
Testing the Spirits. How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations. Patrick Keifert.Â Rather than viewing congregations as mostly passive recipients of the largesse of seminaries where ‘real’ theology is done, Patrick Keifert and his colleagues view congregations as communities of faith-based moral deliberation and action that play a key role in generating theology. Doing so, they maintain, will return the congregation to the center of theological study. “Â What I like about this book is that it honors congregations as the agents of theologizing, it enriches the theological academy with deeper roots in the actual life of congregations, and it opens fresh imagination for the ways believing people may learn again to speak about God in public.” How are theology and counseling connected? In basic terms, theology is understood as â€œthe study of religious faith, practice, and experienceâ€; especially: the study of Godâ€™s relation to the world.â€[1]https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology. With this definition in mind, one might wonder, â€œHow does counseling fit into the study of God and his relation to the world?â€ To answer this question, a general definition of the word counsel is helpful.Â Consequently, the key to understanding how counseling, or the act of giving counsel, reflects an individualâ€™s theology rests in the word â€œadvice.â€ Often times, an individual seeks counsel or advice when a question or problem arises (or reoccurs) that requires outside help. Shrinking church congregations have been a problem in the West for many years now, particularly for mainline Protestant denominations. For example, â€œsince the 1960s, Canada’s mainline Protestant denominationsâ€ made up of the Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United churchesâ€ have lost anywhere between 40 to 60 per cent of their membership. â€œPastors have been encouraged to adopt liberal theology to stem this exodus. But a new study suggests liberal congregations are still shrinking, while conservative congregations are growing. Change or Die. Studying congregations always means paying attention to the different ways people are involved â€” especially the differences between men and women. Now, researchers at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, are taking that question to a new level. They want to know how those patterns differ in Christian groups around the world. Are there regional differences? And are the denominational differences the same everywhere?