wisdom, goodness, and the like; but it rather seeks and unites itself with the God of the attributes. The attributes of God are not God himself. The power of God is not an identical expression with the God of power; nor is the wisdom of God identical with the God of wisdom. The holy soul, in its contemplative state, loves to unite itself with God, considered as the subject of His attributes. It is not infinite wisdom, infinite power, or infinite goodness, considered separately from the existence of whom they can be predicated, which it loves and adores; but the God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness.¹³

Meditation, inquiry, and reasoning, are exceedingly necessary to the great body of Christians and absolutely indispensable to those in the beginnings of the Christian life. To take away these helpful practices is akin to taking the child away from the breast before it can digest solid food. Still they are only the props, and not the life itself.



Their natural love, however, which within its proper degree, is innocent love, is so absorbed in the love of God that for the most part it ceases to be a distinct object of consciousness. Practically and truly they may be said to love themselves *in* and *for* God. Adam, in his state of innocence, loved himself, considered as the reflex image of God and for God's sake. So that we may either say, that he loved God in himself, or that he loved himself *in* and *for* God. And it is because holy souls, extending their affections beyond their own limit, love their neighbor on the same principle of loving, namely *in* and *for* God, that they may be said to love their neighbors as themselves.

It does not follow, because the love of ourselves is lost in the love of God, that we are to take no care, and to exercise no watch over ourselves. No man will be so seriously and constantly watchful over himself as he who loves himself *in* and *for* God alone.¹⁴

Not everybody is equally capable of receiving or handling these more direct states of experience. While Christianity, like all the world's religions, recognizes times and places for spiritual direction, it understands these states to be God-given, not pursued. Pursuing such ecstatic states can even be dangerous. Hindus aspiring to these states of mystical life work with a guru, who closely monitors progress. Zen masters say that meditation will cause those who are mentally ill to deteriorate. In an article written for the UK's "Guardian Unlimited," Karen Armstrong points out the dangers of easier access to artificially induced states of ecstasy without the right ethical foundation:

Aspirants could not even begin their training until they had achieved habitual serenity, benevolence, abstinence from drugs and stimulants, and absolute truthfulness. This, as it were, earthed ecstasy, prevented it from becoming selfish and self-indulgent, and gave it moral direction. All the major traditions have taught that peak experiences are unhealthy unless they can be integrated kindly, peacefully and truthfully into our ordinary lives.



In our secular society we tend to dismiss these mystical systems as outmoded and irrational. But they contained wisdom that we need today, because our desire for transcendence and unfettered bliss has got out of control. We have now developed technology that yields instant rapture. Today young people can simply swallow a pill and enjoy states of mind that were formerly the preserve of a very few highly trained and talented mystics, but without any of the traditional safeguards. In the old days, mystical teachers such as Teresa of Avila (1515-82) deplored the harm that was done by unskilled spiritual directors, whose inept understanding of the psyche made their disciples mentally ill. Today the situation is much worse. The purveyors of ecstasy are no longer uneducated, but well-meaning, priests. They are often unscrupulous dealers who have no concern for their victims, many of whom become addicted and even die in their search for joy, liberation and transcendence. Even religious people, who do not use drugs, have fallen prey to unbalanced *ekstasis*. Protestant reformers decried mysticism as unbiblical and elitist, and so people lost the mystical expertise that would have enabled them to manage religious intensity. Puritans underwent wrenching conversion experiences that sometimes left them chronically depressed and even suicidal. During the Great Awakening in 18th-century New England, whole towns succumbed to a pious hysteria, which they believed to be the work of the Holy Spirit. When this frenzied joy subsided, many fell into despair, and a few killed themselves.

It is interesting to compare this with the ecstasy drug culture that developed in Britain towards the end of the Thatcher years. The typical ecstasy cycle begins with a honeymoon period. Once the initial excitement fades, some people accelerate into excess or abuse, taking stronger drugs and becoming psychologically or physically ill, as they try to regain the lost paradise. It was precisely this kind of instability that worried the mystics.



Today we see plenty of examples of ecstasy gone awry. Without the ethical grounding prescribed by the Buddhists, rapture can become self-destructive or even violent: ravers fight police and dealers shoot one another. Even if not drug induced, the *ekstasis* of sport can lead to football hooliganism or racial hatred. People will always seek to experience these heightened states but, if deprived of proper guidance, there will always be some who cannot sustain such mental extremity without suffering or inflicting damage.

The government is right to point to poverty as a source of drug abuse. But providing people with jobs, which are often tedious, will not quench the yearning for ecstasy that is built into the human condition. At a time when traditional religion seems dead and art caters only to an elite, an increasing number will turn to the chemical technologies of bliss. We have to acknowledge the need for *ekstasis*, find more creative ways of satisfying it and acquaint ourselves anew with ways of managing the peak experiences that we seem to need to give our lives meaning and value.¹⁵

This quote highlights just a few of the areas that are more effectively navigated with an Integral approach. At the Integral Congregational Ministry Center we intend to have discussions that will inform pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, discernment, healing ministries, preaching, teaching, and all other aspects of the Christian presence and experience in the world. In future articles, we will cover these topics in greater detail and will touch on other finer points, such as states of consciousness. We hope such articles will be resources for theologians and ministers, for Christians and Christianity in general, and for the growing community of those curious about Integral thinking. Using an Integral perspective, we hope to begin reconstructing ways to guide and support people pursuing the dynamics of the Christian experience.



Become Involved

There is a nearly overwhelming abundance of materials related to the Judeo-Christian heritage and its cognate disciplines. The words integrative, Integral, or AQAL might suggest that all of it could potentially be part of the Integral Congregational Ministry Center. In part, that is true.

The main factors that attempt to delimit the material and bring a focus to the Center are the AQAL framework and the concentration on congregational ministry. We especially welcome contributions that apply an AQAL approach to aspects of congregational ministry. Most of the time, however, it is difficult to deal with such a wide perspective all at once. It is helpful if a resource can concentrate on a subject in a specific quadrant and simply be aware of or acknowledge the influence of other quadrants, even though they are not exploring them in depth. Other resources may simply weave an Integral point or perspective into a more specific discussion.

Some resources, for instance about the nature of consciousness or moral development, might be included because they contain valuable knowledge for congregational ministry, even though they make no direct references to it. In this case, the directors will usually leave an explanatory note describing where and how they consider the contribution helpful. Many contributions from cognate disciplines will be referred to in their more specific domains, where they are primarily archived.

The forms of resources you will find at this Center will be wide and varied. There will be articles dealing with theory and articles aimed at praxis. There may be specific sermons, liturgies, class outlines, prayers and meditations, and book reviews. There will be recorded lectures and dialogues between Ken Wilber and various people, as well as places to be interactive.



Overall, we hope that this Center will become an impressive, user-friendly, and user-responsive resource for those working in congregations who strive to foster the full potential of their ministry by applying an Integral perspective.



Endnotes

¹ Barrett, *World Christian encyclopedia*, 2001

² Dunne, *The way of all the earth*, 1978

³ Merton, *Contemplation in a world of action*, 1971

⁴ Fenelon, *Maxims of the saints*, 2000

⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On loving God*, 2000

⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On loving God*, 2000

⁷ For this reason, we'll provide links and interdisciplinary resources from the Integral Psychology, Psychotherapy, and Psychiatry Centers.

⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On loving God*, 2000

⁹ Both this "dark night" and the "dark night of the senses" can be considered state experiences themselves, and passage through them may take months or years. In common parlance, these are also both frequently reduced to depression or confusion. They are neither. Both are gifts of Grace and are evidence of Spirit moving quite powerfully in a person's life. Consequently, though they are difficult times, they are best approached with gratitude.

¹⁰ In fact, Christian mystic Bernadette Roberts has described the contours of yet a further state that is approached through the "dark night of the self," which we will be exploring in future articles and conversations.

¹¹ Gospel of Mark, *New Jerusalem Bible*, 1999

¹² Quoted in Fenelon, *Maxims of the saints*, 2000

¹³ Chadwick, *The best of Fenelon*, 2002

¹⁴ Chadwick, *The best of Fenelon*, 2002

¹⁵ Armstrong, "Ecstasy gone awry," 2003



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John has published several articles on these topics and presented papers at the New England Complex Systems Institute and the International Society of Systems Sciences, and has published articles in numerous publications. John has lectured on Integral Theory at a number of organizations, including the National Defense University, the University of Washington, the International Leadership Association, St. Martin's College and the Diocese of Olympia's School of Theology.