

c. My colleague, Allen Miller, observed some time ago that the identifying mark of the evangelical tradition was *annual conference*. It is a tricky creature to characterize, easier to say what it is not. It was not like the Methodists who conduct real business and receive sealed instructions at the door. Nor was it like a free church tradition in which droves stayed away because it didn't matter. It mattered! Not for the business nor for the education nor for the inspiration. It mattered because it was the main visible act of belonging to the fellowship. It was not much worried about whether it was connectional or non-connectional, or about who spoke for whom. It was rather the practice of face-to-faceness which kept the *Verein* functioning, there being a sure sense that such a practice would require time and energy.

The sense one gets, and the reason that this practice of face-to-faceness was taken so seriously, is that these evangelicals let their identity come from within the fellowship. It was that practice and that common presence which told them who they were and what they were to do. Without too much romantic jargon, I suggest it had to do with the *corporate interiority* of sisters and brothers, the space between and among folks in community which provided energy and stamina for faithfulness." [Walter Bruggemann, *Festival of the Church*, 1977, p.18]