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The Participative Self: An Enquiry into the merits and limits of a Theological and Postmodern Anthropology

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This project began with a concern that research into Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions groups had too great a focus upon ecclesiology and missiology. Not only did this approach miss a great deal of what the groups were attempting to do, but it also resulted either in sycophantic or scathing caricatures of the participant groups. This thesis argues, however, that through their practises these groups are exploring a much broader and deeper question that is also active within academic literature: the extent to which postmodern and theological discourses can be considered to be appropriate dialogue partners. This research analyses this question in both the practical and theoretical contexts, beginning with an engagement with prominent approaches within philosophical and theological literature. In addition to this, four leaders of ecclesial groups who claim to be engaged with postmodern culture are interviewed, and a grounded theory analysis carried out upon the transcripts. Anthropology emerges from both practical and theoretical streams of enquiry as an important way of speaking of the possibility of postmodern and theological dialogue. The analyses from both contexts are then brought together, questioning whether a coherent and suitably rigorous anthropology can emerge from postmodern and theological dialogue. It is argued that 'the participative self' is just such a concept, emerging from a dialogue between constructivist-Lyotardian postmodernism and open-narrative theology. This suggests that postmodern and theological discourses, when carefully defined, are both suitable and important discourses to hold in dialogue. Furthermore, the method of bringing together practical and theoretical resources demonstrates two final points. First, that Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church groups should not be patronised as ecclesial novelties, but rather groups who offer a serious consideration of theological discourse in its socio-cultural context. Second, that holding practical and theoretical resources in conversation is vital to the development of theology.

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A Thesis in one volume
for the degree of Doctor of Theology and Ministry

Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

2010

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Acknowledgements

My thanks go to my supervisors, Revd Dr David Wilkinson and Revd Dr Gavin Wakefield, both of whom have been of great support over the past four years, which has seen more than its fair share of colourful moments. Their ability to help develop the thoughts here contained is not only testimony to their quality of mind, but also their obsessive fairness in encouraging me to work on issues with which their views differ. I wish to thank, also, the other students on the DThM programme, particularly for the sparks that have flown over long lunches and late night bottles of wine. A final word of thanks must go to Revd Dr Alan Bartlett, First Admiral of the Doctorate, who gave me the requisite shoves and cuddles to help me see I might be able to do this.

Also, I wish to thank those people and groups who have provided time and funding to make this possible: the participants of the qualitative stage of the project, Lady Hewley Trust, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Crook and Wokingham Baptist Churches, Church of England Ministry Division, Diocese of Oxford, Ripon College Cuddesdon and the Parish of Caversham Thameside and Mapledurham. Thanks are also owed to the administrative skills of Ellen Middleton of the Theology Department at Durham and Suzanne Bradley in St. John's College, Durham.

There are those who set these questions in motion who deserve great credit. Of course, my parents, step-parents and God-parents all gave me the security and determination needed to begin to form an enquiring mind. Amongst them, special mention must be made to my step-father, Richard, who will sadly never read this work. His own passion and love of learning was still so alive, even in his final days. He never had the opportunity to finish his book, so I offer this, for all its faults and inadequacies, in memory of his name and in dedication of his fine work. Thanks, also, need to be paid to Revd Tom Thompson and Revd Chris Burke, Vicar and Curate in the Parish of St. Mary the Virgin, Nunthorpe during my adolescence, who birthed my fascination with theology.

Finally, and most importantly I wish to thank those who have had to live with me during this time. It is glaringly ironic that a project on participation has made me so un-participative at home. My wife, Amy, whilst busy with her own research, has been characteristically generous with her support and time. When I have been lost in a muddle of transcripts, her faith in me has kept me going; without her, this would never have been written. My children, Millie and Olivia, are more than anyone could ask for, bringing not only a good sense of fun and love, but also a reminder to keep things in perspective. They have an unfailing talent at making me smile, and for that, I shall always be thankful.

Chapter One
Superficial, Sycophantic or Scathing:
Why another study of Theology and Postmodernism?

This thesis has emerged out of my reflections upon ten years involvement in mission activities amongst teenagers and young people with three churches in England. Many of these groups were seeking to engage with what they believed to be 'postmodernism' with a clear intention to form ecclesial communities for, or even within, this emerging culture. The greater my involvement, however, the more aware I became of a lack of fit between the spoken and operative theologies of these groups. Whilst the groups were extremely theologically-literate, and considered carefully how to express themselves appropriately, there still appeared to be a difference between their practise and speech which presented a conflict of agendas. This disparity between spoken and operative theologies formed the hypothesis that I set out to explore.

The theology that tended to be spoken by these groups presented a meta-narrative that they claimed emerged from the Bible. Such a 'big story' was thought to offer an ontological security within a culture that, they suggested, was confused and chaotic. Much of this spoken theology appeared to share a great deal in common with the work of NT Wright, which resulted in a belief that postmodernism was a culture that required a meta-narrative in order to remember who it was, and this meta-narrative was similar to that explained by Wright to emerge from the Scriptures.[1] This was expressed as a concern that, without a controlling and coherent narrative, one was too easily given over to institutional control, moral relativism and market forces of postmodern culture. To inhabit God's Story as one's own was to be saved from a vacuous moral landscape and brought into the community of truth.

This approach, however, was not evident within the practises of the groups, in which there was a degree of moral relativism with no desire to encourage individuals to commit to a

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[1] Wright, Nicholas Tom, The New Testament and the People of God, *Christian Origins and the People of God*, Vol. 1, (London: SPCK, 1992, 2nd ed., 1993), 44-46, 76-77, 78-79, 132, 135
Wright, Nicholas Tom, and Marcus Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus*, (London: SPCK, 1999), 218-222
Wright, Nicholas Tom, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, (London: SPCK, 1994), 67-70

particular story or set of truths. Rather, abstract imagery and open-ended discussions were employed in order to encourage group participants to engage with the worship and dialogue on their own terms. Particularly important to many group organisers was the understanding that each person had something unique and valuable to offer to the meeting, which formed open and non-directive discussions. The only guidance and control that was made manifest was through broad guiding principles or values, which could be interpreted without reference to a particular meta-narrative. These practises, with a focus upon dialogue, open table fellowship and antagonism toward conservative understandings of evangelism, appeared to have more in common with the work epitomised by James Dunn, who critiques Wright's meta-narrative approach for squeezing diversity and difference out of the New Testament texts,[2] whilst emphasising a Jesus mission that broke social norms and religious boundaries.[3]

The view emerging through this hypothesis was of groups appearing to communicate themselves in a rather contradictory fashion: proclaiming the necessity of a meta-narrative for self and salvation, whilst practicing caution, or even disdain, toward such control in their relating to individuals and groups. It was the desire to explore these issues further that led to the beginning of this doctoral research project, with an initial focus upon the theology and practise of mission within groups engaging with postmodern culture, and whether the spoken and operative theologies could be shown to be as divergent as I had initially observed. I was particularly interested as to whether such a disparity existed and, if so, how pronounced it was, and whether plotting it upon a matrix based upon the work of NT Wright and James Dunn would prove helpful.

In order to investigate this hypothesis, the qualitative element of the research design was focussed upon interviews with leaders of well-established ecclesial groups who claimed to be operating within postmodern culture. Interviews appeared the most helpful strategy so that a dialogue could be opened up with each leader in order to explore the complex issues associated with mission, theology and the postmodern. The focus was to be kept upon the leaders rather than the congregations for two reasons: the reality of the scale and timing of a

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[2] Mathison, M. M. (Ed.), 'An Evening Conversation on Jesus and Paul with James DG Dunn and NT Wright', 25 October 2004, http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Dunn_Wright_Conversation.pdf, 15, 28 August 2007
[3] Dunn, James DG, Jesus Remembered, *Christianity in the Making*, Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 599-607

doctoral project, and because it appeared fair to assume that the leaders would be most involved in thinking through these issues. The latter point is particularly salient as each of the participants was selected, not only on the basis that they were leaders of these individual communities, but because they had a wider influence through their speaking and writing on the subject. Each leader was to be interviewed twice: one interview would focus upon the spoken theology of the participant, and the second upon the operative theology. In order to ensure the participants didn't simply repeat answers from the previous interview, and so unfairly skew the data as it was investigated for difference and similarity, I planned to allow a three month gap between the interviews.

Attitude toward meta-narrative appeared to be a key difference between models of mission and ministry based upon the work of Wright and Dunn. This meant that in order to plot the spoken and operative theologies of the participants with any accuracy, this investigation would need to understand the model of postmodernism or postmodernity with which the participants thought they were engaging. In order to link this to the difference between models of mission based upon Wright and Dunn, and to provide an interpretive key for such a complex concept, the participants' understanding of, and relationship to, meta-narrative was to be investigated and analysed. Far from being an externally-imposed concept, 'meta-narrative' was already a term commonly employed in the discourses of these groups. By being able to discover the kind of attitude they displayed toward postmodern critique of meta-narrative, it was hoped that such data would serve to confirm or question the plotting of the spoken and operative theologies. Those who had more in common with Wright would display caution toward, or even confrontation with, a critique of meta-narrative. However, where participants actively criticised a meta-narrative approach to understanding mission and ecclesiology, it would not be inappropriate to link that with Dunn's similar criticisms.

Throughout the second year of study, in addition to carrying out the first set of interviews, I also began to explore more fully the philosophical and theological literature that engaged with postmodern critiques of meta-narrative. The aim of this detailed literature review, that went beyond the work of Wright and Dunn, was to increase my conceptual vocabulary and so gain a richer analysis of the interview transcripts. Philosophical and

theological authors were chosen carefully in order to demonstrate the various forms of postmodern theory, and attitudes toward it, that are shared in both disciplines.

What began to emerge from the initial analysis was that the interview transcripts did not easily fit onto a Wright-Dunn matrix, simply because there was not a clear overlap between the language of the transcripts and the specific literature of Wright and Dunn. It simply appeared to force the transcripts into categories alien to the language of the participants themselves. However, use of, and relationship to, the concept of meta-narrative still appeared to be important in understanding how the participants related to the postmodern. In order to understand the transcripts without too great an imposition from my own prejudice, I felt it more appropriate to develop a different way of engaging with the transcripts. Rather than placing them upon an externally-formed matrix, I employed grounded theory so that themes would emerge from my own analysis of the transcripts. These themes could then be compared with the emerging themes from my own analysis of the philosophical and theological literature. This way, by attending more carefully to the language of the participants, and engaging those themes within the broader landscape of theological attitudes toward the postmodern, I felt I would be better placed to observe any potential disparities or similarities in the spoken and operative theologies of the participants.

By engaging with the transcripts in this manner, the concept of anthropology emerged as central to the way the participants were thinking through their spoken theology in relation to the postmodern. All four participants were conscious of how the postmodern critique of meta-narrative affected the nature of personhood, both in positive and negative ways. Alongside this, the concept of 'the self' was also important for the way in which academic literature was dealing with postmodern criticism of meta-narrative and possible theological responses. It was at this point that this research project altered its direction in a small but significant way.

All of the studies of Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions that I had read to this point had focussed their attention upon the missiology and ecclesiology of the groups involved. In addition to revealing some of the trends within these ecclesial groups and their relationship with more traditional forms of church, they also communicated the political possibilities and fears that these groups presented. As I shall later demonstrate in this chapter, authors such as

Eddie Gibbs see them as a positive opportunity to move away from institutionalised forms of conservative evangelicalism. Others, like Martyn Percy, see Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church groups as presenting a threat to established churches by colluding with postmodern anti-institutionalism.

Rather than attempting to engage directly with the politics of these studies, and also run the danger of repeating research that had already been carried out, I changed the focus of the study from mission to anthropology. This allowed me to do two things that those who had tread this, already well-worn, path had not done. First, by focussing upon anthropology rather than mission or ecclesiology, I would be observing the participants from a different viewpoint, which would hopefully shed new light upon the spoken and operative theologies within Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions movements. Second, by emphasising a concept that was shared by both the ecclesial groups and academic literature, I considered them both as seeking to reach the same ends, albeit through different methods. By understanding the groups in this way they were viewed less as church novelties, and rather as serious practitioners who were engaging in complex anthropological developments, and thus considered as partners with the academic literature. Through my analysis of what the participants communicated within the interviews, themes were emerging that represented understandings of personhood informed by theological and postmodern discourses. Rather than looking for similarity and difference regarding spoken and operative theology, the two sets of interviews now served to deepen the conversation about personhood that emerged from their descriptions of the spoken and operative theologies of their groups.

This is not to suggest that the difference between spoken and operative theologies was either disproven or unimportant, but that the research design was not able to demonstrate such a hypothesis. Whilst I could have designed another way of exploring this perceived disparity, the current research was suggesting significant and interesting enough data to warrant further exploration, and so it was felt appropriate to alter the direction of the research. Whilst the central concept being observed had changed from mission to anthropology, there seemed no need to change the line of structured questioning that had already been planned.[4]

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[4] See Appendix E

The questions would allow the participants to engage with how they see both their spoken and operative theologies in such a way that their understanding of anthropology would emerge.

After the third year of the project, all interviews were completed and analysis upon the transcripts had begun. Also at this stage, authors of postmodern engagements with personhood and theological writers offering reflection and development upon those specific understandings of anthropology had been identified as dialogue partners for this project. It appeared that there were five broad understandings of personhood that emerged from postmodern discourses, and four theological engagements with those concepts. Pete Ward presents a theological view of the person, church and God contained within a Baudrilardan hyper-modernity and organised according to consumerist forms of participation. Tom Wright, John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas each offer a coherent meta-narrative into which a person is able to escape the violence of postmodern culture, which shares a great deal of similarity with David Harvey's confrontational Marxist narrative of liberation. David Ford, through an engagement with Emmanuel Levinas, presents a self-for-others which is similar to Zigmunt Bauman's concept of centrifugalism. Finally, the work of David Tracy, James Dunn and David Brown offers a positive engagement with a Lyotardian resistance toward dominating meta-narratives that, with James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium, offers a self that is recognisable without being autonomous.

The analysis of the transcripts suggested that the participants had more in common with one of these developments of anthropology than the other three. The themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis were employed as focal points around which I organised a dialogue that attempted to develop theological and postmodern anthropology. What became clear at this point, was that anthropology was not an end in itself, either for the participants or the authors. Rather, it was a habitus for a much broader dialogue concerning the extent to which postmodern and theological discourses may be considered to be appropriate dialogue partners. Whilst it was right to view these groups as sharing with academic authors in the pursuit of the same questions, anthropology itself only served as a focus for the broader, and more abstract discussion taking place. This is an important statement to make, as it prevents the study of these ecclesial groups from simply being about mission, church, or in this case, anthropology. It seemed that it was not only politics that had limited previous studies of these

groups, but also a separation of mission, church or anthropology from the wider dialogue with which they were engaging.

From this point, the development of the thesis was organised around three levels. The first level was the most abstract, asking to what extent postmodern and theological discourses could be considered to be suitable dialogue partners. This broad, abstract question was explored within the secondary-level issue of personhood. This was then explored at a third level, through an analysis of the interviews with practitioners and academic philosophical and theological writing. Having completed the tertiary-level analysis and recognised the key themes and authors, I then moved to ask whether a coherent vision of personhood could emerge from a dialogue between postmodern and theological discourse. This secondary-level dialogue was organised around, and driven forward by, the themes that had emerged from my analysis of the participant interviews. If the qualitative analysis had not been allowed to engage at this level, then the discussion of this question would have taken a very different shape. In this sense, both the participants and the academic authors were vital conversation partners in exploring the primary and secondary-level questions. Having developed a concept of personhood through this dialogue, I was then able to offer a partial answer to the primary-level question with which the literature authors, participants and myself are all engaged.[5]

Thus far, the focus of the chapter has been the telling of the story of this research project, and how and why it has changed in focus. What follows within this thesis is my attempt to present the research within its final form, of a three-tiered approach to the suitability of postmodern and theological discourses as dialogue partners. Whilst this was not the original intention of the project, I believe that the changes have been positive, and allowed an original contribution to be made to a rather crowded field of study. In the remainder of this chapter I shall outline the way three authors have attempted to attend to a secondary-level manifestation of postmodern and theological dialogue. In so doing, I hope to explain in more detail how there is, at present, an over-emphasis with a single manifestation, which skews the authors' engagement with, and distracts away from, the primary level dialogue. I shall then outline the intentions of this research project.

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[5] The method is explained in greater detail in chapter four.

The Ubiquity of Church and Mission Studies

The major focus into the dialogue of postmodern and theological discourses that attends to both literature and qualitative research is either ecclesiology or mission. Such has been the focus upon these particular secondary-level manifestations, that the study of theology and postmodern discourses has become almost synonymous with the study of church and mission. This is deeply problematic for two reasons: first, there is a lack of movement from the secondary to the primary level dialogue, which causes the individual studies to be decontextualised from the question to which they belong. The second reason, which of course is connected to the first, is that it has over-politicised the research along ecclesial party lines. Whilst all forms of research are hermeneutically-shaped, the point here is that the arguments have become so politicised that research is beginning to exclusively serve political ends. This point can be made more fully by attending to three studies by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, Ian Mobsby, and Martyn Percy. Each have a very different aim and approach which, I argue, colours the reflection on the practises of these churches in unhelpful ways. Whilst some of their writing is certainly of value, their conclusions are overly-skewed by their own ecclesiological concerns. There is value in analysing the structures of these groups and their relation to the institutions from which they are emerging, but this is certainly not all that can be learned, as this thesis hopes to demonstrate.

In their interviewing of a large sample of leaders from emerging church groups in the UK and USA, Gibbs and Bolger attempt to ascertain the main practises that these groups hold in common.[6] Their findings suggest that the groups studied offer an antidote to Modern Evangelicalism which has privatised and commodified faith.[7] Whilst this may, in part, be true, their conclusion demonstrates three problems that run throughout the whole work. First, 'Emerging Churches' are categorised in both too neat a manner that belies the complexity and difference inherent within these different groups, as well as falsely defining them as 'new'

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[6] Gibbs, Eddie, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: creating Christian communities in postmodern cultures*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 235

[7] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 157, 218, 236

churches that do not belong to another church.[8] This final statement is categorically misinformed, and one need only reference the Fresh Expressions groups who are part of the Church of England or Methodist Church. Further, participant groups such as 'Grace' not only consider themselves as part of the Church of England, but specifically understand themselves as a congregation of a Parish Church. Whilst Gibbs and Bolger's definition will certainly have more relevance in the USA, it is not unfair to state that the definition is, at best, rather poorly formed.

Second, the writers only superficially analyse and theologically engage with the data, never moving beyond, to use David Silverman's phrase, 'the gaze of the tourist.'[9] Following on from this rather scant attention to fair process and defining of the participants, one is given the impression that the data is being formed to undergird an already-existing theory. It is not that a hypothesis is being tested, but that the participants are being employed to further a fully-formed theory. The questions asked in interviews appear to suggest this,[10] so skewed are they by the assumptions of Gibbs and Bolger. This can also be seen in the way they caricature Christian faith within the Modern era as a Religion that is solely privatised and self-serving, and go on to compare it with the kind of faith found within their participants' churches which stands to challenge and correct their predecessors.[11] Such naming of the past and the future is, at best, an example of a superficial engagement, and at worst, represents an attempt to further the ecclesio-political aims of the authors. What is certain from this study is that their claims regarding the overwhelmingly positive nature of the 'Emerging Church' as a corrective to the negative nature of the 'Modern Church' is a superficial statement that, whether deliberate or not, seeks to further one form of ecclesiology at the expense of another. This study also demonstrates how the secondary-level manifestation has been detached from a genuine engagement with the primary-level question regarding the possibility of theological and postmodern dialogue.

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[8] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 235
[9] Silverman, David, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, Third Edition, (London: Sage, 1993, 2006), 383
[10] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 334-335
[11] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 236

Anglican Priest and Fresh Expressions activist, Ian Mobsby,[12] attempts to examine the relationships between emerging groups and the institutions to which they belong.[13] Whilst this study presents a similar level of superficiality to that of Gibbs and Bolger, it also highlights a further danger of sycophantism. Mobsby's argument is simply that, as 'statistics' suggest the church is in decline, it is only Fresh Expressions of church that will be able to fill the growing gap between itself and the surrounding culture. These emerging groups are marked by a rejection of Christendom, which Mobsby understands as an arrogant control that the church used to hold over its communities.[14] This takes for granted a rather positivist view of statistics and a naive acceptance of what they may communicate. There is neither an interaction with the studies from which the quoted statistics emerged, nor with the aims of those who carried out those studies. Furthermore, Mobsby's conclusion that only Fresh Expressions can fill the gap between church and culture is a rather sycophantic view of Fresh Expressions. In addition to the superficiality, it is this apparent need to promote, even to 'sell', Fresh Expressions as the only alternative to church decline that undermines the idea that this could be a suitable ecclesiology within a consumerist society.

The work of Martyn Percy takes a very different approach to the two mentioned above, seeing Fresh Expressions as a form of collusion with consumerism and post-institutionalism.[15] In terms of ecclesiology, he does not believe it is able to sustain the church in the future, and defends the model of the Parish Church as 'cutting edge.'[16] In terms of mission, he believes that Fresh Expressions is simply a reaffirmation of Donald McGavran's much maligned 'Homogenous Unit Principle', whereby the theory of like-minded people being attracted to join groups together is extolled as a virtue in the aim of increasing church membership.[17] Whilst these points demonstrate that there is some engagement between the secondary-level manifestation

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[12] Mobsby, Ian J., *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How are they Authentically Church and Anglican?*, (London: Moot Community Publishing, 2007)

[13] Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church,* 10

[14] Mobsby, Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church, 48

[15] Percy, Martyn, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A critique of fresh expressions', in Nelstrop, Louise, and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church*, (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2008), 27-39, 31

[16] Percy, *Old Tricks for New Dogs?,* 39

[17] Percy, *Old Tricks for New Dogs?,* 38

and primary-level dialogue in Percy's work, it is only present when attempting to demonstrate what he believes to be the cultural accomodationism of Fresh Expressions.

Percy certainly cannot be accused of being sycophantic toward Fresh Expressions. Within this work are some important points to bring to discussions of contemporary ecclesiology and mission, particularly regarding how ecclesial, state and corporate institutions are to interact. However, his defensiveness of the English parochial church system leads to a less than satisfactory engagement with Fresh Expressions: to say that the whole movement is simply a form of collusion with consumerism is grossly untrue, as I shall attempt to demonstrate within the qualitative part of this research. Furthermore, to frame these groups within the Homogenous Unit Principle, a profoundly unpopular and, arguably, elitist model of mission, is not only unfair, but is a shrewd (and perhaps, cynical) move to undermine Fresh Expressions. Percy's scathing view of Fresh Expressions represents the politicisation of this field, which has a disregard for both the detail and diversity of the groups involved, as well as displaying a disinterest for the larger question which is made manifest in the practices of these groups.

One final point needs to be made before moving on to outlining the intentions of this project. All three of the authors above use forms of the word 'participation' in their studies as an important way of engaging in church and mission within postmodern culture. For Gibbs and Bolger, 'participation' is literally central to their understanding of the Gospel, whereby Emerging Churches are claimed to be helping people participate, not as consumers, but as producers.[18] Similarly for Mobsby, owing to the attention Fresh Expressions groups give to providing people opportunities to engage in their corporate life together, he claims they are helping shape people to be producers rather than consumers.[19] Percy employs this concept, albeit negatively, to suggest that Fresh Expressions are forms of institutional apathy, and so colluding with the non-participation that he observes within broader cultural developments.[20] The concept of participation also emerges as important within the qualitative research in this thesis, which further suggests its importance for groups believing to be engaging with

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[18] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 218, 235-237
[19] Mobsby, Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church, 45
[20] Percy, *Old Tricks for New Dogs?,* 33- 35, 38

postmodern culture. The issue at this stage, however, is not its importance, but rather, that none of the authors develop it further than is outlined in this paragraph. It is, instead, simply employed as part of an argument as to why one ecclesial or missional method should be preferred above another, which is the true focus of their studies. This is exhibited in the superficial analyses of the groups studied as well as in the partisan nature of their conclusions which take no, or little, account of the broader dialogue in which their work is situated. It is my contention that these groups represent more than just new forms of church or mission, but are embodiments of the dialogue that is taking place in academic research concerning the relationship between theological and postmodern discourse. If this is correct, as I hope to demonstrate, then neglecting to account for such a link has narrowed their research aims and caused their conclusions to fall short of the depth to which they may plumb.

The intention of this thesis is to explore the primary-level dialogue by studying in detail one of its secondary-level manifestations, and to do so with reference to both literary and qualitative sources. Whilst church and mission are, of course, two manifestations of the dialogue which would serve as a habitus for this study, so much writing has already been offered in these areas that it became more helpful to locate this study in an area that has received slightly less attention. This way, different concepts to those arising from church and mission studies may emerge. Equally, if similar concepts do emerge, it may underline their importance within the primary-level dialogue. I shall now outline the intention and content of this thesis.

Intention and Content

As has already been stated, this research project locates the dialogue between theological and postmodern discourses within anthropology. For the purposes of this thesis, 'anthropology' is defined not in terms of a social scientific discipline, but as the study of personhood and self-conception in which the chief concern is the nature of the human person. The choice of anthropology as the location for this dialogue is no arbitrary decision, as it is a concept that is prevalent in both the literature and practises of those engaged with discussing theological and postmodern discourses. The evidence for this will become apparent as the content is explained.

In order to construct such a thesis, there needs to be a recognition of the diversity within both discourses. For this reason, chapters two and three will attempt to take account of this breadth, and explain why particular definitions have been chosen for the dialogue in chapter six. Chapter two is concerned with postmodern discourse itself, principally focussed upon how those within this discourse define the term 'postmodern' and how that shapes the concept of the self. The chapter is constructed around the works of Jean Baudrillard, David Harvey, Zigmunt Bauman, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium. The definitions that each have to offer are explained before discussing their implications for selfhood. It is hoped that this chapter will give a sense of the breadth and diversity by what can be encapsulated in the term 'postmodern'.

Chapter three is necessarily the longest chapter, as it seeks to cover the most ground by discussing the work of theologians who engage with the merits, limits and possibilities of postmodern and theological personhood. Each of the sections will enter into dialogue with theologians whose understanding of postmodern discourse corresponds with the social thought presented in chapter two. This is structured around the works of Pete Ward, John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, Tom Wright, David Ford, David Tracy and David Brown. The purpose is to discuss and evaluate four approaches to theological and postmodern anthropology, one of which will then be developed more fully in chapter six.

Chapter four outlines the details of the method that was employed in locating the broad, multi-faceted primary-level research question within a particular manifestation. It also explains how the qualitative analysis was carried out and how it relates to the engagement with academic literature. This is followed by the analysis of the qualitative research in chapter five, which details the main themes that I observe emerging from the transcripts. These themes not only reveal that all four participants share an understanding as to how theology relates to non-theological discourse, but also how this informs a common anthropology.

In the final chapter, the main attempts to engage a theological and postmodern anthropology in academic literature and ecclesial practice that have been outlined in the earlier chapters are brought together to attempt to develop the concept. The findings of the qualitative analysis provide a vocabulary which enables the development of an open-narrative

theological engagement with a constructivist-Lyotardian model of the self. The purpose is to examine the possibilities of such a concept of personhood and then, in turn, to consider whether such an engagement is able to further illuminate the primary question as to whether theological and postmodern discourses are able to occupy the same space.

Chapter Two
Defining the Postmodern Self

To say that 'postmodern' cannot be defined is inaccurate. It is certainly a slippery term, a term in which there is great political investment, and as such it is defined in many different ways. This should not be a surprise, as it is a term that could be capable of wielding great power, at least in shaping the future, if not also in representing the present and the past. Difference of opinion and uncertainty over development should not, as with any other concept, be sufficient reason to shy away from attempts at definition and understanding. In this chapter I intend to outline five definitions of the postmodern self, through which the character of postmodern discourse as understood by each of the writers will be explored and evaluated. In the following chapter, I will present four theological responses to the notion of the self in postmodernity, each of which will compliment the five definitions below. To begin this chapter, I will first outline the model of self-construction that will be followed throughout this thesis, and used to resource the conversations about postmodern identity. This model is being employed not because it is assumed to be 'neutral' in any sense, but because its broad scope enables the opening up of a discussion with the other authors.

Constructing the Self

In their book, *The Self we Live By*, sociologists, James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium ask how the self may be defined and constructed within postmodernity. The model of construction offered is the product of twenty-five years of sociological research, and is a considered argument that relies heavily, not only upon an engagement with postmodern reflections upon the notion of self, but also the findings from data within their own research.[21] They accept many of the criticisms levelled at an autonomous social self that has been supposed, somehow, to construct meaning without too much interference from surrounding culture. In addition to this, they explain how surrendering autonomy to institutionalism, social policies and prejudices

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[21] Coffey, Amanda, Review of 'The Self We Live by: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World'*, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 2000), by James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium', in *Contemporary Sociology*, 31:3, (2002), 294-295, 295

has led to selves being formed into 'bland conformists, organizational sell-outs, and the emotionally estranged.'[22] They argue that the greater the extent to which the individual lost its capacity to self-define, the more likely it became for selves to be forced to conform to, or risk exclusion from, society. It is this path that has led the self to its postmodern predicament, in which it is given over to the danger of losing any sense of being discernable.[23] This, however, need not be the case, as Holstein and Gubrium suggest how self-construction can take account of various postmodern criticisms, whilst retaining a sense of autonomy.

Central to this argument is that self-formation is always a response to a demand or discourse within a given place and time,[24] drawing upon the resources locally and temporally available. Building on Levi-Strauss's concept of self as *bricoleur*, it is suggested that the self is a dialogical construction that exists between one's story-ing or interpretation of the world (biography), other people's interpretation of oneself (discourses-in-practice), and the local discourses that are allowed and enabled by culture and institutions (discourse practice). That these are resources rather than injunctions is critical, as it demonstrates that the self cannot be reduced to a mere extension of one's personality, or the product of institutionalisation by particular organisations. On the latter point Holstein and Gubrium wish to stress, in a positive development of Foucault, that it is not selves which are organisationally embedded but 'self construction that is embedded in, and shaped by, the organizational meaning-making apparatus.'[25] It is this subtle differentiation between self and self-construction that they believe enables one to stand within postmodern descriptions of society and not be lost to a multiphrenia,[26] mourning over the loss of an autonomous self. Within this model, the self is both free to construct itself,[27] whilst also captive to the resources made available by local

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[22] Holstein, James A., and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self we Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World*, (Oxford, New York: OUP, 2000), 50
[23] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By*, 55
[24] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we live by*, 153
[25] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By*, 167
[26] Kenneth Gergen's term that relates to social saturation where the self no longer has any integrity, cf. Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By*, 223-224
[27] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By*, 215

culture and institutions. It is within this 'interplay of discursive practice and discourses-in-practice'[28] that Holstein and Gubrium argue one can find the self we live by.[29]

The view of postmodernity that emerges in the writings of Holstein and Gubrium is one of steady social transition that is particularly characterised by technological developments and the rise of mass media. Following the work of David Reisman, they state that the influence of the mass media project upon self-construction was already ubiquitous within Western cultures by the middle of the Twentieth Century, making multiphrenia a more familiar challenge than they claim is assumed by postmodern writers like Jean Baudrillard and Kenneth Gergen.[30] Whilst they accept the presence of a link between an increase in technological advances and reach of the media with the possibility of mutliphrenia,[31] they are rather unsympathetic toward those who claim the self can be lost within this cultural landscape. Rather, the self is not to be found in some 'ethereal location,' but within the psycho-social exchanges that occur as one participates in various cultural settings. Within these exchanges, the self continues to enjoy a level of autonomy, and whilst being tempered by institutions and sociability, retains the ability to choose the contexts with which one wishes to engage. [32]

Whilst Holstein and Gubrium claim to construct a psycho-social model, it is clear that they place much more weight upon the sociological side of the axis. This needs to be recognised, because any talk of self and identity, if it is going to attempt to at least be aware of all influences, must recognise the role that one's neurology plays. All of the described interactions take place under the influence of the personality, which itself is mediated and shaped by various chemical processes. Michael Gazzaniga, a hugely influential American neurologist, has demonstrated the presence of an interpreter module in the left hemisphere of the brain, which he suggests is responsible for all interpretation of the messages one's brain receives.[33] Reflecting upon this, Cultural Anthropologist, Naomi Quinn, has suggested that as

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[28] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self weLlive By*, 232

[29] A similar conclusion is reached by Anthropologist Katherine Ewing in 'The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self, and the Experience of Inconsistency', *Ethos,* 18:3, (1990), 251-278

[30] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By,* 235, footnote two

[31] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By*, 235, footnote two

[32] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self we Live By*, 224

[33] Gazzaniga, Michael S., 'Consciousness and the Cerebral Hemispheres', Gazzaniga, Michael S. (Ed.), *The Cognitive Neurosciences,* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), 1391-1399, and also

this module will inform the process of autobiography, then it surely becomes the chief neurological building block in self-representation.[34] She further highlights the importance of the psychological by introducing the work of Joseph Le Doux, who suggests that, as all socio-cultural experience is received, stored, and retrieved from one's synapses, any change therein will change the nature of one's self.[35] This raises a question over the level of autonomy Holstein and Gubrium claim the self is able to retain, not because of any new cultural setting, but because one's very perceptions and memories are, to a certain degree, out of one's autonomous control. This demonstrates the mythical nature of complete autonomy, not only over one's social context, but also in terms of personality and cognitive decision making. In this way, one's neurology is shown to have an enormously important role in the construction of the self, and alongside the social setting mapped out by Holstein and Gubrium, further highlighting the fragility and dialogical nature of identity.

The Self Consumed

Through his playful and pessimistic social commentaries, Jean Baudrillard presents his view of a world that has become 'hypermodern'. When reading his work, one is never entirely sure at which points he is employing a cutting irony, or a serious philosophical enquiry, not that he would necessarily wish to separate the two, or even recognise those categories as valid. With this in mind, it is always dangerous to take Baudrillard at his word, quoting his work in the manner of a literalist. Couched within that understanding (and apology), Baudrillard's presentation of hypermodernity is an attempt to say that all beings have been reduced to stimulus-response machines,[36] all of whom exist in a matrix of mass-media simulation within a nihilist, global market. A radical form of postmodernism, hyper-modernism reduces existence to nothing more than consumption. In Baudrillard's view, the world has become an enormous super-market, and the 'whole structure of living' is trafficked around its aisles of the 'serial,

Gazzaniga, Michael S., Richard B. Irvy and George R. Mangun, *Cognitive Neuroscience: The Biology of the Mind*, (New York, London: Norton & Co., 1998), 542-549
[34] Quinn, Naomi, 'The Self', *Anthropological Theory,* 6:3, (2006), pp 362-384, 368
[35] Quinn, 371. Cf., Le Doux, Joseph, 'The Self: Clues from the brain', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1001, (2003), 295-304
[36] Lyon, David, *Postmodernity*, Concepts in Social Thought, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 60

circular, spectacular arrangement' of objects-without-meaning, signs detached from that which they signify, simulacra, in the market itself.[37]

As David Lyon has suggested, in Baudrillard's presentations, the social has been lost and all that is left is the function of Institutions and subjective culture, 'where meaning revolves around identity.'[38] Oblique though much of Baudrillard's writing may first seem, one can accept that, as Lyon states, Baudrillard does appear 'to be onto something,'[39] whereby ubiquitous media simulations can become 'reality', and as such this 'information' becomes destructive, dissolving any separation there may have been between one's own experiences of 'reality', and a media presentation thereof. Baudrillard argues that the information presented by the media is made to be more real than that which it is presenting, which is exactly what he means by hyper-real.[40] The more ubiquitous this practice has become, the greater the extent to which the meaning and reality of the things signified have been denigrated. Having lost the meaning of the real, and rather than facing the emptiness of the loss of meaning, one places an ambivalent faith in the presented information.[41] Having done so, not only is there a loss in the ability to differentiate between the medium and the real, but also the mass media gains the sole power to name one's reality. In this simulation, reality and meaning are lost, and one becomes dependent and enslaved to mass-media presentation. Baudrillard then lays his final strike against any sense of hope, stating that the media itself is equally void of direction or autonomy and, like humanity, is also purporting the myth that the medium is the message; and so all of life continues enslaved to the ubiquity of the Market.

Hyper-reality, however, tends to be over-stated, particularly in Baudrillard's patronising of those who are engaged in media interface (for example, watching television, or reading a newspaper), suggesting that they have no ability to critique manipulation or falsehood. This is a dangerous simplification and, if taken literally, can cause a hyper-active jump to the conclusion that the autonomy of the self, and any sense of human agency has been completely lost to

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[37] Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila F. Glaser, The Body, in Theory: Studies in cultural Materialism, (University of Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 75-77
[38] Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 21-23
[39] Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 22
[40] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1, 'It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.'
[41] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 81

media representation. Whilst it is necessary to caution the reading of Baudrillard with a reminder that one need not believe that the current status of the world is as bleak as it appears in his writings, one must also be careful not to treat his work as alarmist or childish. His work on hyper-reality consists of imaginative and portentous suggestions of how powerful the media can be in manipulating society. It is worth repeating that the 'suggestions' that come through Baudrillard's writing on hypermodernity are not to be taken literally, but might be better understood as offering direct examples of how media representations engross and absorb one's agency.

Liberating the Self

Whilst the two offer opposing views of the self, Marxist Geographer, David Harvey, offers a similarly negative definition of postmodernity to that of Baudrillard. In his book, *The Condition of Postmodernity,* he attempts to answer whether the postmodern is a radical break from modernism, or a revolt against a 'high' form of modernism.[42] Throughout the work he argues that the postmodern is 'nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over the whole range of cultural production.'[43] For Harvey, the postmodern is an insidious, nihilistic 'swamp'[44] that, by understanding progressive meta-narratives as either repressive or illusory, is unable 'even try to engage in some global project.'[45] As such, the Market is allowed un-curtailed, profiteering expansion into all areas of life.[46] Even where engagement within a specific locality to engender change takes place, Harvey warns that it is most likely to become a parochial power game of the sort that led Heidegger to Nazism and Le Pen to Fascism.[47]

Similarly to Baudrillard, Harvey states that time and space have been affected by technological development to give way to instancy and spatial compression. David Lyon points

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[42] Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 42
[43] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 62
[44] Harvey, David, 'Postmodern Morality Plays', *Antipode,* 24:4, (1992), 300-326, 300
[45] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 52
[46] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 62
[47] Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 351

out that at the root of this, for Harvey, is the desire for a greater amount of, and ease for, capitalist accumulation.[48] Rather than exploring social ontology within this setting, as Baudrillard has, Harvey confronts the postmodern as a social malaise on two fronts, stating that its relativism is self-defeating, and its view of humanity is morally bankrupt. Regarding the first claim, Harvey explains that the rejections of totalities and claims to ultimate truth as being epistemologically invalid are themselves paradoxical, as the statement is itself a general principle, and therefore equally invalid.[49] On this basis, Harvey sees no reason why meta-narrative cannot be an epistemologically-appropriate response to postmodernism. By approaching the immense complexities of postmodernity in this way, Harvey believes he can confront them as a vast problem that can be simplified using a meta-narrative that offers liberation to the selves as well as the society. This, for Harvey, is the only appropriate response to the condition of postmodernity.[50] It is the meta-narrative of Neo-Marxist emancipation that enables Harvey to do that which Baudrillard claims is futile because there is nothing to see: to go behind the images and discourses in order to formulate a true representation of reality.[51]

Not only does Harvey believe that a meta-narrative approach has epistemological superiority over postmodern relativism, but it also has a moral claim for this confrontation. Whilst Harvey accepts the importance of the terms 'difference' and 'otherness' that are central to postmodernity, it is only with the disclaimer that the significance of difference is dependent upon the social circumstances of those involved. That is to say that the poorer the circumstance of 'the other', or the greater their oppression, the more significant the response should be to that difference.[52] This difference, however, can only be understood within the Marxist dialectic of commonality and difference, with attention being given to both poles.[53] Owing to this dialectic, Harvey does not accept that difference and otherness can only be understood through the postmodern concept of 'situatedness' which pays no heed to any commonality (except a commonality of difference). Rather, Harvey argues that situatedness arises not from a person's

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[48] Lyon, David, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*, (Oxford: Polity, 2000), 127
[49] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 322
[50] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 311-312
[51] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 316
[52] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 322
[53] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 309

specificity, context and otherness, but rather is a term imposed by external social systems to further their domination.[54] The clearest difference, for Harvey, between the meta-narrative being offered and the relativism of postmodernity is that the latter is simply unable to liberate those people and social systems that have been subordinated by the bourgeois.[55] For this reason, postmodernity is simply an enemy of the Marxist meta-narrative of liberation, and allows the Market a free hand in its expansion.

Whilst David Harvey's criticisms of the postmodern condition rightly point to an ethical vacuum that exists within much of postmodern enquiry, they do so in such a way that attempts to leave meta-narrative thought as the only viable alternative. This need not be the case, however, and one certainly needs to question why Harvey insists on this dichotomy. It seems likely that, given that Marxism depends upon an emancipatory grand narrative, postmodernism is proving to be a particular threat. In Harvey's work, then, Marxism and postmodern thought are presented as a clash of conflicting moral and epistemological desires for the world, and through his work attempts to show postmodernity as the lesser of the two. In following this approach, however, Harvey is not fully able to engage with the critique that meta-narratives are held as disdainful, not necessarily because of any commitment to capitalism, but because there is genuine concern that they inappropriately impose foreign value systems and, even more seriously, are simply fantasies. Here, though, is the rub: Harvey cannot fully engage with these criticisms because to do so, would mean he would have to hold to the possibility of Marxist liberation being something less than a Universal Truth. Harvey uncompromisingly lives within a particular story and his hope is that others will recognise the futility of capitalism in any of its forms, and join him.

The Resistant Self

Jean-Francois Lyotard studied Philosophy and Literature in the Sorbonne, Paris, writing his M.A. dissertation, *Indifference as an Ethical Notion*. This he lived out through his introspective, poetic existence until the Second World War changed his focus, becoming

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[54] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 305
[55] Harvey, *Postmodern Morality Plays*, 318

committed to understanding 'reality'. This led him into teaching in Algeria where, having been inspired by the writings of Karl Marx, he became a member of the revolutionary, Marxist organisation, *Socialisme ou Barberie*. By around 1966, Lyotard could no longer view Marxism as anything other than just another Western, metaphysical totality, and so resigned from *Socialisme ou Barberie*.[56] It seems clear that this move away from Marxism, whilst being emotionally difficult, was an important moment of inflexion in the direction of his thinking, as he was forced to reject the Revolutionism in which he had placed so much hope. At this time he began teaching Philosophy in Paris, and so began to develop his theories of Aesthetics, Phenomenology and Paganism, the direct precursors of his postmodern thinking. This short history provides an important historical backdrop in understanding Lyotard's writing.

In 1979, in a succinct and simple work, Lyotard dared to attempt to define the postmodern, and so ignite the imaginations of others who were equally disenchanted with Modern Progress Myths. In a term that is often misquoted, Lyotard defined the postmodern as 'incredulity toward meta-narratives,'[57] which, rather than being a denial of their existence, is an expression of exhaustion and indifference in the face of the grand narratives that were intended to lead all of humanity and the world into a great Enlightenment, but were perceived to be failing. In this context, Lyotard begins tentative steps into the postmodern, not as the end of Modernity, but as Modernity 'in the nascent state.'[58]

In Lyotard's own terms, the postmodern presents that which is 'unpresentable' within Modernity. The 'unpresentable' is so because the academic forms of language and grammar limit what can be expressed, and as such, postmodern presentation will always be denied 'the solace of good forms.'[59] Whereas the Modern is the institutionalising and totalising of that which has previously been presented, the postmodern is the emergence of that which has been deprived of presentation, whether it is judged old, heretical or foolish.[60]

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[56] Lyotard, Jean-Francois, 'That Which Resists, After All', *Philosophy Today 36*:4, (1992), 402-417, 403
Jameson, Frederick, 'foreword', Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), x
[57] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv
[58] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 79
[59] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 81
[60] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81

With reference to the person and identity, Lyotard's social thought is grounded in Wittgenstein and language games, as well as in Foucault and discourse practice. Rather than a self lost in and to image, as with Baudrillard, Lyotard presents a self that is formed and developed within the practice of discourse, under local and institutional rules. Here the self exists at nodal points of communicative intersection, but is kept from being lost because no self, 'not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent.'[61] Furthermore, all of these language games in which identity is created, are separated by a chasm, and as such are unable to be totalised without illusion or violence.

Lyotard takes up a second issue with knowledge, which he defines as the mercantalisation of knowledge. Particularly prevalent within, although not restricted to, the Sciences, mercantalisation is where the focussed development of specific knowledge becomes an economic end in and of itself, measuring knowledge by a performance criterion.[62] Lyotard sees this as highly problematic, and a further example of the Modern's damning of the imagination and controlling of emergence. Understood in this way, mercantalisation can be said to prevent opportunities of presenting the unpresentable in areas of study that rely heavily upon financial support. Furthermore, to focus only on those potential discoveries that the Institutions have decreed useful is counter-productive, as the 'use' of many discoveries are often only realised after the time of discovery. On this point alone, perhaps David Harvey has more in common with postmodern discourse than he is willing to concede.

Throughout all of these discussions, Lyotard repeats his belief that totalising regimes and the narratives on which they are founded are either mythical, violent, or both. This leads him to call his readers to be 'witnesses to the unpresentable,'[63] embracing a postmodern state in which emergence of the impossible is given precedence over a Hegelian, Marxist or mercantalised progression. This is to adopt a position of 'paralogy', which Lyotard defines as moving against the established methods of reasoning.[64] This is quite the opposite to Lyon's,

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[61] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 15
[62] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 5
[63] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 82
[64] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 60-61, 66

usually salient, commentary that Lyotard 'sidesteps the question of social transformation.'[65] This is not a progressive transformation in a Marxist sense, but a focus upon that which the centre has marginalised, that it may be re-presented. It is this paralogy that is transformative, not as a prescribed praxis, but as a way of being in relation to, a resistance to, meta-narratives. This point is highlighted by Lyotard in an interview he gave in his later years, in which he insists that 'what we have to resist is at bottom despair and surrender,'[66] which are the effects of totalising regimes.

Quite the contrary to the assumptions of Harvey, Lyotard defines the postmodern as the nascent, the emergent, that which speaks against and undoes the Universalist assumptions of power. The postmodern is the perpetual challenging of 'The Institutes' and 'institutional', that the forgotten, the silenced, and the new would emerge. For Lyotard, it is not *laissez faire* to move from universalising to local narratives, but rather it is to resist what he sees as the violence and fantasy of imperialism, and challenge the rules of engagement. Nor is it fair to suggest that an emphasis on locality over and above totality will necessarily become lost in parochialism, when the localism is grounded in paralogy. For Lyotard, the postmodern is a call to 'war on totality,'[67] so that emergent streams of knowledge are not silenced by those which are honoured. The question that remains unanswered, however, is how paralogy itself resists becoming a totalising system, and whether it is simply anarchy by another name. If this is the case, then Lyon's criticism regarding a lack of interest in social transformation may, in part, be justified, as such a state of being could lead to paralysis by confusion, rather than any action upon totality.

Another important criticism made by Lyon, citing Bruno Latour, is that Lyotard, and many other postmodern philosophers, 'assume that modernity is a seamless all-enveloping environment.'[68] Rather, Lyon wishes to emphasise that modernity has many more uncertainties and a greater diversity than the way in which it is presented by postmodern criticism. That is to say that the 'totalising whole' of modernity is itself a movement of different, sometimes

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[65] Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 56
[66] Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *That Which Resists, After All*, 403
[67] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 82
[68] Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 43

mutually exclusive, often competing, ideologies, each of which have varying levels of commitment to totality. Lyon states that it is more appropriate to suggest that 'modernity has lived with inner doubts and contradictions from the start.'[69] This criticism, though, only applies to Lyotard to a point. Whilst he emphatically presents the modern as a totalising whole, he is also careful to illustrate that the postmodern has always existed alongside this. For Lyotard, the postmodern is not just an issue for contemporary scholarship, but has been evident throughout Modernity. This, perhaps, helps to explain Lyotard's presentation of the modern and the postmodern as two co-existent, dialectical movements. Whereas the former is the movement to totalise in order to unify or emancipate, the latter is the movement against the flaws and self-confidence inherent within totality.[70] Lyon's critique of Lyotard's simplified Modernism, and Lyotard's own concept of the constant presence of the postmodern within Modernism, is a helpful dialectical representation of the highly complex and dialogical arguments that take place within the formation and propagation of local and universalising discourses.

The Centrifugal Self

Zigmunt Bauman, a Polish immigrant who has lived and worked in Leeds since 1972, has written prolifically on 'liquid modernity' since his retirement in 1990. Whilst being a Professor of Sociology, his writing is much broader than his title would suggest, to the consternation of some in his field.[71] Like Lyotard, Bauman, too, has been a committed Marxist and communist, although Bauman remains focussed upon socialist critique of Western society and globalisation.[72] Aptly named by Dennis Smith in a book by the same name, 'Prophet of Postmodernity,'[73] Bauman writes with both an uncanny accuracy about the near-future of a consumerist culture, as well as with a dry, socialist wit. Above all, it is his purpose in writing that is so clear: this is a man who wants to inspire change, not by turning back some mythical clock, but by embracing the world as it is.

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[69] Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 41
[70] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81
[71] Turner, C., 'Zigmunt Bauman: Prophet of Postmodernity', *British Journal of Sociology*, 51:4, (2000), 762-763
[72] Bunting, Madeleine, *Passion and Pessimism*, The Guardian: Review section, Saturday April 5, 2003, 20
[73] Smith, Dennis, *Zigmunt Bauman: Prophet of Postmodernity*, Key Contemporary Thinkers, (Cambridge: Polity, 1999)

'Liquid modernity' is Bauman's explanation of the postmodern: an evocative metaphor of how loyalties to feudal or family structures, and obligations to institutions have melted into the air. 'Solid modernity' held confidence in 'society' being a fair and just arbiter of life so that one's identity could be worked toward and earned. Liquid modernity, however, is like 'an Escher universe, where no one, at no point, can tell the difference between a way uphill and a descending slope.'[74] Society is mistrusted as a 'pastmaster of underhand tricks,'[75]and the individual is at once overwhelmed by the responsibility of self-construction whilst also desiring more freedom.[76] This is a new type of society that is focussed on consumerism rather than work, with selves that are constructed through the acquisition of signs and symbols. In this society where seduction has replaced coercion, capitalism 'is stronger, and can look forward to a favoured future.'[77] Further, as society itself cannot be trusted, then a culture of 'cheating to win' develops, whereby cheating is legitimated because 'everyone' else is cheating too.[78]

Within this liquid modernity, tied as it is to consumerism, happiness is never a state that one can achieve, as there is always more to purchase and collect. As such, 'the 'state' of happiness is actually replaced by the 'pursuit' of happiness, and as the nature of a pursuit is endless, this has a destabilising effect on the individual person.[79] Citing de Tocqueville, happiness is that quality which always feels in sight yet is always out of reach, and as such leads the pursuer on in a game they can never win.[80] As the state of happiness is an impossible dream, the 'hope of becoming happy' is that which drives individuals to dress themselves in signs and symbols of happiness. Bauman sees this as a consumerist pursuit, so that happiness is dependent not only upon the signs one acquires, but also on the quality of those signs ascribed by monetary value and social prestige.[81]

In *The Art of Life*, Bauman suggests six main tools that appear important to self-construction within liquid modernity, under-girding each of which is the free will of the

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[74] Bauman, Zygmunt, *Identity*, Themes for the 21st Century, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 51
[75] Bauman, *Identity*, 52
[76] Bauman, *Identity*, 53
[77] Lyon, *Postmodernity*, 86
[78] Bauman, Zygmunt, *The Art of Life*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 95, citing Lawrence Grossberg
[79] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 29-30
[80] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 30
[81] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 23

individual 'artist' to shape one's own life. The first three involve one's individual identity over and against that of others and of institutions. Bauman states that the first and the 'ultimate' skill is 'flexibility', which allows individuals to cast off any facet of their identity that has become a liability in their quickly changing surroundings. Whatever this might be, whether an out-of-fashion watch or 'out-of-kilter' politics, can be cast aside without regret.; all that must be hung onto is the first rule of flexibility, which is the avoidance of 'swearing lifelong loyalty to anything and anybody.'[82] Furthermore, if one is to be a truly flexible artist of life, then one will be in a permanent state of transformation. This leads to Bauman's second and third tools, of destruction and resistance. It is his belief that creative destruction is necessary so that the old self can be destroyed and forgotten, making way for the new, improved being.[83] Placed alongside resistance to identities enforced or suggested by others,[84] one can see how Bauman paints an image of self-assertion and self-definition.[85]

This, though, is set uncomfortably alongside the communitarian tools of 'socialisation' and 'multiple belonging'. Whilst careful to not deny individual freedom at any point, socialisation reminds the artists that the locus of identity is a battleground between the forces that desire individual freedom and also yearn for the security that is offered by being in community.[86] A liquid belonging, however, need not engage the whole self, thus allowing the self in liquid modernity to demonstrate a part-loyalty to various, even conflicting, groups, without viewing this as betrayal.[87]

The final tool is that of 'recognition'. Bauman explains this in the negative, stating that to refuse to offer respect, or to be actively disrespectful, toward another person, is to humiliate their 'chosen being.'[88] In so doing, one makes a statement against individual freedom, placing limits on 'who' a person can be, and questioning their 'place' in the public realm. Furthermore, Bauman argues that in a deeply privatised society this refusal to recognise, or admit into membership, is to breed a very personal resentment that will insist upon personal apology, or

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[82] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 66
[83] Bauman, *The Art of Life, 73*
[84] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 81
[85] Bauman, *Identity*, 78
[86] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 82-83
[87] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 86
[88] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 90-91

even revenge. Those who are guilty of such offenses are to be 'located, exposed, publicly condemned and punished.' In this sense, there are definite 'them' and 'us' categories within liquid modernity; 'them' being those who contravene individual artisanship, and 'us', the artisans.[89]

At the opening of his presentation of liquid modern self-construction, Bauman offers a cutting remark that serves as his critique throughout. Flexibility, that 'ultimate' tool, Bauman suggests, is nothing more than a politically-correct term for spinelessness,[90] and there is, at least according to Bauman, a more appropriate way than this to construct identity within liquid modernity. In opposition to flexibility's resignation to consumerism, Bauman insists that it is 'character' which is vital in self-formation, enabling an artist to defy their circumstances and refuse to resign themselves to accept what may appear inevitable. This suggestion, that identity has the potential to be a transformative catalyst within liquid modernity, leads Bauman to develop an understanding of a 'moral' self in conversation with Levinas, and in stern opposition to Nietzsche.[91]

A liquid modernity based upon the work of Nietzsche presents a world in which the Market has free reign, and where 'freedom' is nothing more than an illusion for the many. Rather, 'freedom' resides with the Higher Men alone, and they are encouraged to use it for 'ego care, ego enhancement and altogether self-referential concerns....'[92] In this view of liquid modernity, the vast majority of humanity who are not 'higher men' are undeserving of compassion, and are certainly not to be seen as equals.[93] In the present, Bauman is critical of this resurrection of Nietzsche that attempts to give voice and substance to a centripetal pursuit of happiness. In opposition, Bauman presents an alternative, centrifugal way of living.

Rather than viewing society as divided into the higher few and the lower many, Bauman understands liquid modernity as the dissolution of 'solidified networks of loyalties and obligations.' This is described by Bauman as a positive development, where the actions of an individual have been liberated from Law and Order and therefore, unlike any other period in

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[89] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 91
[90] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 66
[91] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 104, 121-123
[92] Bauman, *The Art of Life,* 121-122
[93] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 121

human history, liberated to make free choices.[94] In this sense, Levinas's non-teleological and anti-deontological stance becomes important, so that Bauman may present 'moral acts [that] are intrinsically free choices.'[95] These free choices are a response to the face of 'the Other [who] commands us to care by his [*sic.*] *weakness*, not by his *power*.'[96] This 'command', of course, is not an order, literally understood; rather, the face of the other presents a moral responsibility, which one could accept or ignore. That is to say, one's happiness need not be found in the centripetal making of self-for-self, but in the centrifugal self-for-other, the 'taking responsibility for my responsibility.'[97]

This attempt to encounter the work of Levinas within liquid modernity is, perhaps, a step toward an example of Lyotard's call to paralogy. To argue whether centrifugalism is an opposing meta-narrative to Nietzsche's centipetalism, is to lose Bauman's point by misunderstanding his style. Bauman often works by presenting the human condition as individuals who have freedom to choose between two polar opposites.[98] In this sense, centrifugalism is the polar alternative to centripetalism, as to how an individual may conduct themselves having been freed from solid modernity. Between these two poles, an individual decides on a constant basis whether they will seek to overcome in the style of an *Ubermensch*, or will respond to the face of the other by accepting responsibility. In doing so, Bauman successfully provides an alternative both to Baudrillard and Nietzsche, as well as to solid forms of Modernity. Bauman, in the spirit of Lyotard's hope of paralogy, imaginatively draws upon marginalised voices, to insist that responding to the call of the other, has an important role to play within liquid modernity. This new age, then, need not be a denizen of self-interest, but could spell a beginning of a new social being; not enforceable by Law and Institution, which belong to the solid order, but a vulnerable, and freely-chosen being-for-other. That is, at least, the hope of Zygmunt Bauman.

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[94] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 109
[95] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 105
[96] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 106, original italics
[97] Bauman, *The Art of Life*, 124
[98] Cf. Bauman, Zigmunt, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 4-5, 19-24, another set of 'poles' that have an important role in Bauman's thought is are the 'security' and 'freedom' of community.

There is, though, an important question hanging over the notion of a centrifugal self responding to the other, and it is an issue that Levinas himself never resolved: what of the third person? What happens when one is met by a plurality of faces, with differing and conflicting demands? As Levinas accepted, this demonstrates the limit of his presentation of personal responsibility, and so he is forced to ask what happens to the self when substitution into the other becomes infeasible, impossible, and as I would argue, immoral.[99] The answer he posits without exploration, is in the movement from love to justice, the turning from a face-to-face encounter to walking shoulder-to-shoulder. This, though, is not only applicable to those in a public office, nor even when a citizen attempts to engage in party politics. It is, in fact, the reality of everyday social interaction. If two people meet one another, it is only superficially a meeting of two persons, as both exist in complex psycho-social networks. In this sense, the encounter takes place within a host of other discourses, as well as within the discourse practice allowed and enabled by societal structures and institutions. Within any social interaction, the other is always plural, the faces are always legion. The task, then, of responding appropriately becomes one of judgement and discernment, which itself relies upon a conferring with the 'faces' of one's own psycho-social setting.

The omission of this complexity is deeply problematic, as it simplifies the reality and morality inherent to encounters where one is called to responsibility, and will be further explored in chapters three and six. However, such a criticism should not lead to a disregarding of Levinas's conceptualising of 'the face' which provides a powerful metaphor, particularly in an age of mass media where faces from across time and space are brought into living rooms and offices. They are difficult to forget, and somehow find a unique space within one's memory, so that any talk of 'justice' cannot simply be a game of word play to remove responsibility. The faces of others are certainly calls to responsibility, but if one's concern is to seek justice and the common good, then there is a great deal more to consider that cannot be present in the face of the caller. The face of the other demonstrates human need and co-dependence, but a just response looks beyond the immediate to the whole-life setting from which the face has emerged.

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[99] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978, 1998), 157

The Confused Self?

It is hoped that this chapter has certainly not confused the issue, but explained five approaches to dealing with the question of the postmodern self. Needless to say, outlining these definitions is a critical step in attempting to judge the merits and limits of a theological and postmodern anthropology. They demonstrate the difference that exists within this field, and the options that appear to be open. It would be inappropriate (although ironically tempting) to offer a unified conglomerate of the five theories above as a supposed way forward. Rather, the chapter has been concluded with five loose threads, each with varying degrees of interaction with one another. Holstein and Gubrium's construction approach suggests that the self is formed through various levels of discourse and that, whilst it is highly complex, there is a discernable order at least to the forces involved. Baudrillard, however, insists that there is no order, and that selves have been reduced to stimulus-response machines. If this is the case, then what is an appropriate reaction, and does it make futile the exercise with which I am here engaging? In stark contrast once more, David Harvey sees postmodernity as a morally bankrupt swamp that is the enemy of the self and the world. What is required is a confrontation between the truth of the meta-narrative and the lies of consumerist relativism. Fourthly, and perhaps more subtly, Lyotard calls for a very different kind of resistance whereby the lies and fantasy of the meta-narrative are unmasked, and so the comfort of the easy forms of Modernism are to be resisted, so that the unpresentable may be presented. Finally, Bauman's presentation of a centrifugal self suggests that liquid modernity has brought about a freeing from class and societal loyalties, making possible the development of a freely-responsible character of self-giving within a culture of centripetal capitalism. In the following chapter I will outline four theological responses to the issue of the postmodern self, each of which shares a similar method to those mentioned above. This will then form the theoretical resource that will enter into conversation with the themes emerging from the qualitative element of this project.

Chapter Three
Can Jesus Fit into a French Lyotard?
Christian Responses to the Postmodern Self

This chapter will necessarily be a much longer discussion of the notion and possibility of a theological and postmodern anthropology. The previous chapter has briefly outlined five approaches of defining the postmodern and its repercussions for the self. The approaches offered by Bauman, Lyotard and Holstein and Gubrium see postmodern discourse as having a substantial impact upon the self, but not as preventing its existence. Baudrillard and Harvey, however, offer a much more bleak view of the future of the self if postmodern capitalism is allowed to have continued and uncurtailed development. The former offers no rescue at all, stating that the self has already been lost within this technological world. The latter insists upon a conflict of narratives, so that selves can be liberated into a storied community.

In this chapter, the major theological works that deal with these approaches shall be discussed. The critical question that each set of authors attempts to deal with is to what extent, if at all, Christian theology and postmodern social thought can be conceived as suitable conversation partners as a resource for identity. This begins with a surprisingly positive theological discussion of Baudrillard's view of the hyper-modern through Pete Ward's work on the feasibility of liquid church. This is followed by an engagement with David Ford, who, like Zigmunt Bauman above, offers a weighty reflection upon the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Taking a more negative approach to the postmodern, the works of John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas and NT Wright will be discussed in order to outline theological approaches that are similar to the narrative-conflict method taken by Harvey. Finally, a resistant, yet constructivist approach will be presented through a dialogue between David Tracy, James Dunn and David Brown. The commonality and difference between these approaches and that of the participative groups will form the basis of developing a postmodern and theological anthropology.

Consuming Disciples

Through his work, Pete Ward argues for new ways for the church 'to be an effective agent for mission within liquid modernity,' as explained by Bauman.[100] For Ward, a liquid society in which the Market is given free reign should not be understood negatively, but embraced as a neutral state of being. Through his reading of Baudrillard, Bauman and, in particular, John Fiske, Ward states that consumerist culture is a neutral state of being in which the majority share of power for self and cultural construction lies with individuals rather than with institutions, businesses and the Market.[101] In this sense, consumerism provides the pattern of, and rules for, Western socio-cultural existence, and is seen as an improvement upon previous hierarchical societies.[102] Consumption, then, should not be condemned as shallow or harmful, but rather 'as a spiritual exercise' through which a person is attempting to explore and express themselves.[103] Equally, the flows of production and consumption are not merely economic terms, but belong to all meaning-making processes within society. In seeking meaning and identity, the self negotiates these pathways, buying 'things' and joining groups as part of that search.

The role of theology, for Ward, is not to critique this practice, but to learn to live within it. More than that, it is to learn to use its language in order to free the church and its own discourses from 'solid' cultural practices in order to be engaged with society within liquid modernity.[104] Ward insists that there is more involved in 'liquid church' than a simple response to a change in culture, but that it is also a response to the contemporary development of, and change in emphases in, the social nature of Trinitarian theology. Particularly building upon his reading of John Zizioulas and Paul Fiddes, Ward stresses the perichoretic movements of relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit as a more appropriate 'organising metaphor'

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[100] Ward, Pete, *Liquid Church*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 1

[101] Ward, Pete, *Growing up Evangelical: Youthwork and the making of a Subculture*, (London: SPCK, 1996), 203.

[102] Ward, Pete, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church*, (London: SPCK, 2008), 150-151

[103] Ward, *Liquid Church,* 59-60

[104] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 16, 26-29, 41

than that of essence.[105] This *perichoresis* is the 'liquid dance of God' through which the Spirit draws believers to participate in God.[106] Ward insists that for church to be the church of God, it must share in this liquid movement, which is impossible for the solid, 'monolithic' church. Rather, Ward sees within this Trinitarian thought the theological rationale for a church of dynamic and fluid networks: 'liquid God and liquid church.'[107] The practical impact is for the church to become a network rather than a congregation, in which 'worshippers are free to shop,' gravitating toward those leaders 'they perceive as being enlightened and in the know.'[108] Through these networks and gathering hubs, Ward challenges the church to stop meeting peoples' needs, and instead begin 'stimulating their desires.'[109]

Initially, it appears that Ward is presenting what one might expect from a postmodern church; a closer inspection suggests that this is a superficial caricature of both church and society. Ward is basing his thesis of 'liquid modernity' upon a strange amalgamation of Bauman and Baudrillard, which he uses to make statements about the postmodern. Ward's embracing of consumerism within liquid modernity, as Kees de Groot has pointed out, omits Bauman's ambivalence toward, and criticism of, this society.[110] As such, this view becomes less in line with Bauman, and has more in common with warnings associated with David Harvey, where the Market will continue to destruct and delude:

> *Whereas Bauman says, "Watch out! Beware Liquid Modernity!", Ward exhorts, "Behold, society is liquid! Church should be likewise!"[111]*

Whilst that is too strong a statement concerning Bauman, it appears to accurately capture the first of Ward's two misunderstandings, the second being his simplistic presentation of John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture*. Rather than suggesting that people have the power *over* corporations and the Market in their own self-construction, Fiske presents a more nuanced argument against a Baudrillardan suggestion that the audience is merely an

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[105] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 51-52

[106] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 53

[107] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 54-55

[108] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 90

[109] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 72

[110] De Groot, Kees, 'The Church in Liquid Modernity: A Sociological and Theological Exploration of a Liquid Church', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 6:1, (2006), 91-103, 95

[111] De Groot, *The Church in Liquid Modernity*, 99

homogenized mass. Fiske corrected this by stating that people are actively involved in the making of popular culture as they inhabit the space between the reception of consumerist products and 'everyday life.'[112] Ward too heavily emphasises the power of the individual, which masks the actual power and influence that both Market corporations and the society of 'everyday life' both weald upon self-construction, as has been demonstrated by Holstein and Gubrium.

There is further confusion to follow. Whilst fervently desiring to pattern the church within consumerist culture, Ward seems less sure about what to do about the church's theology. Rather than following through with his ecclesiological liquidisation, Ward insists that the free and liquid networks need to be connected to their 'theological roots.'[113] The oxymoronic nature of being a rooted liquid network suggests that whilst Ward appears ready to embrace liquid modernity in terms of its anti-institutionalism, he is less keen to follow this through to its natural conclusion in challenging the notion of orthodoxy. If this is to be a genuine attempt to create church within liquid modernity, then surely this aspect of solid modernity must undergo at least some form of challenge. Yet Ward does not even seem to recognise the irony of a rooted, liquid network. This suggests that, at least as it stands, liquid church is a superficial attempt at engaging theological and postmodern discourses that appears to leave the self and the church in a precarious state before a ubiquitous consumerism. Ward has quite simply gotten his prioritising of concepts the wrong way round: participation is not a form of a neutral consumerism,[114] rather, consumerism is a superficial form of participation. Whilst he is right to see great hope for a theological anthropology within social Trinitarian thought, he completely misses that the participation spoken of is intended to aid humanity in seeing beyond the way consumerism imitates genuine relationality. This is an important point for this project which will be further developed in chapter six.

Ward demonstrates a pragmatic approach to the postmodern, attempting to use its language to make his understanding of Christianity more accessible to those within this culture. The danger inherent within this approach is that, in changing the church's language to one of

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[112] Fiske, John, *Understanding Popular Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 23
[113] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 71
[114] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 137

capital and production,[115] the life of God and the church is reduced to a superficial consumerism. One need not be strongly committed to a cultural-linguistic view of religion to accept that its language is formative, as well as one of its greatest assets. Moves to change theological language are more significant and require greater sensitivity than the thesis presented as liquid church.

Ward is also attempting to challenge institutional forms of church to consider whether the way in which they are organised reflects the God whom they worship. His hope is that 'congregation' will be replaced with networks that are in communication with one another. This communication will not have 'gathering' as its focus, but employ current technologies to allow for communication to continue within the fluidity of liquid modernity. If people are to meet on a face-to-face basis, it will either be at a common-interest group, or based around non-regular large-scale events.[116] This summing up reveals two final issues with Ward's call for the church to embrace a 'network' society. First, a networking society relies upon ever-increasingly sophisticated and expensive methods of communication which are not available to all of society. Rather than creating an open and inclusive church, Ward runs the risk of exclusion on the grounds of economics and technological knowledge. Second, as John Milbank has pointed out, whilst 'networking' is not necessarily a social evil, neither is it a replacement 'for real, embodied human contact.' Milbank goes on to suggest that it may be more appropriate for the church to 'struggle *against* networking' because of its potential to divide society further.[117] This concern for face-to-face contact is central to the arguments in the next section, in which David Ford insists 'facing' is the *raison d'être* of Christian discipleship.

The Centrifugal Disciple

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[115] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 180-185
[116] Ward, *Liquid Church*, 87-98
[117] Milbank, John, 'Stale Expressions', *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 21:1, (2008), 117-128, 127 (original Italics)

In *Self and Salvation,*[118] David Ford attempts to deal with the philosophical and theological issues raised within the practical questions associated with selfhood. The method employed, as with Ward above, deliberately draws from outside the Christian tradition in order to create a dialogue that will help Ford form a theological anthropology this is coherent to both Christian and non-Christian discourse. Whilst this method has been strongly criticised by John Webster for not taking proper account of, and direction from, 'the conceptual architecture of the various dogmatic traditions,'[119] Ford's book has been widely welcomed with great favour.[120] Throughout the dense, concise (and therefore, rather breathless)[121] work, Ford holds together the different methods and threads of thought by constantly referring to, and developing, the image of 'the face'. Whilst there are five notable conversation partners, including Eberhard Jungel, Paul Ricoeur, Dietrich Bonheoffer and Therese of Lisieux, it is Emmanuel Levinas who has the most dominant voice within the dialogue. It is Levinas's image of 'the face', critique of theology, and understanding of responsibility with which Ford brings the other voices into discussion. Ford's hope, which is realised, is that through this dialogue selfhood can be defined in such a way that is as theological as it is true to the writings of Levinas.[122]

The concept of the self and self-construction within Ford is similar to that of Holstein and Gubrium. The self is a dialogical complex of genetic, neural, biological, and past, present and anticipated social factors that has prioritised some ways of being over other ways. In order to avoid getting lost in the technical terms associated with each of these factors, Ford uses the image of the face to negotiate the discussions. This is not merely a move of convenience, but rather Ford places huge importance upon the role of the face as the convergence of all the

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[118] Ford, David F., *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999)
[119] Webster, John, Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) by David F. Ford, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 54:4, (2001), 548-559, 549
[120] Wiles, Maurice, Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) by David F. Ford, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 51:1, (2000), 394-397
MacIntyre, John, Review of *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, (Cambridge: CUP, 1999) by David F. Ford, in *The Expository Times*, 110:11, (1999), 374
[121] It should be of no surprise that Ford, in the final chapter of the book, warns himself and the reader: 'At this point intellectual indigestion threatens!' Indeed. Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 272
[122] Ford, *Self and Salvation,* 44

aforementioned factors.[123] In and of itself, however, the face is not a full enough metaphor to carry all of the meaning of selfhood, particularly carrying with it a tendency to be seen as an object. Rather, Ford uses 'facing' as the image which is 'deepest and most pervasive,' [124] allowing, as it does, for both 'activity and passivity' and a sense of individuality and community.[125]

The metaphor of facing also brings into the discussion that there is another being faced. It is at this point that Ford draws heavily upon the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in order to convey the radicality of this image for the notion of the self, whereby each face is seen as an 'interrupting summons to justice and peace.'[126] For Levinas, the face of the other is nothing short of an ethical demand for responsibility which relies not on reciprocity but on the called looking up to the other who is calling.[127] Whilst Ford argues that free will remains to be present within this model, he states that one's free will has a prior existence than in one's self, and 'always finds itself already summoned....'[128] Before outlining the mechanics of the relationship between self and other, it is necessary to explain Ford's first theological reflection upon Levinas's philosophy, that of seeing Christ as the other.

In surveying the resurrection stories of the gospels, Ford argues that it is the face of the resurrected Christ that elicits the responses of faith, doubt, fear and joy. In the same way, disciples are called to live before, not merely the memory of a face, but the glory of God which is this face. In this sense, to ascribe faith in Christ is to 'live before his face,' and it is this that forms the community of the church.[129] Following the words of the Great Commission, this facing of Christ also calls the disciples to turn to the faces of the world, 'without restriction.'[130] It is by this facing of Jesus Christ that the self is transformed 'from glory into glory,'[131] being led

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[123] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 17. That is not to say that this is a positivist view of the face that is, somehow, able to convey all of the complexities of the self, but rather that it is Ford's primary metaphor in developing the notion of the self. Cf., Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 21

[124] Ford, *self and Salvation*, 4

[125] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 23

[126] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 24

[127] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 37

[128] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 39

[129] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 171-172

[130] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 172-173

[131] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 176

into worship and hospitality.[132] Importantly, however, Ford argues that this face of Christ is not a triumphalist domination, as within the face is also the one who was slain. That is to say that the face of the dead Jesus is as important as the face of the resurrected Christ. It is the dead face that signifies the presence of the one who lived, as Bauman would say, centrifugally, giving his life for God and others. More than that, however, Ford argues that as this is the face of the *dead* Jesus, his absence is also signified. It is this absence that creates a space of limitless responsibility for those who would look on his face, with which, Ford argues, Jesus drew parallels through his parables of Masters who go away, leaving their servants responsible.[133] Whereas the dead face calls to responsibility, it is the face of the risen Christ that empowers this call.[134] In this sense, salvation of the self is explicitly linked to facing Jesus Christ, and in this facing comes the realisation that one is already faced by Jesus Christ.[135] With this in mind, I shall now return to the relationship between self and other, in order to understand the enormity of responsibility that Ford understands to be inherent to a Christian self.

Ford's concept of substitutionary responsibility is largely the result of his dialogue with Levinas, Jungel and Ricoeur. Ford takes Levinas's prioritising of responsibility as paramount to any concept of the self that is to be constructed. He interprets the work of Levinas to state that each face is an epiphany of that which comes from beyond the self, carrying the language of obligation.[136] This, for both Levinas and Ford, is nothing less than a call from God for the self to lose its own place and be substituted for the other. The substitution is so profound that the self is not merely responsible for the needs of the other, but also for their responsibility.[137] Here, Ford concurs with Levinas that, at its most basic, the self is completely responsible for the other. Where they differ, however, is over the nature of theology and its relation to this responsibility. For Levinas, in a cross-centred Christianity, the responsibility belonging to the self is necessarily transferred onto Christ who has died for all, which leads to personal

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[132] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 24
[133] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 206
[134] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 207
[135] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 214
[136] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 37-38
[137] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 59-60

irresponsibility.[138] In constructing a dialogue between Levinas and Jungel, Ford attempts to demonstrate how theological discourse actually serves to enrich, rather than denigrate, the concept of a responsible self.

Ford's presentation of Levinas shows that it is important to him to develop a philosophy in which love, and not death, is definitive of humanity. Levinas is shown to believe that death is dethroned, not by ontological argument, but through his ethics of substitutionary responsibility. In this sense death is no longer faceless or a totality, but met in each individual face that has died. Levinas's criticism of theology is that death continues to exhibit a totalising power, thus replacing love as the 'ultimate event' which demands the priority of those striving for survival.[139] Ford, however, suggests that Jungel recognises this danger, and attempts to challenge the universality death enjoys in human relating and thinking, through the particular death and resurrection of Christ, which he terms 'the word of the cross.' This word in Jesus Christ is God's address to humanity, through which humanity may begin to perceive the addresser. This word indicates that there is a reality beyond the alternatives of presence and absence which, if the cross and resurrection of Christ can be accepted by faith, causes death to lose its totalising power.[140] Such a trust in God provokes a response of gratitude for this love, which is then demonstrated by one's substituting of oneself for one's neighbours. Whilst death may still remain as a 'functioning ultimate,' it has certainly been dethroned by the word of the cross as the ultimate event.

Ford believes that Jungel's thought regarding Christ's particular death as important to the understanding of salvation becomes particularly salient when placed alongside Levinas's thought. Such juxtaposing allows Ford to give a more central place to the face of Christ, so that the totalising effect of death can be further countered in order to develop a fuller understanding of love.[141] It is Ford's hope that he can show that the self can be defined according to both Levinas and Jungel, as that which is characterised by both substitutionary responsibility and Jesus' death for all.[142]

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[138] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 50-51
[139] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 63
[140] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 56, 71
[141] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 60-63
[142] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 68

This move is made, principally, in connection with the theology of Bonhoeffer. The critical link that Ford draws in order to develop his theology is that both Levinas and Bonhoeffer hold to the concept of substitutionary responsibility in their understanding of the human person. What differs, and it is this that allows Ford to make a clear, theological move, is that Bonhoeffer understands this substitution as only being made possible through the mediation of Christ, who stands before all and between all. In this sense one cannot recognise oneself or others except through Christ, and by his image in them.[143] Being before the face of Christ, the one who was slain, and the one who has been raised to life, is not necessarily to transfer one's responsibility, but rather to be energised by giving thanks to the other who has been responsible for me. In seeing the face of Christ before oneself and in the other, one is moved with joy to responsibility.[144] It is this that forms the basis of what Ford calls, 'the feasting self.'[145]

Ford develops the work of Levinas in a much more creative and communitarian manner than Bauman, and the concept of the feasting self is the culmination of his dialogues. The feasting self moves the attention away from one facing another (personal encounter) and attends to the vision of a table, around which sit the feasting selves, each person face to face with Christ and one another. This image is a sharing of joy and responsibility that, by its nature, exposes 'the multiple ways of rejecting the appeal of the face in the other.'[146] The invitation comes from the face of Christ to the whole of creation and goes beyond all boundaries save one: those who cannot accept and share in God's generosity are excluded from the feast.[147] This image brings together the two threads that make up the feasting self: substitutionary joy (placing one's joy in the joy of the other) and substitutionary responsibility, and around the table the loving and enjoyment of one another knows no bounds.[148] Salvation is announced in

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[143] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 251-252
[144] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 70
[145] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 266-281
[146] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 269
[147] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 269-270
[148] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 271

and through the face of Christ, and comes to those who positively accept and embrace the call to feasting.[149]

There is no doubt that Ford makes a thorough and inspiring case for following his understanding of the Christian self. Indeed, John MacIntyre believes that it is one of the finest modern expositions of what it means to glorify God and enjoy him forever.[150] The image of living before the face of the dead and resurrected Jesus Christ in all whom one encounters gives an imaginative seriousness to discipleship that serves to enrich the sense of a holistic life of worship. Caution, however, may need to be sounded when a necessary link is made between this concept of facing and substitutionary responsibility. Any form of substitution involves the loss of one thing in order to gain something else. Ford's presentation is too easily given over to a literal interpretation, so that there is a genuine danger of losing one's self and one's sense of responsibility. Whilst there are certainly occasions when giving one's self completely for the sake of the other is necessary, for this to be literally the daily state of affairs leads either to a nauseous-inducing piety or, more seriously, to exhaustion. Whilst the constant giving of one's self to the other may have its roots in responding to the call of Christ, that will not be its only source. As Ford recognises at the start of his book, the self is a complex of many factors.[151] Depending on its sources, this form of self-giving can also be understood as self-harm, as a person attempts to mask (consciously or not) their neuroses, or a history of hurt or guilt. As Nigel Biggar has pointed out, if every person is valuable, that includes the self, and as such, requires just as much care as the other.[152] If Ford's model is to not inadvertently become a vehicle for harm, then more attention needs to be paid to how the face of Christ is encountered by the faces within one's memory.

The second loss within this understanding of substitutionary responsibility, is of responsibility itself. Once again, Biggar is helpful on this matter, stating that '[o]ne person's want does not amount to another person's duty....'[153] In explaining this criticism, it will be helpful to continue to draw on Ford's image of faces and facing. To take on responsibility for

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[149] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 272
[150] MacIntyre, Review of 'Self and Salvation', 374
[151] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 17
[152] Biggar, Nigel, *Good Life: Reflections on what we value today*, (London: SPCK, 1997), 22
[153] Biggar, *Good Life*, 22-23

another as oneself is not merely a giving to that individual, but also to the other faces present within their psycho-social complex. These are the faces of those, known and unknown, who are causing the other to call for me to act upon the primordial obligation. In order to give myself to this calling, I must attend to all of those faces. Anything short of this is to not properly substitute myself in their place. This, of course, is impossible. One person is simply not able to take on another's responsibility in that way. To say so reduces the complexity of the self, and misjudges one's abilities as a human person. Put simply, Ford confuses responsibility with respect. To give respect to all is to treat them as human beings worthy of rights that are basic to life. Responsibility, however, is much more complex. Within a democratic nation state, at the very least I consent to be responsible through taxation, lawful behaviour, getting involved within political processes, and so on. Through the various institutions, responsibility is shared by people who have been deemed to be trust-worthy and suitably skilled to embody the respect that I show to each person. This does not in any way 'acquit' the self of responsibilities to be neighbourly, but is a more effective way of being attentive to the needs of the many, than simply being a good Samaritan. Good neighbours are important, but in order that all would be seen as human persons, the creation and constant developing of a good 'neighbourhood' is more so. This is not to pass on responsibility to the state or other institutions, but to recognise and give thanks for one's place within them.

The concept of facing Christ is undoubtedly an evocative and entirely appropriate image for the discussion of a theological and postmodern anthropology. The face of Christ is truthful to its specific tradition, out of which it is met by others within their own specificity. Whilst the encounter is unique and private, it draws the self into a longer and broader conversation, with the Christian tradition and with the present world. However, the face of Christ should not necessarily be equated with a calling to substitutionary responsibility, but rather as the invitation to the feasting around God's table, at which one realises the implications of one's life before God, and before one's neighbours. For some theologians dealing with theological and postmodern anthropology, Ford's table will simply prove to be too open, and denies the integrity of the Christian tradition. For these theologians, Ford's mistake is not to see that Christ calls people to the feast of the Kingdom, but rather to attempt to understand it in the light of

those who have not positively responded to that invitation. The next section of this chapter brings the question of Christian personhood into debate with writers who make such criticisms.

Liberation and Discipleship

As David Harvey has so eloquently presented in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, the relativism of postmodernity is seen to be unable to liberate people from conditions of oppression and poverty. In this sense, the postmodern is nothing more than a social theory being used to further the power and damage of capitalism. His answer to the complexities and relativities of this social malaise is through confrontation with a revised Marxist meta-narrative. This approach of confrontation is also employed by certain theologians as they seek to respond to the criticisms and challenges that emanate from postmodern thought. Their work is characterised, as with Harvey, with a desire to liberate people into the Truth of a particular Story. This approach will be discussed with detailed reference to the work of John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas and NT Wright. These three theologians are suitably similar in their meta-narrative approach to typify this movement, whilst each occupies a place unique enough to warrant individual attention.

John Milbank: *Altera Civitas*

The first of the three theologians, John Milbank, insists upon an indivisibility between Christianity and Christendom.[154] For Milbank, Christianity began with God's interruption in history by becoming incarnate in Christ.[155] In doing so, the church was formed as the reconciled society, and all those who enter into Christ through baptism, necessarily enter into the peace and social order of Christendom.[156] This is a separate order to anything else in the world's societies as it is uniquely placed within the meta-narrative of God's engagement with the world through Christ. No other social structure, however virtuous, can belong in any way to this Story:

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[154] Milbank, John, 'Stale Expressions', *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 21:1, (2008), 117-128, 126
[155] Milbank, John, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, 1995), 387
[156] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 6

salvation is found in Christendom alone.[157] This Christendom is the *altera civitas* found in this world; a society bound by the Story of God in Christ, and only through being inserted into this story can one enter the city.[158]

From within Christendom, then, Milbank analyses secular social order and reason with the purpose of demonstrating, not only that it has nothing to offer to Christendom, but that it is heretical, and so can only lead the church into error. Secular social theory is intended only for secular society, which it helps to sustain.[159] Milbank sees a direct continuation within modern secular thought from that of ancient belief, wherein humanity and the world are thought to be so chaotic that they must be tamed. This taming is what Milbank calls an 'original violence', the modern manifestation of which is brought about through the rules of market economics and nation states.[160] To suggest, then, that Christendom should engage, and even learn from, secularism is to become a partner in this violence and to render unto Caesar that which is God's. Rather, the only way to critique capitalism is from within an alternative system formed by a different social narrative.[161] It is Milbank's contention that because Sociology must arise from specific contexts that are not neutral, then it is surely foolish for theology to attempt to gain sociological insight from sociologies that have arisen in a non-Christian habitus. What Milbank attempts to develop, then, is theology as social science, as sociology, that is formed within the historic Christian tradition.[162]

The task of this theology, as Milbank sees it, is not as an apology to the world, but as the telling of the Story in such a way that calls the *altera civitas* to proper Christian praxis.[163] It is the realising of Christendom that is the only positive alternative to either Nihilistic difference or Antique Virtue, as it alone is embedded in the Story of the Trinitarian God who both offers and demonstrates 'transcendental peace through differential relation.'[164] This leads to an ontology and ethics that is contrary to that of secular society, because it is grounded in a Story that is

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[157] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388
[158] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 432
[159] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3
[160] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5
[161] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 196
[162] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380-381
[163] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 381
[164] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 6

contrary to those employed in secular social thought. Christendom does not attempt to control any supposed chaos through violence, but rather finds its home within the God who is peace. Any attempt, therefore, to speak of Christianity without Christendom, and engage with social thought that is not so grounded, is to deny that Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation.[165] Milbank insists that this leaves the church with a stark option either to continue its infatuation with a Marxist and heretical secular social theory or to 'enact the vision of the paradisal community.'[166]

Milbank's *Theology as Social Science* is an incredibly brave reassertion of Christendom in which theology is 'the queen of the sciences for the inhabitants of the *altera civitas*, on pilgrimage through this temporary world.'[167] Strictly speaking this is neither a form of fundamentalism, as Richard Roberts has suggested,[168] nor a sectarianism. Properly understood, this is an attempt to re-invigorate a Christendom that has lost its way, but that is good news for creation, in which people are formed in the image and story of the Creator God. Milbank's post-liberalism is an attempt to show how the liberal, secular project has failed to deliver either anything new or good, and has instead continued to repeat the original violence of ancient times. Whilst one may raise questions about the history, and therefore future possibility of what Christendom would actually look like in reality, there are more immediate questions that rather quickly begin to deconstruct Milbank's City.

As Roberts has rightly suggested, his work presents the church with an impossible choice between 'nihilism and chaos, or Christian order.'[169] This choice is grounded in his seriously misconstrued presentation of Theology and Sociology as two disciplines grounded in opposing meta-narratives, the first of which is supposed to be directly grounded in the revelation of the Story of God, and the second as a violent manipulation of a chaotic world. Three responses need to be given to this issue. First, Theology is grounded not only in events, but also in the speech about those events. As such, it is a discipline that has not simply fallen

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[165] Milbank, *Stale Expressions,* 126
[166] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 433
[167] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 380
[168] Roberts, Richard H., 'Transcendental Sociology? A Critique of John Milbank's Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 46:4, (1993), 527-536, 534
[169] Roberts, *Transcendental Sociology?*, 528

out of the heavens, but rather is a part of the common discourses of the world. In this sense, it is as reliant upon non-theological discourses as it is upon the reports about 'the events' in order to communicate its faith. The possibility of a 'pure' discourse emanating from only one source is simply naive. Second, as sociologist Kieran Flanagan noted in his review of Milbank's work, Sociology is a much more humble and divided discipline than Milbank's presentation suggests, and as such offers nothing more than an arbitrary engagement with the discipline.[170] Finally, to set the two in opposition serves no purpose other than neutralising their ability to engage in the common task in addressing the human and global situation.[171]

Whilst one does get the impression that Milbank's works are often, as Roberts suggests, erudite 'exercises in despair,'[172] it would be too easy to reject his work based on his false dichotomy between all forms of theology and sociology. There are two of Milbank's criticisms that are important for the work at hand. Whilst I disagree with his extreme understanding of theology as an hermetic discourse practice, it is important to note that political (and one might add, public and practical) theology is more than merely a reflection upon the latest sociological journal. Rather, Christian theology has a rich tradition of social thought and engagement that emanates from its doctrinal beliefs about God. To neglect this, as Milbank rightly criticises some political theologians as doing, causes theology to risk becoming 'intellectually atheistic.'[173] Whilst I disagree that engagement necessarily leads the theologian to this end, Milbank's criticism stands as a constant reminder of the dangers involved in constructing Theology in a multi-disciplinary setting. Second, contrary to the work of Ward above, Milbank's insistence that Christianity and Christendom are coterminous leads him to stress the importance of a church that is organised according to geographical boundaries, rather than according to postmodern networks. Milbank believes that the latter leads to further fragmentation as people gather according to age and common interest, something which he brands as 'manifestly evil.' In opposition to this, Milbank suggests that people are best formed alongside people who are different from them, and that the mission of the church should be a struggle

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[170] Flanagan, Kieran, Review of *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Social Reason,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) by John Milbank, in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 44:2, (1993), 360-361, 360
[171] Roberts, *Transcendental Sociology?*, 533
[172] Roberts, *Transcendental Sociology?*, 535
[173] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 3

against networking, rather than 'working with it as if it were a neutral means.'[174] These are issues shared by Stanley Hauerwas, another theologian labelled as 'post-liberal', who has developed his line of questioning in a way that holds to a similar meta-narrative approach to that of Milbank, but in a different way to the Christendom model.

Stanley Hauerwas: Resident Aliens

Whereas Milbank is specifically entering into debate with what he perceives to be secular social theory, Hauerwas has set up a quite different division. Following on from Hans Frei and the Yale School, and also John Howard Yoder, Hauerwas's understanding of the church is as a group of people bound by a particular Story who exist in opposition to the Nations. This work is deliberately contrary to the apologetic approach of H. Richard Niebuhr who, claims Hauerwas, simply underwrote liberal democracy with a theological rationale.[175] In order to understand the intricacies within this argument, for it is not a simple sectarianism, it is important, first, to understand what he believes 'the story' to be, and what the world looks like through that story. Having done this, the notion and importance of 'the colony' to Hauerwas's argument will become much clearer.

The meta-narrative that pervades all of Hauerwas's work has been inherited from Yoder, and is a particularly Anabaptist understanding of Church history. For Hauerwas, the church began as a colony, distinct from the Nations, the formation of which is seen in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The colony is said to be formed by those who have come out of the crowd in order to be disciples of Jesus.[176] The distinctive nature of this colony is most clearly demonstrated in two ways. First, they believe that Jesus is Lord, and not Caesar.[177] Second, and emanating from the first, they are committed to non-violence because that is the way they have been called to follow. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow his path of non-violence, even

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[174] Milbank, *Stale Expressions, 127*

[175] Hauerwas, Stanley, and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry for people who know something is wrong*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 41

[176] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 74-77

[177] Hauerwas, Stanley, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society,* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 128

unto death.[178] As the church developed, however, it entered into settlement with Constantine, in which the church lost its soul. Rather than remembering and enacting its tradition that began at the Sermon on the Mount, the church reflected upon its ethical position on the basis of 'how much Christian ethics Caesar can be induced to swallow without choking.'[179] The church, according to Hauerwas, has, ever since, found itself in a constant battle between faithfulness to the Story and accommodation to the Nations.

This is particularly evident for Hauerwas in America in the middle of the last Century, and is embodied by H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. It is claimed that this book has manifestly hindered the church in the West by underwriting further Constantinianism, and has lead to a church that does nothing more than attempt to make America nicer.[180] Within this context, Hauerwas understands his role as one who tells the real story, and calls the church to remember its tradition, believe once more that Jesus is Lord and practice the ways of non-violence. By separating oneself from giving loyalty to the Nations, a community is formed that does not require war for its self-understanding and to make real its future desires.[181]

Whilst the Story defines Christian community and personhood, it is also used to define 'the world' in a particular way. For Hauerwas, the world is comprised of Nation states, each with their own Caesar on the throne. Whether they are described politically as dictatorships or democracies, all Nation States reserve a totalitarian right to militarise their citizens and subjects in order to kill other human beings.[182] Whilst Hauerwas is often accused of tribalism, he claims that it is in fact the Nation States who tribalise humanity and claim an allegiance that is neither deserved nor earned.[183] Although explained in a much simpler way, this is akin to the Original Violence of Milbank's world. In this sense, for a Christian to fight on behalf of a nation is not only to be prepared to kill other humans, even Christians, but at a deeper level, is to forget that Christ, and not Caesar, is Lord. Hauerwas simply cannot accept that any official engagement between Church and State is anything other than the co-opting of the church by the State to

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[178] Hauerwas, Stanley, *Against the Nations,* 117, 129-130
[179] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 72
[180] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 40; Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 122-123
[181] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 62; Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 123
[182] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 127
[183] Hauerwas and Willimon, R*esident Aliens*, 156

further the purposes of Caesar.[184] There can be no settlement or compromise as the Stories are too different. The Nations are in conflict with the Church, and this is the way it has always been.[185] There can only be one Lord, Caesar or Christ, and like the first crowd hearing the Sermon on the Mount, a choice must be made.[186] Herein lies the formation of the colony, made up of those who see the truth of God in this Story, and so learn to live as 'Resident Aliens within a hostile environment....'[187]

Hauerwas makes it clear that the colony is a part of the 'confessing church', deliberately echoing the name given to the movement embodied in Bonhoeffer and Kolbe in Nazi Germany.[188] The confessing church not only stands against the violence of Empire and Nation, but is also conversionist.[189] This does not mean that Hauerwas in any way advocates 'apologetics' in order to explain faith through reason and engage with the powers. Rather, Hauerwas understands his approach to be anti-apologetic, stating that Christianity is not translatable into any other language, and such an approach could threaten the integrity of Christianity itself. Rather, theology is most appropriately carried out 'without apology.'[190] The colony, in its communal faithfulness to Christ,[191] is the primary set of language games that forms people by its Story, and by its existence calls people to join this 'counter-cultural social structure.'[192] Salvation, then, is baptism into the colony, through which one forgets oneself in order to become a part of the Story that is so truthful one can do no other.[193] By living within this Story the person learns a new language and set of skills from the elders of the colony and so becomes more deeply a part of the community, and less a part of the Nations.[194] This is not a

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[184] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations,* 128-129

[185] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens,* 155

[186] Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 129, '[T]he overriding conflict of our time... is the conflict between those who would remain loyal to God's kingdom and those that would side with the world.'

[187] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 140

[188] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 45

[189] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 46

[190] Hauerwas, Stanley, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth Century Philosophy and Theology*, Radical Traditions Series, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 1-2

[191] Hauerwas and Willimon, R*esident Aliens*, 78

[192] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 47, 97, 101; Hauerwas, *Against the Nations*, 117

[193] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 59

[194] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 97

sectian withdrawal from the world,[195] as Max Stackhouse so emphatically claims,[196] but a way of learning to live in the world as a group of people who have come to realise that the claim made on their lives by the Christian Story is incompatible with the vision of the Nations. By fully living in the Story they learn how to live an uncompromised life in the world, surrounded by the Nations.[197]

Two comments should be made, however, that question Hauerwas's work, the first of which involves his defining and dividing of Christianity and liberal democracy, and the second, his rejection of apologetics. On the first point, Nigel Biggar has argued that, whilst Hauerwas is correct to state that liberalism has tended 'illiberally' to exclude religious discourse from the public and political dialogue,[198] his theology drives too much of a wedge between Christianity and the secular, which prevents even critical engagement between the two.[199] This is the same type of criticism levelled at Milbank, that an overt separation of religious from secular spheres is an ignoring of the part both have played in one another's formation. This suggests that, in addition to sharing discourses and a common history (although with distinct discourse practices) the two spheres continue to hold a stake in one another's future. For this reason, there is a responsibility, even if the secular sphere appears unwilling, for Christian theology to continue its dialogue with nation states, drawing on its own particular heritage, as well as being open to change.[200] This is not simply to use theology to underwrite liberal democracy but, as Biggar has phrased it, to seek its transformation and regeneration.[201]

Before the second issue is highlighted it will be necessary to explain the importance of the concept of 'the novel' to Hauerwas's work. When reading a novel, Hauerwas comments that one's eyes are forced to move throughout the pages of the book, by which one is absorbed

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[195] Cf. Biggar, Nigel, 'Is Stanley Hauerwas sectarian?', in, Mark Theissen Nation and Samuel Wells (Eds.), *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 141-160

[196] Cf. Stackhouse, Max, Review of *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular*, (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1994) by Stanley Hauerwas, in *Christian Century*, (18 October 1995), 962-967

[197] Hauerwas, Stanley, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social* Ethic, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1981), 144-145, 150-151

[198] Biggar, Nigel, 'Saving the Secular', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 37:1, (2009), 159-178, 159

[199] Biggar, *Saving the Secular*, 172

[200] Biggar, Nigel, *Good Life,* 135

[201] Biggar, *Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?*, 160

into a narrative world that 'gives us the skills to make something of our own lives.'[202] This is a crucial point to note about Hauerwas's work, and gives an interpretive key to his whole project. Unlike many contemporary theologians, Hauerwas's enormous breadth of reading and interest is communicated with a dry, sometimes brash, usually opinionated wit that always makes for an entertaining read. Often, even if one disagrees with him, the passion and enthusiasm with which he writes can raise the heartbeat. In this sense, Hauerwas is a deeply convincing writer, and as he tells 'the Story' with such colour that raises hope and strikes fear, one begins to realise that Hauerwas's work is actually a very large, erudite novel.

It is a 'novelling' of the world in which his readers live, and of the church with which his readers have some form of relationship, with the purpose of creating a sense of interest and desire. This novel has two locations: the world, which is a place of violence, power and fear, and the church, which is the oasis of salvation. This novel is utterly frightening and enchanting, and if Hauerwas's project is viewed in the same light as Lewis's Narnia or, perhaps more appropriately, Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, then it becomes clear what Hauerwas is asking his readers to do. They are to learn his language, history and geography, and so learn how to be transformed from violence to peace. With this in mind, Hauerwas's apparent rejection of apologetics is more of a slight of hand than it is a rejection of apologetics *per se*. Whilst he certainly resists an apologetics that appeals to reason and logic, as one would find in the work of Niebuhr, Hauerwas's apologetics frames the world and the church in particular ways so as to create a sense of discomfort and intrigue. What is contained within the corpus of Hauerwas's work is an apologetics of desire, which appeals to the world's misgivings, hopes and shame, and through which people are invited to see the world differently; which is surely the very purpose of apologetics in any form.

The reason for highlighting the role of the novel is to demonstrate how Hauerwas creates a world of danger, a violent society on an inhospitable planet, from which God has called those in Jesus to come out. It is the church, alone, that is a place of peace that enables

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[202] Hauerwas, Stanley, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the* Secular, (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 55-56. This is contained within a chapter that discusses the novel as a school of virtue, with a particular focus upon Trollope, 31-57. See also, Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 12-35, for a similar use of *Watership Down*.

lives to be lived without fear of violence. The problem, here, and it is significant, is that this pacifist's novelling of the world and the church employs rather violent means. Hauerwas's rhetoric collects the most difficult, degrading and delusory elements of liberal democratic life, and suggests that this is all the world has to offer. He ignores any sense of justice and development that has taken, and continues to take, place within human society. Further, he appears to ignore the rather important question, raised by Biggar, as to what his idealistic, Christian politics would actually look like under the conditions of sin[203] and, indeed, whether they would look any different to many liberal democracies. The final problem with this approach, and this concern can also be put to Milbank and to Wright, is how can one be sure that this is, in fact, Jesus' story that one is accepting? Each of the three theologians within this section ask us to step into 'God's Story', but each present a different version. Surely the diversity of the Story in its contemporary presentations, let alone in its multifarious historical guises, raises one's concern to question whether it is appropriate to capitalise this 'Story', and make it one's own. That said, perhaps a more open and general story, with greater room for psycho-social difference, would allow the meta-narrative approach to continue to offer liberation to the postmodern self. In order to explore this, the discussion will now turn to the work of NT Wright.

NT Wright: New Creation

Whilst NT Wright certainly adopts a narrative-conflict approach to postmodernism, and has praised Milbank's criticism of the 'sociologisation' of theology, he questions whether those within the Radical Orthodox movement really know 'what to do with the Bible.'[204] Wright's work, then, is an attempt to confront the suspicions of postmodern critique and the arrogance of Political Empire through a meta-narrative that he finds running through the whole of the Bible. Writing from an Evangelical perspective, Wright places the reading of the Bible as central

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[203] Biggar, *Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?*, 159
[204] Gower Street, 'An Interview with N T Wright', 22 December 2004, http://gowerstreet.blogspot.com/2004/12/interview-with-nt-wright-part-5-of-6.html, 16 March 2010

to his understanding of the world and the human person, explaining it to be a 'guide' who helps people tour the landscape in order to 'enjoy it to the full.'[205]

Wright deploys and develops the narrative modelling of Greimas to suggest that all pre-cognitive cultural assumptions, that is, worldviews, are necessarily formed as narrative.[206] This hermeneutic is foundational in understanding Wright's thought of Christianity as an alternative worldview to Modernism and postmodernism that permeates all of his work. Wright argues that the meta-narrative he observes running through Scripture cannot be seen as a Modernist imposition, not only because humans have always been narratively formed, but also because the Story Wright employs is not his own, but Scripture's. The Bible's Story is the key to understand the person and mission of Jesus within the context of Second-Temple Judaism simply because it is already the Story of that community to which Jesus constantly makes reference.[207] Simply put, this meta-narrative is formed in five acts: Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus and Judgement.[208] The driving force throughout this story is that God intends to renew creation and, to this end, Jesus Christ came as fulfilment of Judaism and judgement of paganism. The announcement that emanates from the Story is that the exile is over, and Yahweh is on the throne, not Caesar.[209]

Along with Hauerwas, Wright believes that a Christian worldview can be expressed through the choosing of one's Lord, Caesar or Jesus, and there appears to be no middle ground between the two. How the Christian person can exist within Kingdom and Empire, a hugely important question for the early Christian church, has all of its complexities reduced by Wright to being a matter of a very clear choice: either one is manifestly in the Empire, or simply Christian in the Kingdom.[210] This understanding of being Christian is more fully worked out in

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[205] Wright, Nicholas Tom, *Simply Christian*, (London: SPCK, 2006), 158
[206] Wright, Nicholas Tom, 'The New Testament and the People of God', *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1, (London: SPCK, 1992, 2nd ed. 1993), 69-77, 122-126
[207] Wright, Nicholas Tom, 'Jesus and the Victory of God', *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 2, (London: SPCK, 1996), 199-200
[208] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 141-143
[209] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 413, 405-406, 453
Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 648-651
[210] Wright, Nicholas Tom, and Borg, Marcus, *The Meaning of Jesus*, (London: SPCK, 1999), 218-222
Wright, Nicholas Tom, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, (London: SPCK, 1994), 67-70

Virtue Reborn,[211] in which Wright states that being Christian is not about submitting to the imposition of external rules, but rather being 'formed by this capital-S story.'[212] Virtue, which Wright understands as one's 'true' character,[213] is developed as one follows Jesus and thus learns to play one's part in the true Story.[214] For Wright, faith and discipleship only make sense from within the Story. Personhood, then, is understood to be achieved through a process of crucifying those worldviews that are not Christian, and seeing them 'resurrected' within the framework of the meta-narrative.[215] This approach appears to be problematic in three areas.

Whilst his argument about a narrative basis to worldview is, in part, very helpful, Wright overstates the case by insisting that this is always a *coherent* narrative.[216] 'Worldview' is more accurately a dialogical complex of many narratives, some of which are likely to be contradictory. As has been outlined in chapter two, the construction of a person takes place not simply by positive and negative engagements with forces exterior to oneself, but also through engagement with interior narratives (some of which will be at the subconscious level), all under the influence of one's neurology. It appears that there is, here, a naive institutionalism profoundly influencing Wright's hermeneutic so that the grand narrative he sees throughout the Bible is suspended above other levels of human interaction in the lofty heights of Kingdom verses Empire. The danger is, that in imposing a particular Story as both the goal and the rule of life, the psycho-social complex of the self is gradually reduced to becoming an extension of an institution.

Not only is this problematic regarding anthropology, but it is also ill-founded within the Bible. Whilst such institutionalisation is present within the New Testament texts, it seems that this understanding is, as James Dunn has suggested, 'squeezing out' elements that are central to the exploration of discipleship within the New Testament. In particular, Wright ignores the presence of the dynamic between righteousness and sinfulness within the disciple.[217] Whilst

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[211] Wright, Nicholas Tom, *Virtue Reborn,* (London: SPCK, 2010)

[212] Wright, *Virtue Reborn,* 6, 20, 25, 225

[213] Wright, *Virtue Reborn,* 24-25

[214] Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 225

[215] Wright, *Virtue Reborn*, 233-4, 240

[216] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 44-46, 76-77, 78-79, 132, 135

[217] Mathison, M. M. (Ed.), 'An Evening Conversation on Jesus and Paul with James DG Dunn and NT Wright'*,* 25 October 2004, http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Dunn_Wright_Conversation.pdf, 15, 28 August 2007

Wright is correct to remind the reader that 'ultimate choices are involved' in the forming of worldviews,[218] it seems that his understanding of ultimate choices are a little too tidy and clear-cut to leave room for a people who simultaneously live in both Kingdom and Empire. This hermeneutic thus forms a narrative of Jesus verses the world and Satan; something that is present, yet so frustratingly incomplete. Again Dunn points this out, stating that 'a better example of the kind of politics that Paul operated with is in the household instructions in Colossians,'[219] reminding the reader that the confronting of powers in the New Testament was a much more subtle activity than Wright suggests.

Finally, in discussing postmodern thought, Wright is in danger of caricature, using the hypermodern philosophy of Jean Baudrillard to exemplify what is a diverse movement, as demonstrated in chapter two. In so doing, one should not be surprised that Wright rejects this as, in Baudrillard, one is presented with the end of self and the ubiquity of simulacra. When placed next to Wright's institutional meta-narrative, it would certainly appear that Christianity has no place within the misty vapours of Baudrillard's hyper-dream world. This, though, is not only to edit out the irony and playfulness within Baudrillard's work, but to place other influential postmodern thinkers, such as Lyotard and Bauman, in parentheses. Alongside his over-wieldy meta-narrative construct, Wright's misrepresentation of a movement that is attempting to explore what is perceived to be an emerging culture is unable to engage, in any genuine sense, with wider postmodern thought. For Wright, then, engaging with postmodern culture is simply about rescuing people from a false and temporary childishness by bringing them into the Community of the Truth.[220]

What is unique to Wright, out of the three theologians in this section, is his much more positive stance toward society. Whilst his hope is that people will be rescued into God's Kingdom, it is with the purpose that they will become agents in God's mission. Salvation is not simply a call to leave the world until Jesus returns, but to find one's place within the unfolding

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[218] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 475

[219] Mathison, M. M. (Ed.), 'An Evening Conversation on Jesus and Paul with James DG Dunn and NT Wright', 24 This is in reference to Paul's call for the right treatment of slaves, rather than abolition of slavery, which Dunn suggests demonstrates a 'quiet' politics that questions Wright's clear distinction between church and world.

[220] Cf. Wright, Nicholas Tom, 'The Christian Challenge in the Postmodern World', *Response*, 28:2, 2005, http://www.spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/postmodern.asp, 23 March 2010

Story as an agent of God's kingdom. A consequence of being nurtured in the Story, is that a person will become more involved in seeking to usher in New Creation. For Wright, this necessarily involves work towards non-violent justice with individuals, governments and revolutionary groups, as this is all part of what it means to live under the lordship of the one who will return to 'put everything to rights.'[221] Wright sees no other way for the Christian person to live in the world except by involvement with the political authorities, and unlike Hauerwas, believes that there is a divine ordering to governments and authorities in order to uphold justice.[222] Whilst one's affiliation is to Christ alone, this does not lead to any hint of moving to the edges of society, but rather to being involved in the central and institutional spheres. Similarly to Ford, this affiliation to Christ leads one out of concern for self, to concern for the order of New Creation. Whilst it has been argued that Wright rejects postmodern discourse too quickly, and his view of the person is overly institutionalised, it is his positive stance toward the world that perhaps allows his meta-narrative approach to appear less conflictual than the other two discussed. Whilst conflict between Jesus and Caesar clearly lies at the centre of his approach, it is intended to lead people into being more faithful to the Story in which they are nurtured, in order to more readily anticipate the New Creation by becoming its agents in the world.

Hope for Liberatation?

I hope to have demonstrated that whilst meta-narrative confrontation will always lead to the danger of sectarianism, such a critique is overly simplistic regarding these three theologians. Whilst Milbank presents the most despairing understanding of postmodern discourse, his work is actually one characterised by hope; that is, a hope to reignite the idea of Christendom. This is not the Christendom of the Crusades, but the alternative city of God's peace. Equally, Hauerwas hopes that he can stir the imaginations of Christians who have never considered another way of being church other than, what he perceives to be, the bland liberal

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[221] Wright, *Simply Christian*, 193-194
[222] Wright, *Simply Christian*, 193-194

church that has become coterminous with the liberal state. In doing so he calls Christians to consider again the Anabaptist story that calls people to join the non-violent colony, and witness to the peaceable Kingdom by their life together. Finally, Wright's meta-narrative calls people's allegiance to be solely given to Jesus, and join the church in their hope of sharing in the New Creation. In making such a move, they become agents in this renewal, demonstrating their allegiance through lives oriented around prayerful and practical anticipation of the new order.

Each approach, without apology, one might say, embodies an exclusivity, so that one is either in or out of the Kingdom. This allows a control over the defining and ordering of the Story into which people are saved, giving a higher degree of ontological security than can be offered in postmodern discourse. The question remains, however, whether these communities are actually alternatives to the Modern and postmodern societies which they claim to stand against, or whether they are simply deluded manifestations of contemporary culture. None truly demonstrate what it might mean to be alternative to Modernity or postmodernity, which leaves one wondering whether their hopes are anything other than the desperate rhetoric of disintegrating traditions. With this question in mind, the writers of the next section have attempted an open-narrative approach in their engagement with the notion of a postmodern and Christian self. Whilst they speak of the Christian tradition, they do so within a habitus of critical dialogue with other, non-theological traditions.

Constructing the Resistant Disciple

In this final section of the chapter, the theological methods and concepts are similar to those of Lyotard and Holstein and Gubrium. The theologians being discussed do not accept that postmodern discourse is to be eschewed, but rather accept it as a socio-cultural development. That is not to say that they accept it whole-sale in any of its guises, as with Ward above, but rather wish to interact critically with it from their current position. In this view, Christian theology is not something that is developed in isolation from the developments of the world, but rather, is seen as intrinsically bound with, and dependent upon, wider socio-cultural discourses. I shall attempt to show that, contrary to the big Story approach of Milbank,

Hauerwas and Wright, the writers in this section resist the totalising of closed narratives. Rather, they attempt to suggest how Christian discipleship should look, not only to the authorised Christian tradition, but should also seek to engage with voices which have been marginalised or rejected. In doing so, they seek to demonstrate, not a rejection of meta-narrative *per se*, but the presence of an openness within a broad narrative that is able to be challenged and changed by particular psycho-social discourses. Such a move, whilst wishing to retain narrative as a key analogue, views closed narratives in a similar way to Lyotard, and particularly shares in his concept of paralogy, through which he challenges systems that claim coherence and cultural hermeticism.[223]

This exploration of theological and postmodern self-construction will take place in conversation with the seminal work by David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination.*[224] In this work, Tracy plays with the metaphor of the literary classic, understanding it to mean a text that has such an excess of meaning that it is able to be continually interpreted and so speak truthfully beyond its own setting.[225] He uses the literary classic to cast the image that the New Testament is the classic Christian exploration of the classic Christian event, Jesus Christ. In Tracy's argument, the Christian tradition is that which emanates in and from communities and individuals who attempt to follow and develop their experiences, some interpretations of which have attained a classic status in their own right. By its nature of being a re-interpreting tradition, rather than one that mimics the classic event and earliest writings, it is at all times a tradition that is dialogically situated between the said classics, and other historical and contemporaneous attempts at meaning-making. In order to explore the complexities involved, I shall bring three of Tracy's key concepts into dialogue with other authors who work in a similar, yet not identical way. Tracy's suggestion of the inherent diversity of the origins of the Christian tradition will be brought into dialogue with James Dunn's discussion of the synoptic

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[223] The difference between open and closed narrative approaches to theology is discussed using the terms pure and impure narrative theology in Comstock, Gary L., 'Two Types of Narrative Theology', *Journal of the Academy of Religion*, 25:4, (1987), 687-717

[224] Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, (New York: Crossroads, 1981)

[225] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 99-102

presentations in *Jesus Remembered.*[226] Secondly, the way in which Tracy understands the limit-roles played by authority and normativity will be discussed in reference to David Brown's work on tradition, discipleship and imagination.[227] Finally, Tracy's understanding of the tradition's role in mediating Jesus will be explored with further reference to Brown's work, with a specific focus upon Brown's discussion of the development of the role of saints.

David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination* is an attempt to develop theology within pluralism, rather than set against it.[228] The founding premise of the work is that because God is a 'public' God, then any talk of God, that is, theology, should also be public. Any talk of God that attempts to privatise its discourse is actually 'unworthy' of the reality of a public, all-pervasive God.[229] This, therefore, deliberately sets Tracy's work against the closed narrative movement discussed above. For Tracy, the role of the Christian is not to move away from the world, but to affirm the world, in all of its ambiguities, as a place where God can be encountered, and where Justice might be remembered and developed.[230] Tracy sees this form of engaging, public theology within three over-lapping publics: Society, Church and Academy. In each of these, the role of the theologian is to bring the resources of the Christian tradition to the felt experiences, that it might shape both the questions as well as the answers. In this way, theology can be seen to be generally expressed in terms coherent with the discourse practices of the three publics: philosophically-based, foundational theology within the academy, systematic theology within the church, and practical theology within society.[231]

As Tracy is attempting to engage positively with pluralism, any suggestion that the theologian engages with the Scriptures as the sole Word of God would counter his hopes in setting up a genuine dialogue. Rather than using any exclusivist language, Tracy develops a model of a 'classic' so that Scripture may be presented within its human meaning-making aims, without having to deny a sense of revelation. Tracy explains that whilst the *text* of any classical piece of literature is locked within a particular moment, the interpretation and re-

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[226] Dunn, James D G, Jesus Remembered, *Christianity in the Making, Vol.* 1, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003)
[227] This refers to his two-volume work on this subject: Brown, David, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change,* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth*, (Oxford: OUP, 2000)
[228] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, xi-xii
[229] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 49-51
[230] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 51
[231] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 31

interpretation of that text is able to resource one's own meaning-making, even if situated within a very different geo-temporal context. The classic, according to Tracy, is an expression of existence that has such an 'excess of meaning' that, through interpretation, is able to convey that depth in different settings, and thus bring those times and places into its own tradition.[232] Furthermore, whilst the classic may well be a text, it need not be limited to that category, but may also be seen as an event, an image, a ritual, a symbol or a person. The classic is not so much about the medium, but about naming reality in such a way that the interpreter is drawn into a respectful conversation and cannot but name it as truth.[233]

In this sense, then, the classic is something that needs much more than repetition, as such an act would keep it locked within its own context, and also assume that the classic is able to be fully comprehended.[234] Rather, Tracy recognises any classic as containing its own plurality, by which the interpreter is invited to value its plurality of meanings, by which one becomes a self rooted in multiple locations; in one's own geotemporality, and in the situation of the classic.[235] This critical dialogue between classic and interpreter, Tracy goes on to argue, is a 'fully public function,'[236] which engages one's own contemporary publics with that of the classic. In this sense, as engagement with the classic is public, then this theological conversation becomes a missional action, calling other contemporaries into the dialogue.

In terms of the Christian tradition, Tracy sees *the* classic as being 'the present experience of the Risen Lord who is the crucified Jesus of Nazareth.'[237] In this sense, the Bible is the classic witness to that event, and the remainder of the Christian tradition is an engagement with the classic event and the classic text. Following the logic of this model, some of those later encounters, such as the Nicene Creed and Trinitarian theology, have themselves gained classic status.[238] According to Tracy, the nature of these encounters has about them two journeys. Initially the encounter involves an intensification, whereby there is a participation within something beyond oneself. Sometimes this might be an active participation, that is, a

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[232] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 102
[233] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 108
[234] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 102
[235] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 113-115
[236] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 104-106
[237] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 248
[238] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 258

manifestation of the classic. Alternatively, it might be a non-active participation, and thus the hearing or seeing of a *proclamation* of the classic event.[239] Whether a manifestation or proclamation, the first move is away from one's known situations and into something other. This first move is then followed by a distancing, whereby one is able to reflect with others upon the experience.[240] Within the Christian tradition, then, the classic proclamation and manifestation are seen in the event and person of Jesus Christ,[241] any exposure to which brings about a meaning-making dialogue.[242]

The event and person of Jesus Christ is clearly central to Tracy's understanding of the focus of the Christian tradition and any engagement with that tradition is therefore bound up with the *imitation of Christ*. As the foundation and goal of life is found to be manifest and proclaimed in Jesus Christ, then the imitation of Christ becomes the way of engaging with and mediating the Christian tradition, so that the classic event and person, and the classic texts about this, might continue to live within one's own geo-temporalities. This approach allows for a respect for the past tradition that does not deny its manifestation and proclamation within contemporary public meaning-making. Even, and perhaps especially, where plurality of opinion is held as a virtue, this approach allows the event and person of Jesus Christ to continue to be seen as a classic meaning-making resource, whose depths will be further realised the more one is open to engaging with its excess of meaning.

This approach, however, is not without its faults. Firstly, from start to finish, Tracy's work is unapologetically theologian-centred and, even if this could be understood in something similar to Jeff Astley's *Ordinary Theology,*[243] makes for a distinctly cognitive model. The imitation of Christ is an embodied engagement with the classics of the tradition, and Tracy can only skim the surface of the potential of this dialogue, so focussed is he upon the centrality of

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[239] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 203-208, this follows from Ricoeur's dialectic of intensification
[240] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 199-200
[241] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 218
[242] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 352
[243] Astley, Jeff, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002)

the professional theologian.[244] Secondly, as Gordon Kaufman has commented, more care in the defining of pluralism could have been taken,[245] particularly with reference to how the notion of pluralism is seen to function within the New Testament and emerging Catholic writings. In many ways it is anachronistic to apply the term pluralism to the canon, particularly as the view was toward uniformity and away from a confused plurality. Whilst there appears to have been divergence of opinion from the beginning, those views which are contained in the canon are within particular set boundaries, and so are not really representative of pluralism *per se*. Whilst this view is alluded to in his understanding of the difference between the text and interpretation of the classics, there is more room for development in the relationship between the two. Stating that the latter should hold the former as 'normative'[246] does not go into enough detail as to the complexities inherent within the development of a tradition from a particular set of classic expressions. It is to the questions surrounding how Tracy deals with the New Testament, the tradition as mediating Jesus Christ, and normativity and authority that attention shall now be paid by bringing the work into dialogue with James Dunn and David Brown. Through these dialogues, the larger question regarding the shape of the interaction between the Christian tradition and its personal, local and institutional contexts will be explored, which is critical to the theological and postmodern anthropology emerging from this conversation with Tracy.

Tracy and Dunn: The Beginnings of the Christian Tradition

It may seem strange, perhaps even false, to attempt to orchestrate a dialogue between Tracy and James Dunn. As a New Testament scholar Dunn has not intentionally engaged with the pure-impure narrative theology debate in which Tracy has been so prominent. Rather, his focus has been upon critically developing the work of EP Sanders on Paul and Judaism, as well as engaging with the quests for the historical Jesus. In doing so, however, he has had to think

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[244] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 'The route to authentic selfhood for the Christian... remains the route of a radical discipleship of an *imitatio Christi....*', 435, see also pp. 3-5 for his discussion of the situation of the theologian

[245] Kaufman, Gordon D., 'Conceptualising Diverse Theology', *The Journal of Religion*, 62:4 (1982), 392-401

[246] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 313

through the role and nature of narrative as a tool for understanding the Scriptures. As has been noted above, this has been particularly focussed in his debates with NT Wright, whom he criticises as 'squeezing' diversity out of the New Testament through his highly structured meta-narrative approach to reading the Bible.[247] Whilst continuing to recognise the merit of narrative, like Tracy, Dunn is hesitant to use meta-narrative in a closed and authoritative sense, seeing such an approach as an attempt to reconstruct a 'whole' that never existed as such.[248] Rather, both scholars perceive a greater richness of interpretations of the person and event of Jesus Christ within the New Testament itself, and believe the texts have more to say with their differences intact, than if they are forced into a false unity.[249] This is not diversity for diversity's sake; rather, it is a recognition that what is recorded in the New Testament is not the manifest event and person of Jesus Christ, but rather proclamations of the memories of the first disciples. Therefore, they argue, it is through the impact that the manifestation of Christ had on those individuals and communities, that Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the one who is still manifest through words, sacrament and loving acts of a transformed person and community.[250]

The contemporary hearer of the Christian tradition is not interpreting the original Christ event, as it is a past event that is out of reach. Rather, they are considering various interpretations of the original Christ event and other manifestations. In this sense, the proclamation of Christ is an invitation to join in a very long conversation that has found particular ways of speaking about both the first and continued manifestations.[251] In this view, there is no constant kernel of truth that merely requires translation into unchartered cultural-linguistic contexts. The proclamation of Christ is, rather, an invitation into the long, deep and broad conversation that began with the first witnesses of the event and person of Jesus Christ. Those first interpretations are demonstrative of the impact that Jesus had on the earliest individuals and groups. As such, they are also the classic memories of the Christ event; the starting point of the Christian tradition. They are normative in the sense that they furnish

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[247] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 475-477
[248] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 396, 879. This is the way Tracy appears to understand his position on narrative, as is well demonstrated in Comstock, *Two Types of Narrative Theology*, *688*
[249] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 113, Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 396, 893
[250] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 234; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 131-132
[251] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 236-237

speaking about life through a particular person and particular events which involve most aspects of living and dying. However, they are also limited, written as they were, by people-in-context, with only a partial view of the world. The New Testament cannot provide a specific answer to so many contemporary issues simply because its authors could not have conceived of such questions. This view suggests, then, that the Christian tradition should not be limited by the *language and worldviews* of the first writers, as closed narrativists claim, but only by the *subject* of their fascination and transformation, which is Christ.

When individuals engage with this conversation, they begin to internalise elements of the Christian tradition into their own, personal context. As has been explained above, this is influenced not only by one's geo-temporality, but also by one's personality. This has about it great potential, not only to affirm or reject that which has been, but, within a new setting, marginalised or undiscovered elements of the tradition can (re-)emerge with an unrealised importance. Each personal encounter, whilst sharing various similarities, is unique, as the highlighted elements of the Christian tradition enter into conversation with a particular geo-temporality, under the influence of both, a particular psychology, and the extent to which one's construction is embedded within particular institutions. In this sense, both the Christian tradition and the individuals have something other brought into their horizon, and thus have the potential to be shaped in some way by this conversation. Where dissonance occurs within the encounter, and is not ignored, the individual can either be changed, or can adapt elements of the tradition to cohere within their own meaning-making. For Dunn and Tracy, this is not simply a contemporary, pluralist position, but the way in which the Christian tradition has developed from its very beginning. This, however, leads one to question where the limits of this model lie, as Tracy and Dunn would both argue that it is not simply a *laissez faire* approach that allows people to walk roughshod all over the classic manifestation and proclamations of Jesus Christ. In order to explore these questions I will now turn to engage with the work of David Brown through his two volumes on this subject: *Tradition and Imagination*[252] and *Discipleship and Imagination*.[253]

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[252] Brown, David, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change,* (Oxford: OUP, 1999)
[253] Brown, David, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth*, (Oxford: OUP, 2000)

Tracy and Brown: The Christian Tradition Today

David Brown is particularly helpful in this engagement with Tracy, placing himself between the Yale-Chicago debate, critical of, and grateful for, both Schools.[254] Whilst he agrees with Tracy that the closed narrative approach is incorrect in believing that the Christian Scriptures have the capacity to shape lives without any dialogue with their received context, he is concerned that Tracy stands too far in the other direction, using too external a language in engaging with the Christian tradition.[255] Rather, in his own work, Brown attempts to demonstrate that the revelation of God should be seen in both Scripture and tradition, the latter not being seen as secondary to the former.[256] In so suggesting, Brown engages with various developments within the tradition, such as interpretations of heaven and of Job, so as to clarify the key reasons for, and connotations of, such a view. Seeing revelation as present within the development of tradition, Brown recognises the need to engage critically with what, or who, are appropriate sources of normativity and authority. These two issues are central to any engagement with the question of this thesis: whilst it is fair, even obvious, to talk of a shaping of the Christian tradition within the personal sphere, when that expression is recognised as being embodied within a local or institutional context, more complex questions arise. It is over these questions that the value of a dialogue between Brown and Tracy can be seen, as Brown offers a more comprehensive exploration of theological and postmodern anthropology.

Brown understands the development of the Christian tradition to have moved in positive and negative directions within the personal, local and institutional spheres of psycho-social existence. As he follows through some developments of the Christian tradition, he concludes his two works by suggesting a set of criteria for judging the past and continued developments, which are not based upon how closely the developments remain to the

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[254] Gary Comstock's differentiation between the closed narrative approach (associated with Yale, and in this thesis demonstrated by Milbank, Hauerwas and Wright) and the open narrative approach (associated with Chicago and David Tracy in particular). Comstock, Gary L., 'Two Types of narrative Theology', *Journal of the Academy of Religion*, 25:4, (1987), 687-717, 688

[255] Brown, David, *Tradition and Imagination,* 53, 58

[256] Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 1

supposed authorial intention of the texts.[257] Rather, he is quite comfortable with the notion that the Christian tradition can, and indeed should, speak back and correct the Bible, limited as it is, to its own geotemporality.[258] In this sense, inherited tradition is certainly received as revelatory, but also as contextually-bound. There is then a requirement, not simply to mimic, and so repeat the mistakes of the past, but to risk measuring the received tradition within one's own context. It is only through this dynamic, claims Brown, that any tradition may develop and continue to give life.[259]

Both Tracy and Brown develop criteria that assess the claims of the inherited Christian tradition. Tracy uses a three-fold method of historical-critical, literary-critical and social scientific tools as an appropriate way of engagement,[260] although insisting that the only starting point for an expression of the Christian tradition is that of an experience of Christ.[261] In this sense, Tracy is not as far outside of the Christian tradition as Brown suggests, and indeed shares Brown's underlying assumption that, in order to understand the Scriptures, one must engage them with both a faith in Christ as well as with resources and skills that lie outside of the paradigms contained within the Bible. Not to do so would be to limit one's understanding of these classics, as well as their ability to be a resource in the contemporary situation.

Tracy's criteria, however, are not really specific enough to help assess the normativity of a received element of the tradition. Brown goes into much more detail, with nine criteria at work. He begins, along with Tracy, in outlining the importance of historical and empirical (or social scientific) investigations in being able to further understand the original text, as well appropriate its meaning-making for one's own context. Whilst Brown does not explain literary methods in isolation, they are clearly relied upon within all of his criteria as a way of mapping the conversation that occurs between oneself and the inherited tradition. Brown continues by suggesting that, in engaging with the received tradition, one should judge the clarity of the concepts employed. For example, Brown suggests that the majority-Scripture view that Christ exists in heaven, and all saints lie sleeping, awaiting resurrection, is incompatible with a

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[257] Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 226
[258] Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 111
[259] Brown, *Tradition and Imagination,* 106-110, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 389
[260] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 238-241
[261] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 320

contemporary, social view of personhood. Instead, he suggests the minority-Scripture view should be employed in response to this, so that all saints are said to exist in heaven immediately after death.[262] Whether one agrees with the specific example or not, the criterion stands as an approach which continues to engage with the Bible over matters of truth, but in such a way that questions its presuppositions. Brown further uses this to-and-fro approach to enable the questioning for the morality of the texts of the tradition, so that ancient views of women and children, for example, need not be continued into present day.[263]

The following two criteria focus upon the original revelation of God in Christ, and how that tradition 'builds on earlier versions of itself.'[264] The criteria, then, are based on continuity and Christology. This is an important corrective to Brown's previous two criteria, stating that any imaginative corrective, for it to be capable of discerning revelation, must remain on a trajectory that begins with the proclamations of the New Testament. It is not that the New Testament claims about Christ set clearly determined boundaries of what one may or may not say, but that the light of the Christ revealed shapes all future proclamations.[265] This, then, functions as a critical assessment of the imaginative engagement itself, as well as the efficacy of the analogues constructed as a result. Both of these elements of engagement with the Christian tradition are heavily dependent upon context, and may have limited value outside of their own geo-temporalities. Others, however, may have a greater and more universal appeal, becoming classical in their own right. In developing these two criteria, Brown is stating that imagination, even if grounded in a trajectory of the Christian tradition, is not enough on its own; the analogical imagination must be shaped by the past tradition as well as speaking into one's contemporary situation.

This past-present engagement is required to speak beyond one's own self and into the public realms of the Academy, Church or Society, where it will be judged.[266] On this point, Brown develops his final criterion, that of the Ecclesial. This is less interested in official pronouncements, than it is in the community of the church, sharing and judging one another's

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[262] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 395-396
[263] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 396-398
[264] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 398
[265] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 398-402
[266] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 402-404

engagements with the tradition. Brown notes that, by its nature, this creates conflict, as it always has done, but in doing so, this conflict is the engine by which the church may continue to develop in its pursuit of true belief.[267] This conflict, however, is present within authoritative, sometimes authoritarian, structures which at least function as conversation partners. In this context, holding lightly to one's interpretation is necessary as it is weighed by those in authority, whether that be a congregational understanding of the local body, or a more Catholic view involving Bishops and synods.[268] If it is modified, or even rejected, the individuals involved can continue to remain faithful to the vision of making meaning in conversation with others, either by submitting to the institutional view, or by continuing to attempt to reform the group to which they belong. This submission to the wider community, however understood, is important in preventing this meaning-making from becoming insular, and operative only on a personal or local level, which is what is in danger of occurring when individuals move to gather together with like-minded people to form 'alternative' expressions of the tradition. It is also important if the institutional is to develop. This most complex level of human interaction, carrying historical and pastoral burdens to sustain a broad community, is necessarily slow to be shaped. If it is to develop, as all institutions must, then it will only be through interaction with the individual and local embodiments of the tradition, reminding the bearers of authority that their office is not only to hold the tradition to its normative past, but also seek its movement in the present and toward the future. Whilst those in authority have a central role in embodying the tradition as it has been understood, they do have the ability to make space for individuals to more deliberately engage the classics of the Christian tradition within a particular context.

Constructing the Resistant Self: Simply Imitating Christ?

In his conclusion, David Tracy suggests that the Christian tradition is the present, living reality of the Christ proclaimed in the New Testament.[269] In this sense, individuals, as well as local and institutional levels of church are involved in reinterpreting what it means for them in

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[267] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 317, 404-405
[268] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 334
[269] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 422

their own context to imitate Christ.[270] For Tracy, this is a critical engagement between the people and groups-in-context, with the classic texts of the tradition. Whilst at times this might merely take the form of translation from a First to Twenty-first Century setting, the position Tracy is putting forward has a greater depth, asking questions of the first interpreters of the tradition from one's own context with different, and in some ways, deeper insight. Tracy's focus upon the imitation of Christ appears to be a potentially helpful metaphor in which to locate a discussion of theological and postmodern anthropology, as it is able to engage with the view of the person and society that has been developed by Lyotard: a locus of communicative interaction that retains the capacity to continue to act with, rather than simply be acted upon by, the communicative world in which one is immersed.

However, it should be stated that Tracy and Brown's proposals are acutely limited to the world of the academic theologian. The imitation of Christ is an embodiment of the manifest and proclaimed Christ; in many ways it is the most personal and straight-forward way of speaking theologically of personhood. Yet Tracy's description lacks any engagement with the embodiment of discipleship in the church and world. This is a major flaw in a work exploring Christian discipleship within pluralism, particularly with a conclusion that is so heavily dependent on 'the harsh, demanding reality of radical agapic love.'[271] The reason I believe this to be such an issue is that discipleship requires more than the engagement of the mind, but of the whole self, which suggests there are more appropriate ways of speaking of this engagement. Further, this over-emphasis on text leads Tracy to assume that it is only by working to engage with the texts of the Christian tradition in their totality that one can avoid a 'simple pluralism.'[272] Even if the whole of the Christian tradition could be known, which is doubtful, what is more troubling about this view is that it graces academic theologians with more power than those who do not have access to such texts. Although they have an important role, a Lyotardian criticism of totalising authorities insists that it is not the academically-trained who are the sole mediators of the Christian tradition. Rather, the Christian tradition, if it is understood as the continual to-and-fro between the classic texts and presenting experiences of

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[270] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 435
[271] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 435
[272] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 313

Christ, world and self, is, as David Brown concludes, the possession of all disciples.[273] Mediation of the tradition, then, whilst being represented in texts, takes place primarily through individual, local and institutional embodiments of the imitation of Christ.

This personal understanding of mediation, then, refuses to accept that tradition is simply an inheritance of all that has gone before, but is rather a continuous interaction of a particular set of expressions of the Christian tradition with oneself-in-context.[274] This is the passing on of a pattern, the imitation of Christ, where contemporary and past embodiments learn from and critique one another, with the aim of engaging with the mediation of Christ in the present age. This imitation, however, is not envisaged by Brown as simple mimicry, either of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, or of his story, but as something more complex.[275]

The Christian tradition could also be termed the communion of the saints: a community of those whose lives, whether effectively or not, attempted to be lived in the pattern of Christ.[276] The very first, and classic, embodiments are seen in the New Testament, where, for example, Paul's Jesus and Luke's Jesus, are communicated through their writings. These works have been appropriated and interpreted as people continued to hear of and experience this Christ, sometimes creating classical discipleship (such as Francis of Assisi), or classical heresies (such as Arius), both of which survive through the continued communion of the tradition. Through all of these examples, Christ is proclaimed and made manifest (at least, in part), not through a simple re-telling of the story of Christ, nor even the copying of his miracles and lifestyle, but rather an imaginative discovery of what it might mean to follow after the pattern of Christ within a very different, yet equally flawed, situation.[277] Whilst text remains an important medium of representing the persons involved, and care must be taken to understand them in their literary and historical contexts, it is as people seeking meaning in Christ that one is able to engage with them. In this sense, Brown rightly emphasises the role of the 'saints' in mediating the imitation of Christ into familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

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[273] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 406
[274] Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 30-31
[275] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 62-63
[276] Although as a definition it raises serious issues over the criteria of inclusion in, and exclusion from the communion.
[277] Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination*, 64, 94-97

Brown explores the role that saints play, both in his *Discipleship and Imagination*, as well as in *Through the Eyes of the Saints,*[278] which is based on a number of public lectures he gave as Canon Theologian at Durham Cathedral. Because the saints embody the Christian call to holiness in different settings, Brown sees their primary role as bridging the enormous differences between First Century Palestine and one's own geo-temporality. He rightly states that it is not enough for a church to call people to follow Christ, when his own ancient, male, unmarried existence is so far removed from the experience of many. [279] Not only do the saints have the potential to close the cultural and temporal distances, they can also close the metaphysical distance between the perfect human of Christ and oneself, allowing an exploration of the human condition through the imperfections of others.[280] Furthermore, that these are embodied and lived examples prevents an exploration of discipleship from falling into the same academic-focus that Tracy adopts. It is not that academic rigour has no role, or even one of the central roles, but it is not, nor cannot, be the sum and total of one's engagement.

Finally, this argument for the saints is deliberately built in contradistinction to the work of NT Wright.[281] Wright's emphasis on an overbearing meta-narrative has already been mentioned above, but one of the outworkings of his Big Story is an insistence upon the dead being asleep and awaiting the Final Day, so that there cannot be any Saints in the way presented by Brown. For Wright, a live, communion of saints contradicts the egalitarian nature of the gospel message where all are equal in Christ, and anything else detracts from the centrality of Christ as Lord. Brown, however, suggests that Wright is overstating the point, allowing his focus on resurrection to miss the reality of incarnation. He argues that whilst Jesus was alive as a truly incarnate being, he depended on others for his survival and for aiding him to transmit his message. This has also been the case throughout the Christian tradition, whereby the proclamation of Christ, and the celebration of his manifestation, is reliant upon those heeding and embodying the call of the gospel. Contrary to Wright, then, rather than diminishing

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[278] Brown, David, *Through the Eyes of the Saints: A Pilgrimage through History*, (London: Continuum, 2005)
[279] Brown, *Through the Eyes of the Saints*, 7
[280] Brown, *Through the Eyes of the Saints,* 8-9; Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination,* 62-97
[281] Brown, *Through the eyes of the Saints*, 13-19

the centrality of Christ as Lord, Brown argues that the saints in glory reveal him as true, both as object of their lives, and as that which sustains them in eternity. [282]

The saints, for Brown, are the whole communion of the faithful dead, who not only speak to the present from their own past contexts, but also challenge and encourage from eternity. In his writings, he unapologetically speaks of 'saints' from various denominational lists, and of those who do not belong to any. It may prove helpful, however, to attempt to push this engagement further, both in terms of the helpfulness of historical figures, and in terms of the place of the dead in God's eternity. In attempting to ask critical questions of one's existence, as has already been stated above at some length, the self is shaped by one's geo-temporality and personality. As such, those of no faith or other faiths are important in one's meaning-making, whether that is deliberate or not. For example, Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, both despite and because of their attacks upon Christianity, have had an enormously positive influence upon how the church understands itself and its faith. Their thought has shaped the church in all kinds of ways and, whilst it is a misuse of the term to name them as saints in any traditional sense, they are certainly significant humans for whom the church may be thankful. Perhaps, then, as an alternative to 'saint', it may be better to employ Tracy's terminology, and speak of classics, not simply as texts, but as people who are so full of expressions of truth that they continue to speak beyond their own time and place. As well as biography, these people have left artefacts as wide-ranging as writing, music, political policy and scientific theory, so that the journey of discipleship cannot but be shaped by them, even if unintentionally. [283]

What emerges from this conversation between Tracy, Dunn and Brown appears to be a form of theological anthropology that is attempting to continue to be intentionally Christian, whilst also taking account of Lyotard's criticism of totalising meta-narratives. This approach rejects the notion that there is a coherent meta-narrative to be found within the Bible, and that such a notion is an imposition upon the text that reduces the complexity and beauty of the manifestations that are being described. Further, such an approach forces the Bible to move

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[282] Brown, *Through the Eyes of the Saints,* 11-19

[283] For example, one thinks of the enormous legacy left by Einstein, even though the vast majority of individuals and groups may be unaware of the specifics of his theories. Alternatively, one may also consider the classical expressions of peaceful humanitarianism from Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Aung San Suu Kyi.

beyond its status as text, to become a meta-narrative that transcends historical development. Placing this enormity of weight upon the Bible flattens it into two dimensions, so that the reader can only enter into its own world where the implications of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ had only been partially realised. The approach suggested by the above conversation, however, is an attempt to see the Bible in three-dimensions, so that the revelation of which it speaks may be encountered as a living tradition throughout history and in the present.

Finding a Place to Stand

The above conversations have presented four understandings of theological engagement with postmodern anthropology. I have attempted to show how their view of culture has been brought to bear upon their theology (and vice versa), and how that has shaped their understanding of self-construction. It seems, at the other end of these discussions, that all that is left is the seeming impossibility of deciding where to stand. The last discussion appeared to present a middle way that was an attempt to be both theological and postmodern, although firmly situated within academic dialogue. Whilst the notion of standing with the classics of humanity goes so far to remedy this, there is still an uncertainty about identity. Is there an identity that is being offered within this approach, and if so, is it anything more than one of a Twentieth Century liberal?

The 'liberated self' certainly offers a great deal more clarity, in which identity is defined by a meta-narrative that stands in opposition to other meta-narratives, and over and above the postmodern. The self is offered a sense of ontological security, a clarity of vision for itself and the world, and a sense of hope. The criticism that has not been suitably dealt with, however, is whether Christianity is actually an alternative to Modernism or postmodernism. This approach is defined as much by its rhetoric as it is by its content, which provides enough concern to ask whether this is simply a flight from reality. More so, however, is the concern that there are as many versions of the Story into which one is giving one's life, as there are protagonists of this approach, suggesting that the security on offer is not all that it seems.

David Ford offers a non-totalising way of being through his development of the face and facing. These simple and evocative metaphors allow a clear definition of the Christian self as one who is oriented toward Jesus Christ and the world. However, the centrifugalism inherent to this model risks losing the self, not necessarily through moral lifestyle or heroic action, but through the deprecation of the self in the service of the other. Furthermore, this devaluing of one's self is a challenge to the notion of the equality of personhood that is inherent to Ford's thesis. More dangerous than this, at least as I have argued, is Ward's liquid self. Whilst this represents a move to engage in a positive way with postmodern culture and site the church within a new form of society, it appears to come at too high a cost. Such primacy is bestowed upon cultural relevance that human facing and the language of the Christian tradition are in danger of being lost as they are translated into a postmodern economic and technological network society. More than that, it is his hope that a new form of church and Christian discipleship is formed according to, what he wrongly assumes to be, neutral socio-cultural developments.

The reality may not be as bleak as it appears. Each of these approaches represents an attempt at answering theoretically whether, in any way, personhood can be both theological and postmodern. In different ways, three of the four approaches believe that it can be. In order to investigate the possibility of a coherent anthropology emerging from a theological and postmodern dialogue, the theoretical approaches will be brought into conversation with themes that have emerged from the practical stream of this research. Before outlining the findings of the qualitative research and constructing the conversation, I will first explain in greater detail the method employed.

Chapter Four
Method

This thesis has its origins in both a sense of dissatisfaction and in a general question. The dissatisfaction is that which has already been outlined, regarding the sycophantic, superficial or scathing treatment often given to the practices or popular writings that are grouped together as 'Fresh Expressions', 'Emerging Church' or 'postmodern church'. Although unable to be accurately expressed until now, I have, for some time, felt that the approaches outlined in chapter one failed to see the value in what was taking place within such movements, instead presenting an overly-defensive move to espouse a particular view of church and society. Rather, the more established and reflective groups appear to represent a practical approach to asking the primary question that is also at the root of this work: can theological and postmodern discourses occupy the same space. A study, then, that takes account of both practical explorations and academic literature has the potential to shed more light upon this critical question.

Having explained the origin and development of the thesis in chapter one, this chapter outlines the detail of the final method employed in this doctoral research project. This allowed a considered and careful approach to the question; able to dissect the intricacies of the question before bringing these elements into critical dialogue. The method then, far from simply lifting a pastoral cycle out of a textbook, required careful thought if the richness of the qualitative and literary resources was to be realised. As outlined in the first chapter, some of this thought was planned and some emerged as a response to the development of the research.

Underlying the method is the belief that general and abstract questions are most appropriately explored by focussing upon their specific manifestations which can be observed and discussed in theoretical and practical discourses. Such a method contains two moves through three levels of intensification. The first focuses a general question (primary level) within one of its particular manifestations (secondary level) and attends to what is being said about this manifestation within practical and theoretical discourse (tertiary level). The second

move organises that which emerges from the tertiary level into a dialogue that explores the secondary level manifestation. The outcome of this is then able to offer a partial answer to the primary level question. By attending to a number of secondary level manifestations, the primary level is able to be explored in both theory and practise.

In the case of this project, the primary level question is the possibility of postmodern and theological dialogue. Rather than simply discussing this in a general sense, a major habitus in which theoreticians and practitioners explore this issue is used to focus the primary level question, thus creating a secondary level of the possibility of postmodern and theological anthropology. In order to fully explore this question, a tertiary level is created by engaging with practical and academic data that will resource the secondary level question. The merits and limits revealed within the secondary-level manifestation then offer a partial answer to the primary level question. The remainder of this chapter will outline in greater detail the method involved in gathering and analysing the literature and the groups at the tertiary level, and how the emerging data was organised to construct the secondary level dialogue.

Gathering Data and Resources

Careful selection was required in order to gather together appropriate academic resources and qualitative data that would make for a rich dialogue. Theological and postmodern literature was surveyed in order to be sure of who appeared to be the major protagonists within this dialogue. The results of this have been presented in chapters two and three, demonstrating five approaches to postmodern discourse, and four theological responses and developments. Equally, care also needed to be taken over the selection of the method of acquiring data about the thought and practise of churches who believed they were engaging in postmodern culture. As the findings were to become a part of the secondary-level dialogue, it was most appropriate to use a qualitative research method that would employ interviews, so that there would be a greater depth to the exploration of the issues. This way, a vocabulary would emerge from an analysis of the transcripts that could engage with the ideas from the literature survey.

Given the number of groups operating under banners such as 'Fresh Expressions', many of whom are quite recently formed, I felt it essential to select participants who appeared to be well-established in terms of years and also in influence. This would allow the data taken from the analysis and into dialogue to be seen as having a representative quality. The participants were selected not only because of the longevity of their groups, but also because of the level of influence they have through their books, blogs, committee involvements and conference speaking. In addition to a sense of representation, it is fair to assume that having such a wide national and international audience in various settings would give the potential participants the opportunity for reflection upon the practice of the groups they lead. It is also for these reasons that only the leaders were invited to participate, rather than conducting a congregational study. Out of the nine leaders who were identified as being part of well-established and respected groups, and with their own portfolio of communication on the subject, four responded positively to be involved in this project.

The third selection to be made was the kind of qualitative method that would be used to gather the data from the participants. The most appropriate appeared to be to interview the participants, on two separate occasions, about what they thought about the aims of their communities and, in the second interview, what they understood to be the practises of the communities. The interviews were structured around a set of questions that the participants had been given before the meeting, and were to be about an hour in length. It was explained that their answers may take the interview away from the specific questions, but if this were to be the case, the further questions would stay within the general remit of the research project (which had also been made clear). By attempting to explore spoken and operative theology in separate interviews it was hoped that any disparity between the two would be observable. Also, placing a gap of at least three months between each interview[284] would minimise biasing the findings by decreasing the potential of the participants from repeating similar answers to each set of questions. If similarities were to arise, then it would likely represent a genuine similarity between spoken and operative theology.

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[284] The difficulty of coordinating timetables meant the actual space between interviews was about twelve months.

Following the work on interviews carried out by Holstein and Gubrium, who see them as occasions for meaning-making, it was hoped that the structured interactions would not bias the participants to answer questions in a particular way, but provide an opportunity for reflection on their beliefs and practices.[285] What was shared and recorded within the interviews, then, is not understood to be a direct access to the thoughts of the participants and events of the communities but, as David Silverman states, 'indirect 'representations' of experience.'[286] In this sense, the interviews gave the participants the opportunity to present and further develop their understanding of what it means to see personhood as being dialogically held between theological and cultural discourses, specifically postmodern discourses. Further, with two separate interviews, separated by approximately twelve months, the participants were given time to develop their own thinking about the subject matter.

The two sets of questions focussed upon the aims and the practises of the groups. The first interview gave the participants the opportunity to present their understanding of Christian faith, postmodern culture, and how the two may, or may not, be related. It was important, also, to attend to how these two discourses were thought to be related to the mission in which the leaders understood the groups to be involved. This grounded the participants' thinking about, and answers to, the questions within the groups they lead. The second interview directly questioned the practises of the groups, with particular attention to how the leaders understand what it means to belong.

I will turn, in a moment, to explain the data from the analysis of the transcripts and how that is able to bring to the secondary level dialogue of theological and postmodern anthropology. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that, at the very least, the themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts were rich and substantive enough to challenge my own preconceptions regarding the practise of these groups, and so how the later dialogue is organised. If the answers given by the participants have been properly attended to, then the discussion within this thesis has the potential to partially represent all churches and

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[285] Holstein, James, and Gubrium, Jaber A., *The Active Interview*, Qualitative Research Methods Series 37, (Thousand Oaks, CA., London, New Delhi: Sage, 1995), 18
[286] Silverman, David, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, Third Edition, (London, Thousand Oaks, CA., New Delhi: Sage, 1993, 2006), 117

groups who are attempting to attend to theological and cultural dialogue. It is important, now, to explain how the transcripts of these interviews were analysed and brought into the secondary level dialogue.

Analysis

Unbiased research is impossible, and so from the very beginning of this research project I attempted to name and understand the presuppositions with which I was entering into this work. This is in no way thought, either to exorcise prejudice, or be ultimate in its revelations, but simply give a helpful level of awareness of the thinking I had developed regarding the subject matter. Understood in this way, I was able to test these thoughts as a rather basic form of an hypothesis within the data, whilst also reading the transcripts for other themes that may contradict, or be completely unrelated to, these initial thoughts. In concrete terms, from my own experience of the writing and conferences of these groups, I suspected that the meta-narrative work of NT Wright would feature heavily within the self-understanding of the groups. However, within the description of practice, I expected to find a greater accommodation of postmodern discourse than one reads within Wright's work, having instead a greater similarity to the writings of James Dunn. The background to, and development of, these ideas are outlined in chapter one.

Having named this presupposition, however, it was important to allow the transcripts to speak for themselves, as much as is possible. For this reason, grounded theory was appropriated as the method of qualitative analysis to engage with the transcripts. At first sight this may seem a strange and contradictory choice, as grounded theory practitioners usually advise against pre-hypothesising. However, that which has been described above is not an hypothesis in a strict sense, but rather the result of an attempted honest appraisal of my own thinking going into the qualitative stage of research. To be able to describe these presuppositions, and even search for evidence of their presence within the data, will always be present at the beginning of any grounded theory project, as Kathy Charmaz and David

Silverman have both made clear.[287] Quite the contrary to causing undue bias, the very reason for this appraisal is to attempt to guard against, as much as is possible, the imposition of personal assumption upon the transcripts.

Each of the eight interviews was recorded, and then transcribed. The transcripts[288] were then subject to three levels of coding. The first level of coding highlighted key phrases and words that answered the question being explored, or made a statement about personhood with respect to either theological or postmodern discourse. This was confined to attending to, and using only, the participants's own words. The intention of the second level of coding was to observe similarities between the highlighted statements, and investigate whether they could appropriately be categorised. It is argued in the following chapter that the highlighted phrases can be coded into three categories, as they all appear to focus on either 'truth', 'sacramental cosmos' or 'belonging as participation'. The transcripts were then analysed once more, through this tri-concept framework, both to ensure suitability of fit, and also to enrich the categories. Being satisfied with this stage, the third level of coding was to analyse these categories into major themes. This is, as Silverman eloquently states, to move beyond the superficial 'gaze of the tourist,'[289] and engage in analysis that moves beyond the specific data without losing any sense of fit with its origin. This analysis took the form of asking what the categories appeared to reveal about the understanding of theological and postmodern personhood spoken of by the participants. The two themes that emerged, 'participation' and 'critical correlation', were checked for a sense of fit with the transcripts, before entering into engagement with the wider literature, the organising method of which is explained below.

Secondary-level Dialogue

At this point, two parallel, yet distinct studies existed: a literature survey and a piece of grounded theory analysis. The next stage, moving from the tertiary-level gathering to the secondary-level dialogue, was not simple. This is because, whilst both the transcripts and

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[287] Charmaz, Kathy, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis,* (London, Thousand Oaks, CA, New Delhi: Sage), 17, 68
Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 295
[288] The transcripts can be found in appendices A-D
[289] Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 383

literature provided texts in which there is engagement with the broad research question and its manifestation in anthropology, the texts themselves are of a 'different order'. This is not to make a value judgement, but to understand that whilst there are certainly important engagements within the transcripts, there is always, as Silverman has pointed out, a greater degree of ambivalence within an interview than there is in an article or book.[290] Furthermore, the texts are not directly answering the same questions, and so cannot be said to be directly comparable. To bring transcript and textbook into direct dialogue, then, would either be naive, or to display a complete ignorance regarding the difference between the two sets of texts. An appropriate method was needed in order to take account of these differences.

This was achieved, firstly, by setting out the four proposals that emerged from the literature survey and judging which approach appeared to share the most in common with the analysis of the qualitative research. This understanding of theological and postmodern anthropology was then developed through its engagement with the themes that emerged from the qualitative phase. In order to do this without confusing the two types of literary and qualitative resources, the two main themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis were employed to organise the dialogue that would develop the proposal. Focussing the discussion around the vocabulary that arose from the qualitative analysis allowed the findings to engage with, and shape, the dialogue concerning theological and postmodern anthropology. Furthermore, the resulting dialogue, its language and conclusions, can be seen to have genuinely emerged from, and continually been informed by, both the literature and qualitative surveys. The interactions and conclusions of this dialogue are fully explained in chapter six.

The final turn was to move from the secondary level dialogue to the primary level research question, which asks whether theological and postmodern discourses are able to occupy the same space. It is vital to recognise that, no matter how convincing the conclusion to the secondary-level dialogue, it could only inform the consideration of the broader question. The secondary level dialogue functions as an example of one of the ways the primary-level question can be explored, and so much further study is required before one may venture a response of a suitably verified and adequate nature. However, if what is offered within this

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[290] Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 145, citing W F Whyte, 'Interviewing in Field Research,' in R Burgess, *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual, (*London: Allen and Urwin, 1980), 117

thesis is able to offer a substantial enough answer, then it can be said that the primary question has been attended to, and that further research that operates within this method has the potential to cast more light upon the primary issue. The remainder of this thesis is concerned with attempting to demonstrate this, and the following chapter explains the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts.

Chapter Five
Analysis

The intention of this chapter is to explain the findings of the analysis carried out on the eight interview transcripts. This will begin with a synopsis of what I have observed in the language used by each individual participant, explaining what I believe is communicated about their view of the group with which they are involved. This will then be followed by a consideration of the presuppositions with which I entered this research, as have been outlined above, asking questions of their efficacy as a descriptor of the qualitative research. I will then consider in greater detail, three themes that I have observed to be common to the discourse of all four of the leaders, asking what that says about the groups involved. I shall argue that these three themes are all rooted in an attempt to model a form of personhood that is both theological and postmodern.

Synopsis of individual participants

Participant A is an ordained Priest responsible for two churches, describing them as public worship services that 'offer a sense of rootedness in a rootless world.'[291] One of the churches, whilst meeting in an ancient, church building, has a very relaxed approach to worship, whereas the other meets in a Cathedral, and is much more formal. She believes that this sense of being rooted is demonstrated not only through relational commitments between the people involved,[292] but also through 'the concepts of liturgy, and movement, and ritual, and candles, and ancient buildings.'[293] In this sense, she appears to communicate that both the worship services and the planning meetings provide the people involved with an opportunity to engage creatively with the Christian tradition, through which she hopes they might 'meet Christ'[294] and become more aware of their rootedness in God. In this sense, the Christian tradition is not only an engagement with the Bible, the creeds, sacraments and worship, but

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[291] Appendix A, 147
[292] Appendix A, 162-163
[293] Appendix A, 147
[294] Appendix A, 147

also an understanding of belonging to an ancient community of saints who are 'rooting for us.'[295] This engagement is not to lead people away from the world and into an alternate existence to contemporary society, but rather to be a community in the world, in which one can ask, 'How do you balance a life which is fundamentally unbalanced by forces beyond your control?'[296] For Participant A, the answer to this question appears to lie in the knowledge of being rooted in God, which is affected and experienced in worship as well as in relational community.

Participant B, an accredited Baptist Minister, describes the church he leads as a 'community of the Kingdom,'[297] which appears to mean that this is a gathered community, made distinctive, but not separate, from contemporary society, by its ethical intention to emulate the character, or virtues, of Jesus.[298] In saying this, however, he is quick to state that the church is 'very fuzzy-edged,' and as such they 'struggle to define who the believers are.'[299] This is further evidenced by the descriptions he provides of the lifestyles of some of the members, including a Bible study group who 'were smoking joints while we were praying there,'[300] and elders who use Class A drugs.[301] An overarching theme that emerges in the transcripts is the belief that God is active in the whole world, including culture, and so Participant B sees his role as helping people explore that directly within their own contexts.[302] In order for church to be effective, then, he argues that it must take place locally and, as far as is possible, be led by local people,[303] so that it can take account of the perspectivist nature of truth which he explains as so important.[304] There are, however, two external, non-local influences to which he regularly appeals. First, whilst accepting that the Bible is read and interpreted in a specific context, it is also held as that which reveals the story of God's dealings

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[295] Appendix A, 164, also 159-161
[296] Appendix A, 163
[297] Appendix B, 166
[298] Appendix B, 166
[299] Appendix B, 166
[300] Appendix B, 177
[301] Appendix B, 177, 188
[302] Appendix B, 168-190
[303] Appendix B, 174-185
[304] Appendix B, 173

with humanity and the cosmos, and as such furnishes people's stories with hope and truth.[305] The second is Participant B's commitment to his Anabaptist tradition, which particularly leads him to challenge people within the church on their views of sacraments and ecclesiology, encouraging a less clericalised view.[306] This participant understands the church he leads as a local network of people who have made a three-way commitment to God, one another, and to being 'Christ to the contexts,'[307] which is embodied in their individual characters, as well as in the flow between 'gathering' and 'scattering' as a church.[308]

Participant C is also an accredited Baptist Minister, and is one of the founders and current leaders of a new 'monastic' community that began in 1994, although its roots go back to the late 1970's. Participant C reports that he is disturbed by, what he perceives to be, a loss of the Judeo-Christian meta-narrative within England, and fears that without a common story, society becomes impossible.[309] In this sense, he describes Western culture as being in exile.[310] This leads him to define the community he leads as a group who are grounded in God's Story, and exist to live in that Story within public life through their shared rule of 'availability' and 'vulnerability.'[311] In doing so, not only do they demonstrate an alternative community within postmodern society, but also, and perhaps in his view more importantly, Participant C believes they reflect 'the nature of God who is Trinity.'[312] By their existence, and in their engagement with society, they attempt to promote these values, not so that people and the world in which they live would be dismantled, but rather, that those smaller stories would find their place within the big Story, and so be filled with 'meaning and truth and light.'[313] Further, he does not primarily see the community he leads as a vision of converting people to the Christian Religion, or his particular understanding thereof.[314] Rather, this is an attempt to tell a story that is intended to provide society with a view of itself and its future that is more hopeful than the

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[305] Appendix B, 174
[306] Appendix B, 176-179, 183-194
[307] Appendix B, 186
[308] Appendix B, 175
[309] Appendix C, 195-196
[310] Appendix C, 196-198, 200, 204-205, 207, 215-216
[311] Appendix C, 199-201, 214, 217-218
[312] Appendix C, 194
[313] Appendix C, 194, 202, 216-217
[314] Appendix C, 200, 217

individualisation, privatisation and sectarianism that he sees as the hallmarks of an increasingly violent Western, postmodern culture.

Participant D, the only participant not to be ordained, is a popular author and blogger on the relationship between church, mission and culture, as well as working for CMS and being a part of the leadership teams for Greenbelt Festival and an alternative worship congregation of an Anglican church in London. He explains that the church has emerged from the alternative worship movement to become much more missional in its focus,[315] being particularly influenced by the Community led by participant C, in how it understands itself as a value-centred community.[316] As such, it has developed an ethos that defines its character as a community of creativity, participation, risk and engagement, seeing these values as relevant to how people relate to themselves, one another, and God.[317] Participant D understands the church in general to be the agent of God's mission,[318] which in turn he defines through a meta-narrative of God's renewing of creation through Christ.[319] He sees no disconnect in holding to a meta-narrative within postmodern culture, so long as the story is not totalising and it is held with humility. It is important to him that, whatever one's story, there is an epistemological commitment to meeting 'round the table with other people,' so that stories can be shared and truth explored.[320] The primary aim, then, of this church congregation, is not to increase church attendance, but to share their story in dialogue with those around them, in the hope that more people will join in with the mission of God to make all things new.

Consideration of the presuppositions

As has already been outlined in chapters one and four, I entered into this research with a set of clear and well-defined presuppositions. It was therefore necessary to consider whether they came to the fore in the analysis of the interviews, an important component of which was whether there was a disparity between the spoken and practised theologies that the four

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[315] Appendix D, 229-231
[316] Appendix D, 240-241
[317] Appendix D, 230
[318] Appendix D, 226, 245-247
[319] Appendix D, 226, 229, 245
[320] Appendix D, 227-228, 233-234

participants described. It was suggested that the spoken theologies would bear a greater resemblance to the meta-narrative work of NT Wright, who suggests that the role of the Christian church is to join in with God's rescuing of people from culture and societies that do not have Jesus as their sole Lord, that they would live within the true Story. It was thought, however, that the theology inherent within practise would bear less resemblance to this approach, and have more in common with the work of James Dunn, who insists there is more space for diversity of theology and ethics within the gospel than Wright allows. In order to explore this, the four participants were interviewed on two separate occasions, with one interview intended to focus upon spoken theology, and the other upon the practised theology.

A problem with this theory, that became immediately apparent in the interviews, was that none of the participants mentioned James Dunn or his work, and when asked after the interviews, not one of them had even heard of him. Whilst the purpose of the interviews was not to investigate a direct link between Dunn and the groups in question, but rather the ideas represented within his work, the lack of knowledge of Dunn's work questions the integrity of employing his work as a frame of reference for the analysis. Furthermore, only two of the participants (Participant C and Participant D) claimed to share some of Wright's meta-narrative theology, which equally raised questions regarding his status. It seems that the presupposition of a Wright-Dunn spectrum was too narrow and specific to be of use as a framework through which the interviews could be interpreted. The danger, here, would be that the frames of reference being employed to interpret the transcripts would be using language and concepts that lie outside the intentions of the participants, which could lead to an inappropriate skewing of the analysis.

However, the consideration of the presuppositions has led to two helpful realisations. First, Dunn and Wright represent two, moderately central, points on a much larger spectrum of debate between theological interaction with culture. This debate in its contemporary setting has been outlined in chapter three, and can broadly be summed up as a debate between those of the pluralist school of thought, epitomised by David Tracy, and those who see Christianity and the church as defined by an alternative narrative to that of the world, as with Stanley Hauerwas or John Millbank. An important feature of this debate is in asking where truth can be

found, and what the role of God and the church is within that. A pluralist would want to encourage dialogue between different thought traditions, and would see the church as presenting stories that are open to dialogue with stories of other traditions and discourses, hence 'open-narrative theology'. At the other end of the spectrum, the role of the church would be seen as confrontational, presenting a world of falsehood with the truth of God as a closed narrative. This, throughout the interviews and interpretation process, proved to be a much more helpful framework.

Second, the presuppositions required the interpretation of the transcripts to attend to the use of the terms 'narrative', 'history' and 'story', and particularly in their relation to how the participants understood the gospel, the church, and the relation of the two to the world. It seems clear from the eight transcripts that these concepts are important to the participants, being referred to throughout the interviews. However, it does not appear to be appropriate, or even accurate, to suggest that by examining the use of these words one can then go on to speak of a disparity between spoken and practiced theologies. This simply does not seem to be a logical or fair conclusion that can be made from the transcripts. What can be said from the transcripts, however, is that rather than revealing a disparity between spoken and practised theology, it appears that the description of the practises of these groups qualifies the way in which 'narrative' is understood by the participant. This, then, is another reason why broadening the spectrum to the open-closed narrative debate was to prove helpful as a framework for interpreting the transcripts: either end of that debate, and everyone in-between, employs the term 'narrative', or one of its synonyms, when speaking of the relation between theological and non-theological discourses. By carefully placing the participants' presentation of 'narrative' on this spectrum, and cross-referencing that with major themes that occur within all eight of the transcripts themselves, allowed fairly accurate conclusions to be drawn regarding what these four leaders reveal about their view of postmodern and theological anthropology.

Themes common to all four participants

Truth

Each of the participants present a self-narration in which they explain they once held a more conservative evangelical position than they now do,[321] and in their liberalising each have developed a more heuristic view of truth. Participant D is insistent that whilst he believes Christians can adhere to a meta-narrative of God's healing of creation, they,

> *Have to have a humility around our truth claims.... You just need to be around the table with other people, and lose the... arrogance of 'We're right, we've got the truth, you've got to get on board with us....*[322]

For Participant D, the Modern world is represented by 'objective truth, facts, gospel propositions,' against which he explains that he stands within a postmodern mindset where truth-claims can be made, but only with the acceptance that 'I'm not quite sure from where I'm standing that all the truths I've been told are so certain as I thought before.'[323] In this sense, truth is described as a 'journey' that is best travelled by welcoming 'people who are strangers or outsiders or sinners....'[324] Participant D further elaborates upon this heuristic approach by explaining that part of this move to 'sit around the table,' is also a challenge to 'live with the ambiguities and discomfort of that.'[325] This is demonstrated well in their gatherings by the rarity of any preaching, and the preference for discussion and ritual which he sees as 'multivalent, or ambiguous... and that's one of the reasons I like it.'[326]

In the interviews with Participant C, who appears the most committed to a particular meta-narrative, he explains that 'postmodernity has made me much less propositional and truth-statement-ing, and much more exploratory....'[327] In this sense, his view of the mission of

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[321] Appendices A, 152, 158, B, 171-174, C, 204-207, D, 234, 236
[322] Appendix D, 227
[323] Appendix D, 233
[324] Appendix D, 233
[325] Appendix D, 234
[326] Appendix D, 238
[327] Appendix C, 206

the Community is to 'invite people to journey with us, come and see.'[328] To illustrate the point further he states:

> It's not bringing people to a prescribed outcome, it's just journeying with people and generally not getting in the way.[329]
>
> So we would have a lot of people journeying with our community who would not call themselves card-carrying Christians, or Evangelical Christians in particular. And, you know, part of the Community's hospitality is creating the space for people to... to question where they're at in relation to themselves, to God, you know, it's kind of all that.[330]

The impression that Participant C is giving of his understanding of the Community, then, is of a group who have found truth in a particular story, and who wish to share that story with others, not necessarily so that they might agree, but so that they might act as companions for others who are asking similar questions. His disdain toward 'conversionist' Christianity would further evidence that reading of his interviews.[331]

Participant B holds to a similar story to that of Participant C, but stresses 'that it can look very different from different perspectives.'[332] He suggests that whilst the story itself is unchanged by one's viewpoint, specific encounters and engagements will bring about specific emphases.[333] In a similar way, it is important to Participant B that truth can only be encountered in the telling and experiencing of the stories of Jesus within a communal setting, so that the group might 'work out where we are at, what's around us, and work this out together.'[334] This appears to be true in the presentations he gives, not only of smaller groups, or 'multi-voiced' worship services in which discussion and participation are regularly practised,[335] but also in their times of sharing in Holy Communion, in which he asks those

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[328] Appendix C, 201
[329] Appendix C, 203
[330] Appendix C, 218
[331] Appendix C, 217
[332] Appendix B, 173
[333] Appendix B, 173-174
[334] Appendix B, 175
[335] Appendix B, 182

gathered around the elements, 'What do you see?'[336] Similarly, Participant B appears to eschew the notion that there can be a universal application of truth, and rather emphasises that truth is most deeply discovered when a local community are able to be honest and open to their own context, to themselves, and to the Jesus of the Christian tradition that they encounter through people, Bible and experience. Whilst this places more limits on truth than the understanding outlined by Participant D, it remains an heuristic enterprise.

This view of truth can also be evidenced in Participant A's dialogue, particularly by the way in which she describes the development of her church's engagement with the Bible and theology. Whereas they began with traditional, Evangelical sermons of around twenty minutes, they have now moved to very short talks that are usually a part of a verbal or non-verbal interactive exercise.[337] The emphasis has moved from the imparting of propositions by one person, to an open discussion around a particular theme or question. This gives Participant A much less control over what can be shared, and allows viewpoints that differ from her own to be shared within a worship context. Whilst at some points she wishes to insist that what is presented 'basically says the same thing' as it did in their earlier days,[338] she is also keen to point out that the churches she leads are not 'the same old thing in new clothes.'[339] This could suggest that whilst she has not recognised any change in her own 'core of Christian beliefs' since the groups began,[340] there is a recognition that changing the medium in which that is presented allows people to interact in a different and more fluid way, with far less certainty regarding the outcome.

In the interviews, all four of the leaders emphasise the discursive nature of the groups, suggesting that it is in conversation, shared experiences and communal living that truth can be encountered. Whilst they are keen to explain there is neither a prescriptive agenda nor a specific outcome, it is clear that these 'journeys' are not without focus and structure. Rather, the leaders are very clear of the central ethos of their groups, whether with an explicit set of

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[336] Appendix B, 184
[337] Appendix A, 148
[338] Appendix A, 148
[339] Appendix A, 149
[340] Appendix A, 148

values,[341] or an implicit commitment to parts of the Christian tradition.[342] As such, whilst truth is presented as an heuristic exercise, it is guided by a particular ethos, and it is the combination of this view of truth and guidance which the leaders believe allows the groups to belong to the Christian tradition as well as their own contemporary situation. The former provides the groups with enough reflexivity in order to be hospitable to, and even learn from, those of differing positions to their own. Value-led guidance is presented as that which can sustain the integrity of the groups, without any need to withdraw from public engagement.

Sacramental View of the Cosmos and Human Cultures

The second theme that appears in all four of the participants is that of their belief in a sacramental cosmos, in which God is active, and the main feature of human agency is to attend to, and cooperate with, the action of God. Participant B explains that, for him, this view stems from God as Creator and Sustainer of all life, who is constantly active within creation. God's action, or mission, is to unfold the Kingdom, which he understands as God's presence and rule.[343] Mission is, first and foremost, a belief that God is 'upfront,'[344] 'up close... [and] very personal,'[345] that leads Participant B to understand 'mission' as the mission of God, for 'the mission has us, and we're just... part of the *Missio Dei.*'[346] In this sense, the call to salvation becomes less about 'rescuing people out of this fallen world, but being God's agents in the world,'[347] and it is this agency that Participant B states is celebrated at baptism.[348] In describing this agency, he uses the language of 'partnership,' so that a person is able to announce formally and be recognised by the local church as a 'partner,' which represents their joining in with God's mission through a commitment to the ethos and people of the church he leads.[349]

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[341] Appendix C, 199-201; Appendix D, 230
[342] Appendix A, 147, 157-158, to 'the ancient creeds' and Anglicanism, Appendix B, 180, 186, to the Anabaptist Tradition
[343] Appendix B, 171
[344] Appendix B, 169, 177
[345] Appendix B, 170
[346] Appendix B, 190
[347] Appendix B, 179
[348] Appendix B, 186-187
[349] Appendix B, 166-167, 170

Similarly within the interviews with Participant C, there is at work within his missiology a deeply held belief in the immanence of God within all creation and human culture, so that, 'part of the rule of life is to look for the Kingdom of God on the streets.'[350] He understands the arts to be 'windows to heaven,'[351] in and through which one can hear 'whispers of God in those outside the church environment.'[352] For Participant C, the role of the church in mission is indefatigably not to 'create a cocoon spirituality that simply takes people out of the world,'[353] but rather the renewal of the church and engagement with culture.[354] This engagement is not to proselytise, but to live out the values of availability and vulnerability, which he demonstrates through the examples of the shop,[355] the arts festivals,[356] Bridge House,[357] and in the support they give to their friends and companions.[358] Without denying a hope that people would encounter Christ,[359] Participant C's speech and description of action strongly suggests that the living out of their Community's values is not about 'recruitment,' but rather about 'celebrating the dignity of human life.'[360]

If Participant C's presentation of the community he leads is as a network of people who go into non-ecclesial festivals and places in order to inhabit them with their common values, then the churches participant A leads seem to operate in the opposite direction. Participant A describes the two as places where Christians and those disenfranchised from the church[361] are given opportunities to worship in settings that speak of the Christian tradition whilst using music and practices from contemporary culture.[362] The hope of these public services is to stir the emotions, giving an experience of the transcendence of God, such as the young people who 'like it, and they don't know why... [*and*] retired people who are also deeply affected by it.'[363] It

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[350] Appendix C, 220
[351] Appendix C, 200
[352] Appendix C, 221
[353] Appendix C, 220
[354] Appendix C, 220-221
[355] Appendix C, 199-200
[356] Appendix C, 200, 214-215, 220
[357] Appendix C, 201
[358] Appendix C, 199
[359] Appendix C, 217, 220
[360] Appendix C, 200
[361] Appendix A, 150, '...Quite a proportion wouldn't be going to church at all otherwise.'
[362] Appendix A, 151, 154-156, 162
[363] Appendix A, 151

is also to blur what Participant A believes to be the sacred-secular divide: by employing contemporary and secular music within a sacred context, she hopes that the attendees would make connections with this affective experience within their daily lives where they might hear this music.[364] In doing so, there is an overlap, as Participant D suggests, in so far as it is also the hope of the church congregation that the presence of contemporary music within their services 'helps people to relocate God back in their everyday life.'[365]

In his discussion of the congregation he leads, Participant D presents a group who became frustrated that, whilst their alternative worship employed 'the stuff of everyday life and culture as the building blocks of worship,'[366] encountering it was 'just as weird as singing choruses, it's just a different kind of weird.'[367] So whilst this approach was working for those within the congregation, it was not helping those from outside. The issue for the community, he suggests, lay not in their theology, but in their method that expected 'them to come to us.'[368] The congregation have sought a way forward that is based upon a common ethos, which remains committed to:

> An undergirding, almost Catholic theology that's sacramental, that sees that all of life, God is present in all of life and culture, and is discerning God within all of life and culture.[369]

It is this belief that leads Participant D to see the congregation as a community with a positive 'posture toward culture,'[370] and as such,

> The culture you live, and your friends live in, is to be celebrated and affirmed, whilst it's also to be thought about and reflected on. [371]

Having outlined his belief in the underlying sacramentality of the congregation's theology, he then suggests, as with Participant C, that the main focus of the community is not proselytism, but agency in the story of God's renewing of creation;

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[364] Appendix A, 154, describing the use of 'music that you'd hear outside, so that bridge is created.'
[365] Appendix D, 229
[366] Appendix D, 229
[367] Appendix D, 230
[368] Appendix D, 230
[369] Appendix D, 245
[370] Appendix D, 245
[371] Appendix D, 245

So Christ has come to renew all things, or... the future heaven and earth is the healing of creation. So our vocation, following in the way of Christ, is to be agents of that healing, reconciliation, transformation, peace-making...'[372]

Far from being a mere superficial trend within current protestant ecclesiology, the sacramental theology spoken of by the participants has profound significance. The concept that God is not simply an outsider who rescues from a fallen world, but is present in both the cosmos and cultures provides the participants with a framework through which they are reimagining the action of God, and the call placed upon creation. The most obvious impact of this to emerge in the interviews is that proselytising is either ignored, avoided, or viewed as less significant as it would have been under the influence of the earlier, more conservative, Evangelical view the participants claimed to hold. The sacramental theology and the de-prioritising of proselytism are linked through the desire of the participants to respect the presence of God within the culture and stories of those people with whom their groups are connecting. The mission of God has, then, become focussed upon the renewing of creation and worldly structures. Further, the participants do not enter into any discussion concerning the relationship between mission and salvation, which suggests that for these leaders salvation is becoming less focussed upon personal eschatology, and more upon the ethical and communal 'joining in' with God's action in the cosmos. This final point about participation and action is well illustrated in how the leaders understand belonging within the groups, to which I shall now turn.

Belonging as Participation

The participants were asked directly about how people could belong and become involved within the worship, action and general community life of each of the groups. In answer to these questions, Participant A narrates the churches she leads as groups that offer a sense of being rooted in God through the interaction with ancient and contemporary practises of the Christian tradition. This has involved labyrinth, *lectio divina*, and Celtic prayer, alongside Anglo-

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[372] Appendix D, 245

Catholic liturgy and Mass, contemporary dance music and interactive, physical responses.[373] This interaction takes two forms, the first of which is within the worship services themselves, where people are invited to become more creatively and conspicuously involved than simply through speaking and singing the liturgy. Within one of them, for example, this interaction takes many forms, from passing round the cup during Holy Communion,[374] to creative involvement in Bible stories 'so that people can enter into that story and be a part of that story....'[375] Even within the church which she describes as a less informal setting than the other, intercession is described as involving moving around various prayer stations in the Cathedral in which they meet.[376] The second form that this interaction takes is in the planning of these services that make up the worship and meeting hub for the groups. The importance of interaction and participation is demonstrated by the intention that:

> *As soon as you visit, you can be part of the community, part of planning, part of this whole journey with us... it's not like you've got to wait until six months with us, or until your theology is right....*[377]

For Participant A, then, the right to belong comes not from any doctrinal orthodoxy, or even ethical orthopraxy, but rather through participating within the life of the community. This is further illustrated by the baptism-thanksgiving Service story, in which she explains how she went to great lengths to ensure that the children who were baptised and the children who were not, were both treated as equals in the eyes of the community. The way in which she explains this is by seeing the church, not as a community bounded by ritual or belief, but by participating in a shared journey:

> *You know, some people go to this part of the journey straight away, and other people wait a while longer before they do it...*[378]

In a similar manner to Participant A, Participant D understands belonging within the congregation primarily through a person's participation in the worship and, perhaps more

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[373] Appendix A, 147, 150, 151, 152, 153, 156
[374] Appendix A, 157
[375] Appendix A, 147
[376] Appendix A, 154
[377] Appendix A, 161
[378] Appendix A, 162

importantly for Participant D, in the ethos of the community. He explains that the congregation's understanding of membership would be very similar to that of most Anglican congregations: that there is an open door, a thick fringe, and that people are given the opportunity to serve within the life of the community as an expression of their sense of belonging.[379] Within this general explanation of belonging, the use of email lists demonstrates that there are varying levels of participation at which people can operate;

> *One is a flow of information, so there's probably about two hundred people on that, at various levels from the centre. But then there is a core group, planning email list, that's probably got about twenty-five people on it at the moment, and that, probably... if you sign up for that, and commit your email, that's.. that's membership, or as close as we get.[380]*

In addition to these levels of belonging is a third, which is the facilitation group. This consists of four people who are voted in by the community, whose role is largely to organise the broad sweep of planning and services that take place.[381] Once again, it will be those who are known by their participation with the wider community who are trusted to take up those positions. As such, it can be said that a participative understanding of belonging runs throughout Participant D's transcripts, and can be seen in the interactive worship[382] and in the time spent having coffee afterwards (which is longer than the actual service).[383] Outside of the worship services, it can also be seen in the important place given to 'table fellowship,' so that a central theme of the church is described as sharing food 'with those who are outsiders, who are poor, and marginalised, or the other, or even demonised in our culture.'[384] It can also be seen in the very structure of the congregation, intentionally not seeking to have a paid leadership position, as a way of involving more of the community in its work, and in demonstrating an alternative to a consumerist model of a 'provider-client relationship.'[385]

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[379] Appendix D, 242
[380] Appendix D, 242
[381] Appendix D, 243
[382] Appendix D, 230, 234
[383] Appendix D, 231
[384] Appendix D, 232
[385] Appendix D, 231

The same understanding of belonging-as-participation appears to be spoken of by Participant B. He recognises that whilst he has attempted to renew the concept of congregational membership to become 'partnership,' it remains to be those with backgrounds in that form of church who tend to be more comfortable in entering into formal membership.[386] What appears as more significant to Participant B than this formal expression of membership, is that those within the community would learn to commit to one another, and have a desire to want to move toward Christ. He insists that this is not bound by a particular set of ethics or specific doctrine, but rather in the sharing of life together. This is expressed through the regular holidays they take together as a church,[387] the sharing of birthdays or celebratory meals,[388] and the weekly gathering in small groups for worship, Bible study and, on occasion, Holy Communion.[389]

Similarly within Participant C's presentation, belonging to the community is defined neither by specific behaviour nor belief, which are seen as 'the death-knell of peoples' spirituality.'[390] Rather, it is defined by the communal participation with the Rule of availability and vulnerability within the Community itself, and 'in whichever sphere of influence God has called them.'[391] Further, the two words that comprise the Rule, availability and vulnerability, are adjectives which, if they are to be 'lived by,' necessarily require exploration and participation, and are not words to which one can give a simple assent. Whether a person is on 'the fringe' of the Community, or is a friend or companion, the implication of this is that they are invited to participate by the demand made by the Rule itself. This form of participation he grounds in the doctrine of the Trinity. The church, he explains, is 'a reflection of the nature of God who is Trinity,'[392] the outworking of which leads him to comment that:

Unless what we do reflects something relationally, then there's no point doing it `cos it doesn't carry any of God's DNA in it.[393]

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[386] Appendix B, 170
[387] Appendix B, 176, 181, 190
[388] Appendix B, 188
[389] Appendix B, 181-183, 188-189, 191, 214
[390] Appendix C, 220
[391] Appendix C, 199
[392] Appendix C, 194
[393] Appendix C, 202

It can be argued, then, that relationality is for Participant C a hallmark of what it means to be human, and is therefore part of that 'dignity of human life' that is to be sought after and celebrated.[394] It is held as so fundamental to existence that he even states that it is the loss of relationality with God that has led to the church being exiled.[395] Participation in God, other and self is presented as being of enormous value to Participant C's understanding of what it means to belong, not only to the community, but also to one's neighbours, one's world and to God.

This sense of participation can be seen to be employed by all four leaders in the descriptions of what it means to belong to the groups in question. It allows them to speak of belonging without the need to resort to an exclusivism that would be dissonant with the way in which they view truth and God's action in the world. More positively, it presents a model of belonging in which the community in question has less control over the individual, so that they are able to belong to multiple, sometimes contradictory groups, and allow different values to interact with one another. In this sense, participatory belonging allows the leaders to observe and speak of differing levels of commitment to the values of their own community, without the need to exclude anyone on ethical or doctrinal grounds. Finally, and I shall return to this point in more depth in the next section of this chapter, it is the understanding that belonging can be understood through participation that has enabled the participants to model a form of theological and postmodern personhood that resorts neither to a dialectical conflict or retreat, nor a laissez faire surrender. What is demonstrated is an open narrative approach that attempts to open new ways of being-as-participation, not only for those outside of the Christian tradition, but also for those who would see themselves as a committed part of the church.

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[394] Appendix C, 200
[395] Appendix C, 197

Summing up the Analysis: Open and Participative?

This very sub-title is enough to sum up many of the sycophantic clichés or scathing ironies made about groups such as those that have been discussed within this piece of research. 'Open' can be taken to mean woolly, warm and politically-leftist, and 'participative', that the groups are just Sunday Schools for adults who can't sit through a sermon. These definitions, however, are far from what is meant by the discussion of the analysis. I wish to argue that the participants have demonstrated that they are more open than closed in their narrative theology and cultural engagement, and very closely match the critical correlative method of theological reflection developed by David Tracy. Further, I wish to argue that the participative belonging demonstrated within the interviews is not only a psycho-social construct, but is an implicitly, although under-developed, theological construct in which the self is viewed as participating within the wider reality of God.

Critical Correlation

Within the interviews, the participants suggest that they understand their groups to be events or communities which have a positive 'posture toward culture,'[396] so that as they bring the Christian tradition to mind through worship and reflection, people are encouraged to 'look for the kingdom of God on the streets.'[397] In this sense, the operative model follows the same pattern as that of David Tracy's Critical Correlative method: there is openness to learning from both the Christian tradition and the culture of one's geo-temporality, and the two are brought into dialogue through the events and values of the groups. To continue the use of Tracy's terms, these events and groups can be seen as social texts that provide the space and vocabulary that encourage shared, non-cynical reflection upon self, world and the Christian tradition. Furthermore, within these groups, the self is acting in the same manner as Tracy's 'theologian', as the habitus of the critical correlation taking place between the texts of the Christian tradition and the broader culture of which one is a part.[398] If one is able to accept this comparison between the participants and Tracy, then it would seem appropriate to consider

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[396] Appendix D, 245
[397] Appendix C, 220
[398] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 24-27, 81, 340, 446-455

that the participants are operating under a narrative theology that is similarly open to that of Tracy.

Where there might appear to be a disconnect between this analysis and other elements of the transcripts is over the way in which the participants use the term 'meta-narrative.' All four give assent to the notion of meta-narrative, and appear comfortable in explaining that the Bible is structured in such a way, possibly suggesting a closed attitude toward narrative and culture. The strongest example of this would be found within Participant C's interviews, as he claims to be in agreement with NT Wright's five-act structuring of the Bible;

> *... It's the Tom Wright stuff, it's almost like there's a drama in the narrative of Scripture, and God invites us to participate in that drama, or that story, and that's what I mean by living in the story.*[399]

This, however, is not necessarily evidence of a closed view of narrative. Given the amount of talk in Participant C, as well as the other participants, concerning a sacramental view of human cultures, it would be rather odd to include a closed view of narrative. Rather, what appears to be at work within his discourse, as with the other participants, is that the concept of meta-narrative is found to be a helpful way of reading the Bible. More importantly, however, is that it is understood to be 'a very liberating way' of conceptualising the Bible, not as a 'legislative bit of paper,' but as 'a script, but the script has to find its expression in different ways.'[400] Far from being evidence of closure, the concept of meta-narrative itself has been opened, or as Participant D suggests, 'there's an anti-totalising, sort of spin on the story,' which allows the participants a way of speaking of their understanding of God as a 'hopeful story, and I don't think it needs to be a dominating story.'[401]

Belonging as Participation

The four leaders suggest an encouragement of engagement within oneself and one's social context in conversation with the Christian tradition embodied and presented within their groups and events. Whether there is agreement on doctrinal or ethical matters is not what is

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[399] Appendix C, 202
[400] Appendix C, 224
[401] Appendix D, 228

described as being a priority. Rather, the priority lies in being willing to 'sit around the table,'[402] engaging in the question of how one balances 'a life which is being fundamentally unbalanced by forces beyond your control.'[403] The way in which this is described, however, suggests that there is an implicit theology at work within this understanding of being-as-participation. Whilst this is certainly communicated in a way that requires further development, its presence can be demonstrated, in part, through the way in which the participants describe participation in the sacramental cosmos, the eschatological community and in worship.

The way in which the leaders present their understanding of a sacramental cosmos assumes an active God who is present and available to be experienced in both the created order and human cultures. Participant D's understanding of this is grounded within the meta-narrative of God's renewing of creation, and as such he explains that he encourages and challenges others, whether in the congregation or not, to join in with ecological lifestyles and concerns. Equally, regarding human culture, Participant D narrates the congregation's involvement in a multi-agency campaign to challenge people-trafficking within the sex trade. His understanding of their involvement in this, once again, stems from the story of God's renewing of all of creation, including human cultures.[404] In this sense, the invitation to consider various justice issues is more deeply an invitation to join in with God's renewing of creation, and to recognise the way in which humanity participates in God, and vice versa, through the ordinary practises of everyday life.

Within Participant A's interviews there emerges an understanding of community participation that is eschatological as well as sociological. The metaphor of 'being rooted' is used to remind those within the two churches of both the historical roots of their faith, as well as to consider the presence of the saints as a part of the community. The saints, she explains, are the 'people-rooting for us with some who've been there before,' and by participating within the Christian tradition, she believes that people are also participating within a timeless community from whom the baton has been passed.[405] By being challenged to consider this

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[402] Appendix D, 227
[403] Appendix A, 163
[404] Appendix D, 245
[405] Appendix A, 160

strange, yet human community, Participant A, deliberately or not, is challenging people's imaginations and understandings of life after death, to ask what it might mean to be held in God.

Finally, it is important to note that the invitation to participate in the worship of the communities without any need to give assent to doctrine and ethical practice appears to be more than an attempt simply to welcome. Rather, it implies that through a person's own experiences of life, they are able to bring stories and ideas that are of worth to the worshipping community. The value lies not in whether or not they ever express these experiences in a way that is recognisably Christian, but rather in the way in which they are able to illuminate or challenge the ethos of the group. Further, that the specifically sacramental elements of the worship of the communities are fully available to all is representative that, regardless of one's beliefs or ethics, all are welcome to participate in God. This is well summed up by Participant B in his description of Holy Communion, 'Do you want Jesus? Tuck in.'[406] This open sacramental theology appears to be grounded in the belief that God is 'upfront'[407] in all people's lives and that through worship, individuals and communities are given the opportunity to reflect upon life experiences from the standpoint of the Christian tradition being expressed.

The understanding of story expressed by Participants A, B and D allows ethical and communal participation to become ways of participating in God's self, action and eschatological community. It can be said, then, that in simply being alive one is participating in God, and the more one attempts to honestly participate in the world, other and self, the more one might be said to participate in God. Participant C argues that this relationality is the hallmark of being Church, and that without it, the church cannot be considered as a Godly community.[408] These statements are grounded in his Trinitarian theology which states that participation in the Trinity, and understanding it as model for community, is that which can save Western culture from its 'excess of individualism.'[409] With these points in mind, I believe that further reflection

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[406] Appendix B, 184
[407] Appendix B, 169, 177
[408] Appendix C, 202
[409] Appendix C, 202

could lead to a helpful model of a participative self as a response to consumerism that is both postmodern and theological.

Limits of Interviews and Analysis

The views represented by this analysis should not be confused with somehow being the direct thoughts of the participants involved. It is only their presentations that can be analysed, rather than their actual beliefs, this being as close as qualitative research can come to making claims about belief. The analysis represents my reflections upon the transcripts, recordings and memories of the interviews, and is dependent upon both the clarity of my reading and my writing. In turn, the transcripts, whilst being accurate in their recordings of the interviews, only reflect the words spoken during the interviews. They represent the current thoughts of the participants in response to the specific questions that were formulated using a language with which they may not necessarily be comfortable. Further, the answers and stories shared during the interviews are dependent upon the psycho-social setting of the participants at that time, and also to the amount of time they had to spare. What then, can one possibly learn from qualitative research?

In response, I would argue that these considerations are not reason enough to despair of the process. Rather, they are a proper recognition of the distance between interviewer and participant, transcript and analysis. The questions were designed to allow the participants to discuss, at length and from different viewpoints, how they understand the way in which their groups brought theological and postmodern discourses into dialogue. The analysis has not been carried out on a specific answer to a specific question, because such an answer is not necessarily a response to the specific question which the interviewer has in mind. Rather, the questions were designed to be broad enough so as to give the participants the necessary space for reflection. The transcripts have been analysed for repeating themes that were considered to be relevant to my own investigation into how these leaders believe their groups relate theological with postmodern discourses.

A second question is to ask what one can say with these findings from just four participants. This is a fair question, as four participants make it completely inappropriate to

extrapolate and universalise the analysis. That said, even with four-hundred participants, one still needs to be wary of direct extrapolations, for qualitative data simply does not allow such positivism. However, if one can proceed with caution from the analysis, recognising the limits of the data set, one may also be optimistic about the analysis, as those interviewed are all profoundly influential within this movement in England, and two of them are well-respected throughout churches in the West who are attempting to engage in a similar manner. Being regarded as influencers within the movement allows a certain amount of confidence to be placed in the analysis of the transcripts. Furthermore, this small sample allows for an in-depth study with key proponents of the Emerging Church and Fresh Expression movement, using two interviews per candidate to focus upon the single presenting issue. This allows a far greater depth to the exploration than can be seen within other work of this kind, such as that of Gibbs and Bolger. The analysis is believed to be substantive enough to express rich themes that engage with the focus of this project. With this in mind, the language that has emerged from this analysis of the practical situation shall now be brought into conversation with my analysis of the academic literature in order to fully develop the concept of a participative anthropology.

Chapter Six
The Participative Self

In the previous chapters I have attempted to demonstrate how anthropology is employed by both practitioners and theoreticians as a habitus in which to locate the question of whether the postmodern and the theological are able to occupy the same space. In chapters two and three I have outlined how both postmodern and theological authors have discussed this issue at such a length, that it is relatively simple to recognise writers who share similarities and dissimilarities within and between postmodern and theological thought. Further, the issue of postmodern culture and society, and how it relates to personhood, has been a topic of much interest in the Church, particularly within and around the Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church movements. The amount of attention that the topic has received allowed the design of a piece of work that could attend to, and enter into dialogue with, both academic and practical discourse.

In chapter two I demonstrated five approaches to defining the postmodern, and how each of them resulted in a particular understanding of the self. In chapter three I then presented four sets of theological responses to the postmodern self, each directly corresponding to at least one of the philosophical approaches in the preceding chapter. These approaches were then left hanging, as it were, as the following two chapters dealt with the collation and presentation of the qualitative part of this piece of research. The work in chapter five has shown that much thought is taking place within these churches regarding the possibilities and limits of speaking of identity as both postmodern and theological. The discussion and development of the possibility of a theological and postmodern anthropology will now be structured around the key themes of participation and critical correlation that have emerged from the analysis.

It is my contention that it is possible to speak of anthropology in a way that is both theological and postmodern, and I intend to demonstrate this through the following dialogue. It is important, firstly, to be clear about the intention behind the conviction regarding the suitability of postmodern and theological discourses as dialogue partners. This is not an attempt

to baptise postmodern social thought, and so state that, 'So long as Jesus is in there somewhere the construct is passable, however unpalatable.' This would be to repeat the mistakes of Ward, above, and suggest that the origin, development and current trajectories of postmodern thought are neutral. Rather, to make the suggestion that the two are coterminous is not necessarily to suggest that they mean the same thing, but that they occupy the same space, having enough commonality, and enough to learn from one another's difference, that they are able to enter into a critical dialogue. This, though, is reliant upon the definitions of 'postmodern' and 'theological' discourse.

Although Baudrillard is not offering a definition *per se*, engagement with this ubiquity of simulacra forces one of two options: either one plays by the rules and so is dissolved, or one presents one's objections from a particular habitus. Either way, dialogue is impossible. The only theological method available, then, is the one employed by Milbank, Hauerwas and, to a lesser extent, Wright. Their presentation of theology as a meta-discourse is unable, and unwilling, to enter into a dialogical space, so dependent is it upon its own sense of self-sustenance. Any countenance of dialogue with other traditions causes a fundamental rift in its foundations. The major problem here, as has been outlined in chapter three, is that such a definition defies the foundation, development and current position of the church. Every stage of its existence has been dialogical, influencing, and being influenced by, the societies and cultures in which it has been present. This is not to collapse the church into culture, but to insist that each of the persons and groups who make up 'the church' have been raised within a psycho-social complex that shapes the Christian tradition in particular ways.

This is not to pick and choose definitions in order to suit my own convictions. Rather, the conviction that all discourses are both particular and dialogical leads to the conclusion, not only that dialogue is possible, but that it is necessary. It is so because all discourses, in their attempt to understand their situation, and also be understood, reach limits when new developments need to be sought after. Whilst this certainly can, and does, come from within the practice of the discourse itself, it also seeks to learn by entering into a common space, in which dialogue can occur with other discourses. The space can be said to be 'common' because it is formed by a crisis, question or memory that is shared by other discourses. Whilst the rules

and history of the two discourses may or may not be quite different, the space unites them in a common search. The achievement made through dialogue is unlikely to be a uniting of the two discourses into one, or even agreement upon the response to the crisis, but rather exposure to a new resource that was previously unthinkable within the practice and tradition of the discourse alone.

The remainder of this chapter, then, is an attempt to engage with an already existing dialogue. The 'space' is clearly formed through the shared question of personhood, into which is brought a constructivist-Lyotardian postmodern discourse and an open-narrative theology. The result will be more nuanced than the creation of a postmodern theology of self construction, as that would be to reduce far too many of the differences between the two discourses in question. Whilst the two discourses will in some ways remain to be separate, they will also have changed one another. The dialogue will demonstrate the commonality, difference, misunderstandings (perhaps making them even more clouded), and questions (some of which will be helpful) that occupying the same space makes possible. The conclusion following will be two-fold: confident in its presenting of a specific development in theological and postmodern anthropology, cautious in its statements regarding the wider relationships between the postmodern and theological discourses.

The dialogue will begin with a presentation of, and discussion with, Paul Fiddes's developments of Trinitarian theology in his *Participating in God*.[410] Fiddes is an important starting point, as it will ground the discussion within his careful development of the doctrine of the Trinity with particular reference to Godly and human personhood. His concept of participation and his discussion of the role of Christ will allow the themes from the qualitative analysis to engage with the theology of Tracy and Brown and so begin, in full, the discussion regarding a postmodern and theological anthropology.

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[410] Fiddes, Paul S., *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000)

Participation in God

Fiddes's book of 2000 is itself a response to, and development of, the criticisms raised by Thomas[411] and Alan Torrance[412] to the work of John Zizioulas from 1985.[413] One of the main purposes within the collection of papers that comprise *Being as Communion* is Zizioulas's affirmation that Christianity brought about a metaphysical revolution in history by stating that the source of all being is 'plurality and relation.'[414] Whilst all four of the authors here mentioned would concur on this point, the themes of disagreement are based on Zizioulas's insistence that the source and cause of the Trinity lies not in the divine substance, but in the Father.[415] This understanding of the Trinity forms the basis for all Zizioulas has to say on theological anthropology and ecclesiology.[416] Within this framework, personhood is granted through the communion between humanity and the hypostasis of the Son, which takes place through the Eucharistic communities who are focussed upon the Bishop.[417] The contention of the Torrances with this is its necessary subordinationism, which one observes in the position the Son and the Spirit occupy below the begetting and sending forth from the Father.[418] It is further made manifest within Zizioulas's anthropology, in which the image of Christ is focussed upon the person of the Bishop to the detriment of the role of the Deacon,[419] as well as the laity as a whole. For both Thomas and Alan Torrance, it is the Being of God, and not the Father, that is the source of Trinitarian communion, to the extent that the divine persons can be said to be

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[411] Torrance, Thomas F., *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988)
Torrance, Thomas F., *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996)
[412] Torrance, Alan J., *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation, with special reference to Volume One of Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996)
[413] Zizioulas, John D., *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985)
[414] Williams, Rowan, Review of 'Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church', (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press and London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985) by John Zizioulas, in *Scottish Journal of Theology,* 42:1, 101-105, 101
[415] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion,* 44
Del Colle, Ralph, ''Person' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology: Conversations with Thomas Torrance and Thomas Aquinas', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 54:1, (2001), 70-86, 70
[416] Del Colle, *'Person' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology*, 70, 73
[417] Williams, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 102
[418] Del Colle, *'Person' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology*, 76
[419] Williams, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 104

en-hypostatic, within one another without being consumed into a single whole.[420] Whilst Fiddes agrees with these criticisms made by the Torrances, he attempts to do so in such a way as to continue to draw on Zizioulas's approach.

Fiddes begins his work by stating that he hopes it represents a move away from attempting to write about the Trinity through 'observation,' instead reflecting a position of participating in God.[421] He affirms Zizioulas's position, that personhood cannot exist without relationship and, as such, being cannot be understood to be prior to relationship.[422] The remainder of the work is really a focus on the *perichoresis* of the Trinity, a theme that is also discussed by the other three authors. Fiddes explains that *perichoresis* has been classically understood in two ways, to which he adds a third. In the East, it is the procession from the Father to the Son through the Spirit, and ultimately to creation. Whilst this alone leads to subordinationism, it also shows the inclusion of humanity into the movement of the Trinity. The second is the Western understanding that *perichoresis* is the permeation of each person of the Trinity by the other without confusion,[423] as the Torrances highlighted using the term *en-hypostasis*. Third, whilst acknowledging that this is not how the fathers understood the terms, Fiddes suggests that it is also helpful to understand *perichoresis* from its root term, *choreo*, or, dance. This is used by Fiddes to great effect to show the movement of God, and how God moves others, rather than simply seeing God as an object that inspires others to move.[424]

What is interesting about this approach is the attempt to bring together the Eastern and Western approaches in a way that is neither forced nor superficial. Fiddes's hope is that this understanding of the *perichoresis* of the Trinity is more open to the participation of creation than has been typical in the West, but in a way that has a greater mutuality between persons than can be currently conceived of in the East.[425] The critical point for Fiddes, as for this thesis, is that the *perichoresis* between the persons of the Trinity cannot be separated from the

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[420] Del Colle, *'Person' and 'Being' in John Zizioulas' Trinitarian Theology*, 79
[421] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 12
[422] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 16
[423] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 71
[424] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 74
[425] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 79

perichoresis shared between God and creation.[426] For Fiddes, the *perichoresis* is the very source of life, and the whole of creation is alive with its rhythm, which is reflected in the ritual and worship of the Church.[427] To this point I agree with Fiddes, and believe that this is entirely the right starting point for this dialogue. However, it should be noted that, in the remainder of his book, Fiddes develops a panentheistic view of creation existing in God, which he relates to his Trinitarian theology. This, it seems to me, is both unnecessary and unsubstantiated. The *perichoretic* movement of God, as described by Fiddes, is able to exist in a more traditional understanding of God and the Universe, and whilst it may open the door for a more thorough case to be made for panentheism, Fiddes's work certainly does not necessitate such a conclusion. Any such engagement appears to be a distraction that prevents Fiddes from more thoroughly working through his development of the *perichoresis* and its shaping of theological anthropology, to which I shall now turn.

As with Zizioulas and Thomas and Alan Torrance, the role of Christ in mediating the relationship between humanity and the Trinity is key. For Fiddes, it is through sharing the 'Amen' of the Son to the Father that is demonstrated in Jesus Christ, that human persons and communities are drawn into the *perichoresis* of the Godhead.[428] On this point, Alan Torrance is helpful in offering further illumination, stating that the *imago Dei*, unlike other 'static' images of God and humanity, can only be interpreted as participation in God: of the *perichoresis* within the Godhead and the *perichoresis* between humanity and God.[429] Through this, Fiddes demonstrates the appropriate centrality of Christ between creation and the Trinity, but in a way that is only partially satisfactory. Any attempt to form an anthropology within a Trinitarian framework that does not take account of the necessity of the mediatoral role of the person of Jesus Christ is simply non-sensical. However, to limit participation within *perichoresis* as taking place only through an explicit sharing of Jesus's 'Amen,' is to underestimate God's presence within creation. Rather, for human selves and communities to share in the character of God as demonstrated by Jesus in his preaching about the Kingdom of God, even without worship of, or

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[426] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 95
[427] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 107
[428] Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 89
[429] Torrance, Alan J., *Persons in Communion*, 367-368

specific reference to Jesus Christ, is to participate in the *perichoresis* of God. Whilst it is certain that there will be deeper *perichoresis* still to be had by becoming aware of the source of life in God through Christ, one cannot say that there is no participation whatsoever. This point, however, needs to be taken one step further. As Miroslav Volf has explained in his own exploration of theological anthropology, in Christ, God has not merely invited humanity into relationship, but has embraced humanity. This is the new covenant, and whilst failure, ignorance and wrong intent continue to have consequences, they cannot break it.[430] Before being there is relationship, God's *perichoresis* and embracing; this life itself can be seen as an outworking of God's *perichoresis*. The essence of this life, this *perichoresis*, is within and before each human person and community, and through participation the human person becomes more acquainted with, and humble before, the possibility of their personhood.

There is, now, one further point to add before going on to ask a rather key question of what is being proposed. The emphasis of the imitation of Christ as the model of, and invitation into, the divine *perichoresis* is an important development in the discussion of this concept that was presented in chapter three between David Tracy and David Brown. Whilst both held the imitation of Christ to be central in Christian discipleship, it was stated that Tracy placed too much emphasis upon an academic understanding, at the expense of a broader understanding of discipleship. In correcting this, Brown demonstrated that imitation is best conceived not simply through the presentations within the New Testament, but through the whole communion of the Saints. In this sense, not only was there a closing of the cultural and temporal gap between one's geo-temporality and Christ's, but also a metaphysical closing as the imitation of the perfection of Christ is demonstrated through the imperfection of the saints. I then further developed this concept to suggest that, using Tracy's metaphor, particular humans can and should be understood in the same way that texts are able to be considered 'classic'. The classic expressions of humanity can be said to be those who, as with texts, are such a full expression of truth that they speak beyond their own lifetime. This discussion, however, omitted how the imitation of Christ was the way of beginning to acknowledge and participate in the *perichoresis* of God. This point more fully develops the discussion of chapter

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[430] Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 155-156, 164

three, as it may now be said that through the engagement with classical expressions of humanity and of the Christian tradition, one is participating in the *perichoresis* of God. Through hearing, seeing, considering and becoming involved with these fellow persons one is led to ask questions of one's own participation in God, one's self and the world. This development shows that participation in God's *perichoresis* is a movement into the fullness of God's presence, within and beyond creation and time.

An important question now remains: is this presentation of participating in God actually a meta-narrative? There is certainly room to understand this as a meta-narrative, and as such, critics will insist it cannot, therefore, be considered 'postmodern'. In response to this, two comments need to be made. First, even Lyotard's 'incredulity toward meta-narratives' can be construed as a meta-narrative. This, though, is to be in such a rush to deliver a clever and ironic response so as to miss the criticism being made by Lyotard. As has already been stated in chapter two, Lyotardian postmodernism is not an insistence that meta-narratives do not or should not exist, but that they cannot possibly bear the weight of the totality of their own claims. No system of human discourse, even one believed to be based upon divine revelation, can be anything other than partial. This is not to level all human systems as equally valid, but rather, to suggest that even those systems most trusted are errant and incomplete. Put very simply, Lyotard extols those who will listen, to look for the limits. Clearly, as will be discussed below, there are limits to this model of theological and postmodern anthropology.

Second, this cannot be fairly understood as a meta-narrative if meta-narratives are defined as dominating. This model of anthropology does not try to coerce any person into any particular shape. It claims to be truthful no matter how a person responds to it and, further, it gives respect to those lifestyles that are a genuine attempt to participate in themselves and their world. (I acknowledge, however, that at this point in the discussion, the concept and practice of 'participation' is awaiting further elaboration and definition.) Where this understanding is unique, however, is in its centring on the person of Christ who leads humans into the *perichoresis* of God. Some will find this pointless, some, offensive, and that will always be the case in attempts to make meaning. However, unlike some other theological attempts to understand the human condition, there is no punitive measure for those who cannot give full

consent to all of its claims. It is the embrace of God and, to follow Volf's development of the Prodigal Son, neither the prodigal nor the elder brother can be successful in disowning the father.[431] Put differently, to borrow an image from David Ford, as has been demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the face of God has been permanently set toward creation. In their lives, human persons are invited to make their response to this face as they regard it in all elements of the other which they encounter.

This section has attempted to begin to explain the theological strand of the dialogue, and has suggested how it might interact with the postmodern. In it I have attempted to explain that humans can be considered to be persons because of God's initiative toward us, rather than by any movement of our own. If Zizioulas, Torrance (Thomas and Alan) and Fiddes are correct in stating that being cannot exist before relationship, and that for anything to be considered as 'being' it must 'be-in-relationship' then it is only God's initiative in creating that has made personhood possible. *Perichoresis* is the movement of God that has moved life into being, and by engaging in its rhythm human persons are able to participate more fully in God, themselves and the world. As this participation has been made most fully manifest in Jesus Christ, the self is most fully attended to by 'imitation' of the character of his life and preaching, and of those who have truthfully embodied elements of that character. In so doing, one participates in the very being of God, as well as in the *perichoresis* present within the created and social world, and so potentially releasing a deeper and wider acknowledgement of God in self, other and the world. The next stage in this dialogue, is to relate this image of *perichoresis* and participation with a constructivist-Lyotardian view of the postmodern self.

The Participative Self

The first, and perhaps most pressing question to ask here, is to what extent 'participation' is a suitable image. The reason this is of such import is that it asks what it is about a dialogically-formed self (that is, not solely autonomous) that is able to be participative. If 'I' am not an object over and against other subjects, how, then, can I *choose* to participate? The answer to this issue lies within the reflections that Holstein and Gubrium offer upon self-

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[431] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 165

construction. As has been outlined in chapter two, within this model there is an alertness drawn to the psycho-social flows in which self-construction takes place. It is not that the self is completely out of the control of anyone, and is simply the product of random psycho-social interactions, but rather that construction is limited by the resources available in one's own setting. It follows, then, to have no awareness of the way that this limitation is shaping oneself is to have, at best, a poor participation in one's own identity. In this sense, the self really is in danger of being simply given over to the whims of psycho-social forces in one's own context. However, the greater the awareness of these flows, the greater the potential for participation in and with them, as one is able to resist, give assent, critique or, even, attempt to see transformation.

Initially, however, this may appear to be an attempt at the re-centring of the self or, even, an expression of Nietzschean will to power, as 'the self' seeks to have control over its environment. It could be argued that this model, rather than really heeding any Lyotardian critique, is attempting to return to an individualistic model of identity. This, though, would be to miss the force of Holstein and Gubrium's model. Awareness of one's psycho-social context and nature does not give power over it, and in fact, such awareness acknowledges the extent to which one's self-construction is beyond one's comprehension, let alone control. Specifically regarding the 'will to power', this model allows such a theory to be seen, not so much as a universal human aim, but rather, as a specific meta-narrative that imagines the betterment of one's 'world' to be necessarily linked to one's own conquest over it. Understanding of the will to power in this way, within Holstein and Gubrium's psycho-social complex, is to be able to see the factors that give rise to such a meta-narrative, as well as the factors that will limit its possibility and realisation. Awareness of, and participation in, any sense one may hold of a 'will to power', is an important step to resisting the narrative: confidence and hope can be discerned (however partially) within a dialogue of arrogance and fear.

In this model, then, the 'will' cannot be said to be 'free', if that is understood to mean completely autonomous. Neither, however, need it be completely under the control of others. Rather, the will, one's choosing to be, emerges from participation in the psycho-social complex of biography, discourses-in-practice and discourse practices. Put simply, the self is never

without the multiple communities of the past, present and anticipated future, some of which have a more dominant stake in the self than others. Identity is, at once, an expression of belonging to, and independence from, these communities; an expression of sameness and difference. The dialogue between these two poles of interaction is what is meant by 'participation'.

What is demonstrated within this model, then, is the impossibility of the 'individual' over and against the world, and the necessary dependence of the one upon the many. It is at this point that theological and postmodern discourses are in most agreement, so parallel is it with Zizioulas's development of Trinitarian theology discussed above: the source of all being is not a singularity, but plurality-in-relation. This is not to suggest a direct pattern from the Trinity to creation, but to demonstrate a way of seeing one's self and the world; that it is the movement within and from a unified plurality (note, not totalised plurality) that has given rise to life that exists as plurality seeking comm-unity (as opposed to totalised unity). In this sense, God has not created individuals who are called to come together. Rather, out of the *perichoresis* of God has emerged the dynamic of creation, a complex of plural-yet-dependent beings, through which flows that same movement. Whilst persons can engage with this movement without reference to, or even awareness of, its source and sustenance, the Christian tradition demonstrates that actively seeking to participate in God is to plumb greater depths of personhood. It is at this point that Holstein and Gubrium's model becomes inadequate, for God's transcendence and immanence cannot be placed within its constraints without limiting the Christian tradition in some way. It is too simplistic to say that this model exists 'within God', as such a move leads to seeing creation as panentheistic. Equally, saying that God is simply 'within this model' is in danger of reducing God to just another psycho-social resource. All that can be stated is that the resources and factors of self-construction within the model are all places in which personhood is explored and, therefore, through which one has the potential to participate in the *perichoresis* of God. If participation can, therefore, be seen to be a suitable image for a theological and postmodern anthropology, the question remains as to how one learns this participation. Whilst this has been implicit to the discussions so far, it is necessary to answer this question explicitly.

It is within the 'communities' of the self that one is taught forms of participation. Following Holstein and Gubrium's specifically discourse-focussed model, the self emerges as a dialogically-formed person from, and within, a particular context. Past and present discourses-in-practice, such as family, education, friends, work and recreation, have all grounded the self within particular discourse practices which have shaped the way the person sees self and the world. This is not to suggest that the self uncritically absorbs all social resources, but rather, as discourse, and the rules governing it, are practised, so the self gives assent to such rules, as well as critically engaging with them. This is an important character of the self being presented from a constructivist-Lyotardian perspective: whilst the self exists at nodes of communicative interaction, it is recognised to retain the ability to critique and reject, as well as accept.[432]

In addition to these social aspects, participation is also governed by one's psychology. That is to say that the social resources are not simply 'external', but perceived by one's own psychology. This perception, as has been argued in chapter two, is governed not only by one's memory of the past, but also by one's neurology, over which one has little control. This directly shapes, not only the way the world is experienced, but the very way in which one is able to engage with it. Furthermore, because it shapes how one thinks about the future, that which one is anticipating about the future also becomes an important factor that influences one's participation with others and one's self. This small, but important comment, is to show that identity cannot simply be conceived as 'social'. Lyotard, Holstein and Gubrium make it clear that self-construction is limited by the social discourses in which one has been, and is, engaged. The discussion of psychology makes clear that any such social engagement is itself governed by one's perception, which is much more than the 'sedimentation' of social relationships past.[433] Rather, one's neurological make-up actively shapes the way in which a person sees and participates in one's context.

The participative self can be said, then, to be premised on four principles. First, because God has brought all life into being, personhood is universal; the origin of being is its relation to, and within the *perichoresis* of, the triune God. Second, owing to the universality of personhood,

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[432] Cf. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 15
[433] McFadyen, Alistair I., *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 78, 86-89, 318

participation is a metaphor that celebrates and explores this personhood as gift; an attentive seeking to live within the *perichoresis* in creation. Third, participation demonstrates that a person can be seen to be more than simply an extension of local culture, a product of institutions or the assertion of the will. Rather, participation is to become active within one's dialogical psycho-social complex, not seeking to reduce oneself to a single, linear narrative, but attending to all of the resources in which one perceives the positive and negative dynamics that shape how one's personhood is expressed. Finally, this model emphasises the communitarian nature of an inter-dependent creation whose origin is in relation to the triune God. Personhood is thus most fully explored in relation to others, and specifically according to the ways of those who, with Jesus Christ, have lived most fully within the *perichoresis* of God. Before discussing this final point in more detail, it is necessary first to understand the importance of 'attentiveness' within the participative self.

Attending to Participation

That personhood is emphatically universal does not mean to say that participation naturally follows. Participation, as it is being argued here, is a theological and postmodern understanding of self construction. More than that, it is also claimed that this form of existence within a psycho-social complex leads to a deeper engagement with, and understanding of oneself, the world and God than any other form. This judgement claim is based upon two points. Firstly, and positively, it claims to be based within a dialogue that is rooted in both the Christian tradition as well as in considered conceptualisations of the contemporary situation. Secondly, and negatively, it believes it offers the most appropriate course between two extremes, both of which also claim to be theological and postmodern. To substantiate this, I shall now turn to explaining and evaluating these approaches, both of which have been introduced in chapter three.

The first approach is that offered by Pete Ward through, what in chapter two was called, *Consuming Disciples*. This approach is particularly salient for this thesis as he bases it upon his reading of the Trinitarian theology of Fiddes, naming it a theology of participation.[434] For Ward,

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[434] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 27

the *perichoresis* of God is observable within human experience as the discernment of God's loving presence. By personally having the presence participate in him, and he in that presence, he is able to mediate that participation through ministry.[435] Further, as *perichoresis* demonstrates the fluid movements of the Trinity, Ward believes that such an understanding demonstrates that the church, also, should be likewise.[436] As has been explained above, this leads to a 'liquid' understanding of church as a fluid network. Within this understanding it is supposed that consumerist culture provides pathways along which the practice of everyday life is governed and lived. Identity, then, is explored and developed according to one's consumption of culturally-relevant artefacts and through the joining of specific groups.

There is, then, one further critique of Ward's approach that I need to add to those of chapter three. Within his discussion of consumerism and participation, he has wrongly assumed that it is the former of those two concepts that has primacy over the latter. For Ward, consumerism is the pattern of the socio-cultural world, and therefore identity formation should follow. Whilst Ward is correct in observing the existence of 'pathways' in the psycho-social complex, it is more appropriate to suggest that they are formed by participation rather than consumption. This is so because participation is not a form of consumption, but the reverse is actually true: consumption is a form of participation. Further, consumerism is not 'neutral,' as Ward insists, but is a superficial form of participation, unable as it is, to be present at any level other than surface. To limit one's identity to that of 'consumer' is to reduce the character of personhood to desires and needs, and its language to consumerist discourse. Further, consumerism placates the will to power by seeming to place 'me' in the centre of the world: all that exists is for personal pleasure and gain. This masks the reality of the self so that one is unable to see the social forces in which one is immersed, reducing one's potential to resist them. Far from being an image of a person engaging in the *perichoresis* of God within an interdependent creation, following after the image of Christ and the saints, this is more akin to the self and the world that is presented through Baudrillard: a self consumed.

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[435] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 28
[436] Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 98
Ward, *Liquid Church*, 53-55

It is in reaction to this view of the postmodern self that John Milbank develops his own understanding of a theological and postmodern personhood. In a book written some time after *Theology and Social Theory* that was discussed in chapter three, Milbank explains that postmodernity is the 'obliteration of boundaries,'[437] which leads to a Baudrillardan view of a relentlessly secular and materialist society in which the Free Market reigns supreme.[438] As with his earlier work, although communicated more subtly, Christianity is not to be found colluding with the nation states or the Free Market, as such approaches necessarily force Christianity to deny itself and become lost in nihilistic difference or supporting violent empires. Rather, Christianity is to be understood as Christendom, the *altera civitas*, which is the counter-empire that confronts the world with the truth.[439] This, though, is not a re-enactment of the caricatured Christendom of the Crusades, but what Milbank supposes to be the original vision of the church. Through the dying to self enacted in baptism, one enters the city of peace in which all divisions, such as nation and gender, are genuinely obliterated under a democracy guarded by a holy hierarchy.[440]

The discussion in chapter three suggested that Milbank misconstrues both theology and sociology to such an extent that the alternatives he presents bear only partial resemblance to reality. Given that this is the foundation for his presentation of the *altera civitas,* the feasibility of the project is questioned: if the postmodern and theological are not as easily defined as Milbank suggests, then where does that leave his vision? Milbank is not suggesting that the joining of Christendom is a sectarianism through which people become non-participative within society. On the contrary, Milbank suggests that Christendom will work with those people and groups who share some of their vision, namely, 'socialists, communists and anarchists.'[441] Herein lies the problem: this is less a theological position as it is a political reaction against nation state and Free Market governance, using theological discourse. Milbank takes the

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[437] Milbank, John, Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon, *Radical Orthodoxy*, John Milbank, Catherine Pinstock and Graham Ward (Eds.), (Abingdon and New York:Routledge,2003),187
[438] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 190-195
[439] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 210-211
Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 6, 380-381, 433
[440] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 128-129, 196
Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 6, 388, 432
[441] Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 210

Christian tradition and moulds it in such a way so as to create a myth, a meta-narrative that shows a city of peace as the alternative to a collapsed and violent world. Unfortunately, it requires an exceptionally selective reading of the Bible and Christian tradition to present this as the only feasible theological response to the postmodern. Whilst this does not prevent any form of participation in the world outside of 'the city', it does prohibit genuine interaction with other stories of the world, naming such an approach as inherently secular and, therefore, a denial of the incarnation.[442]

Whereas Ward presents a superficial form of participation through consumerism, here Milbank develops a strictly limited participation through the creation and propagation of a dominating meta-narrative. Whilst he is correct to critique arrogance and violence as it appears in the nation state and Free Market systems, he does so in such a way that uses the dominative and manipulative techniques that belong to the cynical versions of those very political entities he sets out to oppose. This, then, suggests that the existence of a singular, dominating meta-narrative can only be one of two things: a fantasy, and so leading to unreal participation, or a violent imposition, so repressing participation. Whilst all forms of self-construction have limits placed upon them from the various discourses and discourse practices in which they are engaged, the limit placed by Milbank is too narrow, emphasising theories of postmodern particularism to reassert an ecclesially-bounded form of theological anthropology. It appears strange to insist, whilst emphasising that Christianity is a religion of the incarnation, of God in flesh, that theology be seen as a private discourse that exists in contradiction to the secular. The *perichoresis* is not confined to the church, nor is its movement unidirectional from the world to the church. As institution, the church attends to, celebrates and makes known God's *perichoresis* that is present through the cosmos. Its call is not to escape the world, as if that were possible, but to witness to the potential of the world as God's, and to aid the world in its becoming. In doing so it participates in two ways: against the secular that would attempt to silence public theological discourse, and with the secular that is seeking the Good of the world.

What is being emphasised within this section, then, is the importance of attentiveness to participation. If personhood is considered to be universally given, then the exploration of

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[442] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 126

that sense of being is inexhaustible. However, if participation is the proper mode of that exploration, then one needs to be attentive to both its objects and practice. The above two examples of superficial and dominated participation demonstrate the ease with which it can be eroded or manipulated. Participation is attentiveness to one's biography and psychology, asking how that shapes perception. It is attentiveness to the goals and values of the institutions and politics that have moulded one's self and communities, often in unseen ways. It is attentiveness to the discourse of others, hearing their wants and needs, and learning to respond. It is attending to the levels of access given to others that they may participate in one's own self. Through attending to a participation that seeks the good of all, one implicitly begins to participate in God's *perichoresis* in creation. It is, though, only through attending to Christ's revealing of the *perichoresis* that one can begin to appreciate more fully one's anthropology as utterly dependent upon relation with God. This is not something that can be realised by accident, but only through proclamation and manifestation of the revelation in Jesus Christ. This emphasises the specific role of the church as that which attends to, celebrates and makes known the *perichoresis* of God in the cosmos, to which I shall now turn.

The Church and the Participative Self

I hope to have made clear that the participative self is a concept that is helpful for those who do not necessarily share commitment to Christianity. Having emerged from a constructivist-Lyotardian social theory, it is intended to act as a descriptor, providing a model of how identities are resourced, shaped and limited. Further, it is also a way of existing within this social reality that neither conforms to a dominant, singular meta-narrative, nor allows the self to be consumed by the fluidity of Free Market politics. Put simply, participation is a positive development of Lyotard, combining resistance with engagement. Whilst personhood is a universal given, and so unaffected by the behaviour or character of an individual or group, the deeper one's participation, the more deeply one is able to express this gift of personhood. However, this, as I have made clear from the beginning of this chapter, is to present only part of the model which has emerged, not only from social theory, but from its dialogue with the Christian tradition. The participative self is rooted within Trinitarian theology, and the two

cannot be separated because it is from the theological resources that personhood can be seen as a universal, irrevocable gift. Furthermore, through explicit participation within the *perichoresis* of God, human personhood is able to be expressed and explored more deeply than otherwise. This is not to suggest that without this explicit attention participation can only be superficial, as if the depth to which is being referred is dialectical rather than graduated. That said, it is only through explicit participation in God through Christ that one begins to realise the depths to which one can participate in self and the world. The church, then, as the body of people who have made explicit their movement in God through baptism, becomes a key partner to God and the world.

One word of caution is necessary before beginning this exploration of the role of the church regarding a participative anthropology. There is a great impetus being given at present to explore what is meant by 'theological reflection,' and particularly the role of the parish or local church as a vital habitus of such reflection.[443] The warning is not against this reflection *per se*, but rather that such emphasis is being placed on this at present, that theological reflection is in danger of becoming, not only the priority of the local church, but its very *raison d'etre*. There are two main reasons to suggest that a warning is necessary. First, the parish or local church is only able to resource theological reflection to a limited degree as it depends upon the knowledge and skills of those present. Further, even a Cathedral of Canon Theologians is limited, as local expression of theology is not simply based within a dialogue between locality and theology, but also with the tradition of the church catholic and the particular denomination. Exploration and reflection are certainly important, but so too, is remaining in theological communion with one's wider church, and so a parish or local church is only able to develop 'local theology' in a limited sense.

Second, to stress the development of local theologies is to run the risk of becoming prisoner to local culture, and seeing even less of the Kingdom of God than one would otherwise. Theological reflection is not the correlative middle ground between churches who are supposed to be either sectarian or state-controlled; in and of itself, it is simply a description of one of the elements of which any church is comprised. In this sense, theological reflection is

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[443] Church of England, The Archbishop's Council 2004, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 90-93, 104-105

present in all aspects of the life of the church and the disciples, but is so general a term as to be banal, and so of no help in attempting to understand the nature of theological anthropology.

The role of the church, with regards to the participative self, is that which attends to, celebrates and makes known the *perichoresis* of God in the cosmos. The latter of these three is prominent at the very beginning of the Christian journey, in baptism. Within this sacrament, the church proclaims, the candidate experiences, and the gathered congregation hear about the inseparability of life and *perichoresis*, being and relationship. The candidate is baptised, immersed into a life of participating in the relationship with God upon which their being is founded. It is an opportunity for the candidate to receive and share in those words of being God's child which Christ himself heard at his baptism, and so to share in Christ's identity. That is not to say that one's identity is lost at this point, as if replaced by some spiritual self. Rather, one is invited to seek after the identity of Christ and the whole company of heaven, and so learn to participate more fully in the *perichoresis* of God. This is what Fiddes means when he refers to the joining in with Christ's 'Amen' to the Father as the way to fuller participation in God, oneself and the world.

Having heard and responded to this good news, the baptised community are called to make it known, again sharing in the life of Jesus. This is the visible making known of universal personhood, treating others and oneself with the grace of the dance of God. It is to help others, and allow others to help oneself, in realising the *perichoresis* in which one is participating. This is to share in Christ's 'Amen' in all aspects of life, from familial and cordial encounters, to times of political and personal conflict, and even to the solitary darkness of Gethsemane. This is not a suggestion merely to copy Christ and the saints, but to realise the beauty inherent to one's shared life in the *perichoresis*: that in all elements of life, including dying and death, one's being is sustained by its relation to and in God. This does not bring about a transcendence of humanity for the participative self, as if fear and frailty simply melt away. That said, such a radical claim cannot but begin to transform the self by seeing the world for all of its possibilities. Such an orientation in God and for the world leads to the second role of the church as that of a place of celebration and lamentation.

To share in Christ's 'Amen' is to share in the celebration of, and lamentation over, the world that Jesus is shown to have within the gospels. It is the rejoicing of a life that has been re-oriented, however slightly, within the movement of God. It is the lamentation over greed that induces suffering. It is to glory in the beauty of creation, learn to harvest it for Good, and also to fear its unpredictability. In this sense, the church can be seen to have a priestly role, offering celebration or lament to God for oneself, and also those who are unable to do so. This is to take seriously the universality of personhood, that all persons are beings-in-relation to God and one another. Those who share in Christ's 'Amen' share, also, in God's presence with the joyful and joyless. Central to this role of the church is the Eucharist.

Holy Communion represents and enables the baptised to move deeper within Christ's 'Amen' and focus upon his 'Do this'. For David Ford this movement is central to the character of the church, showing that it is not simply an ethical code or worldview, but a corporate practice that has been held since its inception,[444] 'placing' oneself before Christ and with others.[445] Whereas all of the sacraments can be said to bring creation more deeply into the *perichoresis* of God, and therefore enabling deeper participation in oneself and others, it is the Eucharist which does so most intimately. Through the consecrated elements, Christ is understood to be figuratively or literally present as the Minister, giving of himself to those present. The communicants receive Christ, and so there is a heightening in the awareness of both God's movements within the self and the world, and therefore of one's own place within God. In being open to Christ's presence, one is also invited to attend to the way in which the whole company of heaven may also be present around the altar, joined in worship of Christ. In this sense, it can be said that there is a transcendence of conventional geo-temporality, so rich is the manifestation of the *perichoresis*.

In addition to the bringing together of the local and eschatological communities of faith, the ritual of the Eucharist draws attention to a third community: the faces of one's neighbours. In approaching the altar one is never alone, but accompanied by those present within one's memories. Holy Communion, then, becomes an important way of describing what is taking place as the world is gathered around its source. Such an understanding naturally leads to both

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[444] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 140
[445] Ford, *Self and Salvation*, 163

celebration and lamentation, for faces departed, still present and yet to come. At the Eucharist, the communicants receive not only for themselves, but as representatives of those who cannot receive, who are gathered around the altar in the memories and relationships of the communicants. By understanding the Eucharist in such a way, the church can be said to exhibit a priestly role, by bringing before God celebration for the world's goodness, concern over its potential and lament for its failures and disasters, thus demonstrating the priesthood that the whole church is called to embody on behalf of the world.

The final role of the church being highlighted here is that of bringing and sustaining public attention to the *perichoresis*. Whilst Milbank is correct in recognising the role the church has played since the Constantinian Settlement in forming society as it is today, he is wrong to reject liberal democracy as an atheistic travesty and to insist upon a re-formation of Christendom. It is simply not good enough to hold a vision of a 'City' that has never existed and insist that because liberal democracy cannot match such idealism it should be disregarded. Further, this is a ridiculous patronising of past social movements whose aims have been for the betterment of all people. Within liberal democracy there is a genuine attempt to respect all people, and to assume that they have both the capacity and the desire to seek for truth. To insist upon distinctive communities is not only, as Biggar says of Hauerwas, to prevent any 'evaluative engagement,'[446] but also to forget that such speech about nation state politics is only possible because of the commitment to free speech within a liberal democracy. For the church to participate officially in such a society is not to become atheistic but, as Elaine Graham and Stephen Lowe rightly point out, is to be so committed to a public vocation of citizenship[447] that they are willing to engage in power, not for their own sake, but in order to serve and empower others, especially the marginalised.[448]

This represents the final joining in with Christ's 'Amen', which has deepened to the priestly 'Do this', and now broadens to his command to 'Feast'. This is a theme, not only picked up by David Ford, but also by James Dunn. In *Jesus Remembered*, Dunn is emphatic about the

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[446] Biggar, *Saving the Secular*, 170
[447] Graham, Elaine, and Stephen Lowe, *What Makes a Good City: Public Theology and the Urban Church*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2009), 10
[448] Graham and Lowe, *What Makes a Good City,* 123-124

centrality an open table fellowship held for Jesus in the gospels.[449] During these times of sharing food and conversation, Dunn notes how he would eat with all people, including, and perhaps especially, those outside of the strict pharisaic purity laws.[450] For Dunn, this is demonstrative of the Jesus mission, and its importance can also be seen within the development of the concept of a participative self. Whilst at the table, Jesus ate and drank regardless of the behaviour of others,[451] which demonstrates the respect being shown to all people, further suggesting that all being is so because of its relationship with God. Throughout its history, the Christian tradition has followed the pattern of being hosted at, and being hospitable to, many tables around the world. In doing so, the Body of Christ has sat at both the small tables of marginalised people, as well as in palaces with the powerful. This is not the hypocrisy it might seem, but is the necessary outworking of the church's public attention to the *perichoresis* of God. When the church has not become lost in its own power struggles, its presence at these tables has brought about a greater awareness of the needy and has been able to bring about change for the good of all.

Publically attending to the movement of God ensures that the table the church had a stake in making remains open, so that people may sit together and face one another. It is not exclusively the role of the church to govern the rules of engagement at local, national and international levels, but owing to its explicit position in God, it should be a major stakeholder in the maintenance, development and delivery of justice. Even where the church is prevented from officially sitting at the table, it continues to have this role of insisting upon the common Good. It is not necessarily the role of the church to set up alternative political entities, but more often to learn to dwell in Jesus's invitation to all of humanity to 'Feast'. In order for this to be realised, the church is not called to an immovable dogmaticism, nor is it to give up its creed. Rather, as Biggar highlights, the church is called to share with all of humanity their common desire for truth, being confident enough to share from their own tradition, and willing to admit uncertainty or error when necessary.[452] Here, the church that attempts to engage with the

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[449] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 599, 605-606
[450] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 600
[451] Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 599-600
[452] Biggar, *Good Life*, 135

postmodern has a particularly prophetic role, not acting as public relations for the frail and tarnished public institutions, but to demonstrate the difference between resistance and apathy. If the self is going to be understood as being participative, then it must engage, not only in the personal and local, but also in the institutional, and the church is in a unique position to embody this.

In sum, I hope to have demonstrated that the church is much more than simply a place of theological reflection. Rather, the church is made up of those who explicitly attend to the *perichoresis* of God in themselves, their neighbours, and the world, so demonstrating the depth of participative selfhood. They do this by participating in Christ's 'Amen' to the Father, and so learn with the Saints what it means to live within the movements of God. Secondly, they begin to share in Christ's command to 'Do this' with the disciples, so realising a priestly role of the church that is able to offer celebration and lament to God on behalf of the world. Finally, there is a participation in Christ's invitation to the world to 'Feast'. This involves the attention to God's *perichoresis* in the political sphere of social life, from attention to the dynamics of a family and locality, to serving the common Good within the complexities and ambivalencies of the liberal democratic state. This is hoped to have made clear that whilst all human participation is an expression of divinely-given personhood, to recognise it as a movement in God and a sharing in Christ is to more fully engage in its rhythm within oneself and the world.

Theological and Postmodern?

The aim of this thesis was to consider the extent to which theological and postmodern discourses could be considered to be dialogue partners by focusing this primary-level question within the secondary-level manifestation of anthropology. Whilst it is clear that the secondary-level dialogue has resulted in the suggestion of an anthropology that is theological, is it really postmodern? The concept insists upon the cosmos being dependent upon God, which has the danger of delegitimizing other human discourses. Can this really be sustained without an enforced totalising, or resorting to a Radical Orthodox position that has been so criticised throughout this work? My answer to this is a gentle but emphatic 'Yes.' To suggest a universal personhood existing in relationship with God, in the way that has been done above, is to offer

an understanding of anthropology that is both permissive and prescriptive. It is permissive in that the person is free, within the relations and limits of their psycho-social situation, to develop in complete ignorance of God, or before a false or partial image of God. However, it is prescriptive in suggesting that, because it understands being to be dependent upon God's movement in oneself, then participation, as one's movement in self and world, is an appropriate way of expressing identity. It then moves one step further in its prescription by stating that participation is more deeply expressed and intimately experienced when seen as engaging in the movement of God in the cosmos. This second prescription does not separate out those of faith, as the two continue to participate together toward the same ends. This is not merely to say that agreement is not necessary for joint participation in the world, but that dialogue and difference are themselves an expected and necessary component of participative living, which is why sustaining the open table is central to attending to God's movement. This leads to the conclusion that the participative self can be considered to be the result of a fair dialogue between a Lyotardian-constructivist postmodern discourse and an open-narrative theology.

Through attention to one specific example, this thesis has also aimed to demonstrate that theological and postmodern discourses are formed alongside, and in dialogue with, one another. Whilst this does not, and should not, prevent development of a specific tradition, it encourages such development to take account of dialogue partners from outside the immediate discourse limits, as well as those who played a part in the formation of that tradition. The method locates similar or disparate discourses within a question, to which both have attended, so beginning a focussed form of Tracy's critical correlation. The aim of this method is not to syncretise the disciplines, but to bring carefully-defined discourses together around a specific question, so as to interpret what one believes to be commonality and difference. It is vital to identify a number of sources from within each of the two disciplines, so that before entering into dialogue a surveillance of each field has been carried out and the key proponents and themes have been recognised. Not to attend to this stage is to run the risk of presenting a superficial understanding of at least one of the discourses, and so negating the purpose and results of the dialogue.

The method had one further dimension, which attended to how the question was approached through practice. This was carried out according to a form of grounded theory, in which four leaders of different church groups were interviewed. The questions they were asked were judged to be constitutive of the larger question, which allowed an exploration of the spoken and practised theologies shared by the participants. Transcripts being of a different form of discourse to that of articles and books, it would not have been appropriate to construct a direct discussion between the interpretation of transcripts and of academic monograms. Rather, the interpretation of the transcripts highlighted a set of themes that were common to the four participants which provided key focal points around which the discussion could be developed.

The result of this discussion, given the tight word limit and nature of a doctoral thesis, is of a partially-formed concept. Whilst the sharing in Christ's 'Amen', 'Do this' and 'feast' are helpful summaries of a participative response to, and exploration of, a theological and postmodern personhood, they require a further elucidation and elaboration that is beyond the limits of this thesis. In particular more development should be spent on how participating in the Saints equips and encourages these three elements of participation, and whether that differs from participating in other forms of classical humanity. More attention should also be paid to the nature of participating in Christ's invitation to 'Feast', developing a public theology that would take seriously the potential and wisdom already present within liberal democratic systems, institutions and citizens. Such a move would be to resist any Christian idealism regarding either the State or the Church, and attempt to continue to engage the Christian tradition with the reality of the political world.

A final result of the discussion and method employed, to relay back to the very beginning of this thesis, is to suggest that much research currently being carried out in and upon 'Fresh Expressions' of church is doing so in a way that will provide very little fruit. Discussions about multimedia worship, network relationships, coffee shops and art exhibitions are a superficial engagement with what these groups represent: a practical expression and exploration of what it means to hold in tension and dialogue the commonalities and idiosyncrasies of theological discourse with the discourses of one's socio-cultural setting. With a

particularly sharp question, there is a great deal to learn from the actions and aims of these groups, but this must go beyond the surfaces of patronisingly evaluating them on the criteria of being original or relevant. As Participant A stated in her first interview,

> [W]e can make church a cafe, but at the end of the day other people do cafes better than we do. So what is it we do...? Erm... we can be a poor relation of Starbucks, or we can actually share what we really have, which is Christ.[453]

Equally, research upon and with these groups needs to be more than a review of their Public Relations effectiveness. It is hoped that this small research project represents a move away from such approaches to a more serious consideration. Churches that operate in this way exemplify the dialogical character of the church universal, as well as all disciples, formed as they are by a wide array of theological and non-theological discourses.

Having argued that the participative self can be considered both postmodern and theological, what, then, can be said about the primary-level dialogue it represents? First, it has demonstrated that postmodern and theological discourses, being human discourses, have a great deal of commonality in their observing of the world and questioning of justice and truth. Further, an open-narrative approach to theology shares the postmodern incredulity toward single, dominating meta-narratives. Such is the directness of this connection between the two discourses, that it is possible to say that one need not equate postmodern discourse with nihilism. Whilst the work of Jean Baudrillard reveals the inherent dangers of a hyper-real culture, it need not be understood as a literal and authoritative description of the postmodern. Through the presentation of Baudrillard, Harvey, Bauman and Lyotard, postmodern discourse has been shown to be much more complex and dialogical than is often supposed by theologians such as John Milbank and NT Wright. In turn, this does not lead to seeing theology as a private discourse, but rather as one discourse among many within the dialogues that form selves and societies. Through being brought into dialogue with one another, then, distinctions about both discourses can be seen more clearly, and unfair caricatures criticised.

What can also be said is that, in a Lyotardian framework, theology can become a key discourse in the attempt to present the marginalised and unpresentable forms of knowing and

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being, so rich, varied and (antagonistically) different is its current and historical embodiments. Whilst theological discourse has a tendency to totalise its own doctrines, the reality of its existence (at best seen as multi-faceted, at worse, schismatised) suggests there is as much evidence of resistance to domination within ecclesial institution and development as there is conformity and dogmatism. This is not to suggest the church as a model of how to handle and present difference, but to demonstrate the limit and the depth of theological discourse. A Lyotardian critique shows that theology, as a human endeavour, is limited and partial in its speaking of God, self and the world, and so cannot be totalised without violence. Alongside this, its breadth and depth, having been conceived within so many geo-temporal contexts, is a clear example of the commitment of theological discourse to attempting to present the unpresentable and marginalised. As well as demonstrating the distinctiveness of each discourse, dialogue resources new ways of understanding, exhibiting and developing the two discourses in ways that may otherwise be unthinkable.

All this, however, is not to say that theological and postmodern discourses are completely coterminous. Whilst as projects they can be considered to occupy similar questions, their investigations and answers are governed by specific discourse rules and particular vocabularies; it cannot be said that they mean the same thing. 'Postmodern theology', or 'theological postmodern discourse,' as terms, mean very little, as they totalise (rather ironically) conversations that belie such a neat presentation. In their questioning, however, they certainly occupy much of the same space, and it is in this sense that they may be considered coterminous. Postmodern and theological discourses are important dialogue partners for one another, simply because the questions being asked within each discourse are suitably sharp so as to be of profound significance to the other. This is because they bring into question assumptions that have both formed, and continue to sustain, either discourse. Both claim to be anti-totalitarian, and yet, when not in dialogue, but rather extolling the dangers of one another's claims, they blindly become the totalities they claim to fear and loathe. What has been demonstrated within the habitus of anthropology is that dialogue, it would seem, is a vital method in resourcing the development of theological and postmodern discourses. Any attempt

to progress without it not only limits the intended development, but also is in danger of undermining the integrity of either discourse.

Conclusion

This thesis began with an outline narrative of the research project. It explained that, in seeking to understand a possible difference between the spoken and operative theologies of Emerging Church and Fresh Expression groups, I began to realise that these groups embodied a debate much larger and wider than had been previously realised. By engaging with the anthropology communicated by the leaders of four of these groups, I was able to observe in the transcripts the extent to which this concept was influenced by both theological and postmodern discourses. The themes that made up this anthropology were then employed as organising focal points that developed the same discussion taking place within academic literature. What emerged was both an anthropology that had been constructed from a dialogue between postmodern and theological discourse, as well as an understanding that (in this instance at least) the two discourses could be considered to be appropriate dialogue partners.

This suggests that Fresh Expression and Emerging Church groups are engaging in the same questions regarding postmodern and theological discourse as authors within academic settings. To focus solely upon the missiological and ecclesiological practises of such groups, as previous studies have done, is to ignore the creative and far-reaching discussions that are taking place within and through these groups. They present a resource from their own practise which embodies the discussions also taking place within academic literature. Particularly striking, is the way in which these groups take seriously the notion that theology is a dialogical discourse that originated, and continues to develop, in dialogue with other discourses. In this sense, theology is explored by these groups, with reference to both the Christian theological tradition, as well as to its current philosophical, socio-political and scientifically-informed context. Engagement with practical and academic resources, and carefully bringing them into discussion, has the potential to move thinking in creative and original directions.

Five issues have arisen through this study that require further thinking and research: the study of Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church groups, the method that brings together practical groups and academic literature, the concept of the participative self, the suitability of postmodern and theological discourses as dialogue partners, and the nature of theology. Within the remit of this particular thesis, it would be helpful to return to the initial hypothesis

concerning the disparity between spoken and operative theology. Rather than a small-scale, in-depth research project that focuses upon interviews, the design of this project would probably be more suitable as an engagement with a much wider number of groups through questionnaires, using a Likert-scale design. This would allow for the measurement of the broad trends of operative and spoken theology throughout the movement upon a scale of open and closed theological interaction with culture.

It would also be helpful to use the themes[454] that have emerged from the analysis of this project to formulate the questions. So long as the design was suitably rigorous, then two issues would be able to be explored. First, if the themes that emerged within the qualitative stage of 'the participative self' are present within other groups, then I would want to ask in what way they might be connected to the attitudes of the participants toward society and institutions, and the limits they place upon personal faith. Second, if a disparity between spoken and operative theology is observable, then the project would ask whether this, too, is linked to the groups' societal attitudes and understanding of faith. This part of the project would also be able to ask how the participant groups engage with literature, and why certain authors are favoured over others. Whatever the findings, it is hoped that this would be a very helpful study in understanding Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church groups that will move them away from their current caricature of being either the hope or the bane of the church.

Moving beyond the immediate limits of this thesis, the method and the concept of anthropology require further exploration. If treated together, they could make up a very interesting piece of research that would focus upon the way in which church attendees understand how they are participating in God, themselves and others (if at all) through the seven sacraments and funeral services of the church. If each of the eight services were treated as separate studies, then this research would engage with a wide variety of people, which would draw in an ethnographic element to the project. For example, those attending Communion Services tend to be more regular than those attending a funeral which, by its very nature, is an unrepeatable event which is used by a far wider number of people than those who attend regular services.

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[454] The themes being: truth as heuristic, sacramental view of the cosmos and human cultures, and belonging as participation.

This large-scale project would enable a deeper discussion about the concept of the participative self with respect to the role of the church, and because the sacraments and funerals deal with the whole gamut of life, each study would draw out particular elements about participative anthropology. A critical moment to this project would be the study of penance and confession-absolution, as one of the key understandings of participative anthropology is the universality of personhood as a gift that is irrevocably bestowed upon all: to be is to be in relation with God. Participation is, therefore, the way in which one explores or uses that gift; when there has been misuse or apathy, then penance may serve as a way of remembering personhood as gift and seeking how to explore that through the discipleship of the Christian tradition. Central to this particular part of the study would be an engagement with those who would see personhood as developmental, therefore something which can be gained or lost, rather than a universal and irrevocable given which can be abused or enjoyed. A study of people's engagement with penance would allow the difference between these two positions to be explored with reference to the discourse of both church attendees and academic literature. This study, therefore, has great potential to explore in greater detail the method suggested within this thesis as well as to develop the concept of participative anthropology.

The fourth theme to emerge, the extent to which postmodern and theological discourses can be considered to be suitable dialogue partners, can be further explored by locating this discussion within different contexts. Whereas other doctrinal concepts may be obvious choices, such as creation and salvation, they may prove to have too much overlap with anthropology so as to present anything new to the discussion. However, there are less obvious locations that may allow a more fruitful dialogue. Locating the dialogue within art, for example, would allow me to draw upon postmodern and theological understandings of the sublime and how it is expressed or experienced. A second location would be that of economics, asking what would emerge from a dialogue between postmodern and theological conceptualisations. This would be particularly helpful in assessing the truth of the oft-claimed relationship between postmodernity and Free Market expansion, and whether the only theological engagement to be had is critique from an alternative position, as with Milbank and Hauerwas.

The two locations of art and economics engage with a very different set of concepts and languages to that of anthropology, and so will shed different light upon the wider issue of the suitability of postmodern and theological discourses as dialogue partners. Further, it will also move the discussion away from a direct contact with the church and Christian doctrine (although the church as group, tradition and institution would remain to have a presence within the dialogue), involving participants from groups that are not necessarily church-based. By focussing upon specific locations of this dialogue, I would hope to be able to further demonstrate what has begun within this thesis: that when carefully defined, postmodern and theological discourses are important dialogue partners that enable fruitful, creative insights into the subject at hand, as well as into one another.

The final theme to emerge will be attended to throughout the projects mentioned so far, but will also require a piece of work in its own right. As the projects explore participative selfhood, theological and postmodern dialogue and the method of bringing together practical and academic resources, a view of theology as a discourse whose origin and development necessarily relies upon non-theological discourses will be espoused and explored. However, this understanding of theology will not be fully understood unless it becomes the focus of a study in its own right. The nature of theology to emerge from the other studies will likely revolve around the primacy of reception over revelation: that whatever may be said to be revelation, will always be perceived and communicated within a psycho-social construct, so 'received'. The question to be explored, then, revolves around the way in which 'reception' shapes the nature and claims of theology. Whilst a great deal of work needs to take place before beginning to construct this particular project, it is worth noting this as one of the major goals of the studies being suggested. Both the presence of this issue, and my own engagements with particular authors on this subject (particularly Schleiermacher, Barth, Tracy and Rowan Williams), will shape the above projects.

Even at this most conceptual level, however, engagement between the practical and academic will be fundamental to reaching a satisfactory conclusion. As with this thesis and all of the studies being suggested, a critical dialogue between one's analysis of the practical and academic resources serves to enrich one's understanding of the presenting concept in a way

that would be otherwise impossible. Whilst this method certainly does not de-centre the professional theologian from theological development, it does seek to empower the voices of those in non-academic contexts to have a vital role in shaping the discourse that is as important to them as it is to the academic theologian. Further, it recognises the non-theological voices that are, and always have been, necessary for theological articulation and development. This, surely, is the hope of practical and public theology: not that theology would be mercantilised and so judged upon its supposed usefulness for specific groups, but that it would ensure the locus of theology to remain in public as the possession of all of those seeking faith and understanding.

Appendix A

Participant A, Interview 1

Right... OK, I'm happy to take part in this and be recorded.

Thank you... Right, we'll just go through these questions.... So, yeah... what in your opinion's the primary calling of the church?

Ooh, I suppose at the end of the day, it's what it always has been: to like, spread the good news to, erm... the problem of death, to introduce people to the person of Christ, to be a passionate community of believers, to be a taste of the kingdom of God... erm... and probably lots of other things as well, but they seem to be the main ones.

So, in your opinion, it's an outward focussed...

Well, yes, they're linked, that, we need to be a strong community, we needs to support one another, but, erm... erm... that's kind of, we still need to, we don't exist for ourselves, we exist for the kingdom, not for the church, so I'm more interested in the kingdom of God than in the church as an institution, if that makes sense, but the church as an institution bears the kingdom of God... to a greater or lesser extent... it tries to, anyway.

Ho... can I be a bit naughty... how would you define the kingdom of God?

Erm... right, OK... that's an interesting question... erm... it's kind of like the realm and rule of Christ on earth, a new society, the transformation of everything, all creation, the planet, and we cannot do that on our own, we're kind of just doing partial workings toward that ultimate transformation, of new heavens, new earth, a grand new society, political heaven, heaven as a nation state as well as a fluffy state... a physical state.

Thank you, that's really helpful... so while we're on definitions, how would you define postmodern culture in England?

Ooh, lovely, erm... I suppose my first thought on that is that there's no such thing as culture 'singular' anymore, it's multiple cultures, erm... I suppose it's like, kind of, a cynical, morphing, shifting, shaping, sea of insecurity and lack of certainty, is how I would define it. But as soon as you think you've grasped it, it morphs into something else.

Would you say... would you be able to give me any examples of how that's manifest in the local communities that you're involved in?

Erm... I suppose initially, like when ⎯⎯⎯⎯ first started, we were working in the dance culture, and there was a lot of morphing and shifting, and a lot of people that we worked with then... are now, erm... at more, I suppose, at a more family-orientated stage, and they might have been into trance music, techno music, they're probably more into ambient music, world music these days. Erm... so that's just kind of

one example of shifting culture. But actually, the whole society thing generally... the main society focus of society... I mean, musically, we, we had records, and CD's, and MP3's, and now everything's just speeding up, and it's the same with every aspect of culture... television...we thought we'd got television sussed for about thirty years, and now it's turning into multiple screens... of downloadable content, or digital boxes, or DVDs, or you know, we might have gone past that, high definition... so suddenly, even television isn't one thing... you thought you knew it, you thought you knew what it was, erm... and people had shared experiences of what watching television was like, when even that is not the same anymore.

That's really... that's really interesting... erm... so... what's your aim in engaging with local postmodern culture, or cultures?

Right, I suppose it's the same as engaging with another culture...to offer a sense of rootedness in a rootless world. And the comfort of a sense of eternal truth, whilst resisting that sort of cultural baggage and abuse of power that puts many people off. So it's sort of getting beyond the institution, and the walls of the institution, and the concept of power figures and control, and all those things that people are very suspicious of these days, and into... erm... transcendence and experience, erm... and, erm... certainly with   the service, with a capital 'C', er... capital 'T', that's what they get really, and that's why we've been going for very ancient chants, and very... it's a concepts of liturgy, and movement, and ritual, and candles, and ancient buildings, and a lot of things that other people have chucked out we're bringing back because it brings that sense of rootedness, whilst giving people choice... like, for example, with prayer activities, or whatever, they can wander round the building, and interact with what they want to interact with. But we're not telling them, you must do this, or you must pray this way at this point... there's freedom as well within that. But yeah, the thing that seems to be striking people is the rootedness, this ancient, this ancient thing. Which is quite interesting.

So I guess, that would be part of the answer to the next question. Are there any theological motifs or parts of the Bible.....?

Erm, interesting... I hadn't spotted the theological motifs bits, I think, I think I've started to be quite drawn to the ancient creeds really, as ways of explaining things, and interpretations of those creeds... erm... but actually the gospels, and the stories within the gospels, from a biblical point of view, telling the stories to those who don't know it... the power of story, and the transformative power of story, and avoiding the... kind of... old school, er... Enlightenment proof texts taken out of context and to persuade, which doesn't seem to work as well in our culture these days.

So when you... giving people those stories, what is your... kind of, aim... what is your hope as they engage with those stories?

That they meet Christ, really, and I think they do. Erm... and I suppose, the way we use those stories are... well, yeah we might use standard Bible readings, but we also... we also re-write things in story form, music, meditation, that sort of thing, so that people can enter into that story and be a part of that story and be a part of the experience... and also within creative prayer, and ritual... to be able to express touching the hem of his garment, or something like that, within a prayer activity... erm... say, writing

and pinning it to a robe, or something like that.... So it becomes more than just auditory, it becomes multi-sensory, and works on different levels.

Would you ever relate, erm... either in your thinking or in your practice... relate those stories to a big story, erm... in the Bible, or do you not see that?

Like a Salvation meta-narrative?

Well, that would be one example, yeah. Would you ever do that, or is that something that doesn't really click with you?

Would we? We might do, I don't think we have, but that's not to say that. I mean, hopefully all the pieces will fit and relate to that grand scheme of things, but, it's... I suppose it's too much to cover in any one service... it's not that we don't believe it, it's just... how on earth do you... do you tackle something that big when you've only got an hour. One thing we are thinking of doing next year is... the crucifixion narrative... and going and doing a set of multi-sensory stations across and around town outside as art that people can visit... and just engaging with that is a big project as a larger narrative... erm... never mind like the whole salvation history, just the Easter story is actually quite large.

Hmm, so how do you, same question, how do you communicate it in churches who are more resistant in churches than you are?

I think again, erm... it's the stories of the gospels, and the Christ who is willing to engage with those who, erm... traditional religious structures we're not engaging with. I suppose it's easier, because the people already in the church already know, erm... so you can just point and hint, but you remember this bit when he... yeah... so, yeah, erm... the crucial texts are all there really within what Christ did, and I'd say that more and more the church is starting to realise that, out of desperation...

Erm... do you think postmodernism has changed your understanding of Christian faith?

Erm... I don't think it has, changed my understanding of my core of Christian beliefs. What I think it changes is the language I use, or the clothes I dress my faith in, or the way I present it or approach it. It doesn't change the core.

Do you want to give me an example of that?

Erm... hmm... that's interesting... erm... it's kind of such gradual journey, that it's hard to think what did we used to do that we know longer do... erm... I suppose, once upon a time we would have, in our very early days of [*group*], we'd have half an hour of dance music, and then twenty, thirty minute talk, and people would sit there and listen to a sermon and then there would be some prayer, and although the music and visual bit was funky and artistic and different, we soon realised that that approach didn't work, erm... and if the content of the teaching we now present might basically say the same thing, but it will be presented in story form, and in a creative prayer form, and any verbal input would only last five minutes, ten minutes absolute max, erm... but there will be other forms of input, words on the TV's, so there will be multiple forms, multiple pieces of a jigsaw, creating the same overall message or piece of

meaning. It will just be a very different way of doing it. Personally, I think it's way more effective than a twenty or thirty minute sermon where you should have stopped after the first ten.

Erm, so what is your greatest hope as leader of this, kind of, group?

Erm... I suppose that people would get it. You know, that the kingdom would grow, that the church would revitalise the country and, you know, society itself would be transformed because people would be less selfish... they wouldn't be out for themselves, but out for worshipping God within their daily lives, and worshipping... and serving Christ through each other, and through the world around, so that the world around would be a better place to be. Because, erm... who was it that said, you know, the church, the organisation actually exists for others rather than itself, or it should be. Erm... yeah, I would like to be a part of that really, I think. Erm...

Hmm, so what's your most constant frustration?

Err... lack of publicity. It's all very well doing something new, and radical, and different, but if people don't know you exist you can't get very far. Erm... and actually, even within our own Diocese and Churches that's true, so even getting the word out and saying, 'Hello we're here,' never mind outside, `cos again you're frustrated by... publicity and the means to get... I suppose, the word out to people that this might be something they might want to come to. And even if they see a flier for a service that looks new and radical... unless they've actually experienced something... why would they come? Erm... it's like, oh yes, OK, this is just like, the same old thing in new clothes, or whatever. And I suppose it's not helped by the fact I'm not very good at admin and publicity... erm. So er, yeah, it's not my most fun job. Yes, that can be frustrating. Particularly frustrating when you meet people in your own Diocese, who are clergy, who do receive things on mailings and say, 'ooh, what's   , I've never heard of that.' Ohh, it's like, 'Are you new?' 'No, we've only being going for seventeen years,' or something scary. So, yes, that can be just a little bit frustrating.

I can see why that would be. What would be your greatest fear?

Erm... I suppose on... on... on a small level, the drying up of community members, and, and, funds that are kind of fizzing away, you have to have a body. You can't do it as a single person, you need a little community, and kind of losing our community, and losing members... there's constant turn over as people move on in life stages, particularly in the younger adult bracket. But if that didn't get replenished, and funds dried up, then we just couldn't do what we do. Erm, on a bigger level, I suppose perhaps the greatest fear is the death of the church in the UK, but I don't think that will happen. Erm, I think worst case scenario, some parts of the institutional church will die, some denominations might die, but, I think, ultimately, I think the church will continue, even if it has to do so on a small scale with smaller communities of believers... but then it might be leaner and meaner and healthier and more effective on a, local level. Err, so, yeah.

Do you ever... erm... do you ever have a time of questioning what you do. Maybe something's happened, why am I doing what I'm doing?

I think constantly... you have to constantly, because we plan services as creative entities, and yes we might have a plan A, and a structure which seems to work better, because... erm... because it's free to change at any time then, yeah, we're constantly trying different things... is this working, why am I doing this... and so there's something we've ditched... over the time, or something's have their season so, er... we'd have a labyrinth, we'd have a labyrinth once a month, and that would be... it was a good thing and we appreciated it at the time, but it, then it served its day... it had a moment when it's time to move on and do something different, because we'd done too much of it.... And it had lost it's... kind of... power, through familiarity and so... at some point, we might go back to that. And constant cultural changes and... like... structural changes, and I suppose, yeah, sometimes I think, you know, would I be more effective as a trad. vicar in a trad. church and look at all these lovely people we'd have coming every week. But then I look at the people we've got, you know, erm... in kind of normal   services, we might only get twenty-odd, I look around and I see members of those twenty-odd, quite a proportion wouldn't be going to church at all otherwise, therefore would have dropped out of the system all together, and that's quite encouraging. And then the whole [*other Church*] thing, that's immensely encouraging, because then you actually get the joy of having a large crowd, big numbers, and all that. The buzz that comes with that... I think. But yeah, constant, constant question and changing, tweaking. I think there's an immense pressure, actually, from the church to all kind of small emerging missional communities, to grow, to reap a harvest, to get numbers in... erm, because, I suppose, we have to justify our existence to a certain extent. But also, I think, it's... I think everybody's getting it... it's just maybe a slight panic, that... erm... that new... again new members on a much larger scale aren't coming up and in to replace those who are dying off... off of the top end.

Alright, go on to a cheery note. Erm... tell us a story about the work you do.

Well, I thought... this is a kind of second-hand one, but it so completely encouraged me... erm... and it's a story of a house brick. It's a story of a bloke who's converted by a house brick. Er, and it was so, er... it was something we did in one of our services that made its way into the multi-sensory handbook. And it was stuff about burdens and refreshments. And that idea was you took... you thought about what burdens you were carrying, and it was... erm... represented by a house brick, and it was deposited at the foot, er... at the foot of this, er... you sort of carried toward the foot of this cross, and deposited it, and then there was water, and we were invited to take a drink of water as a symbol of God's refreshment. Any... erm... anyway, somebody who was a vicar in a church, in, I think, Bradford, did it at his church. He had a visitor who, at the end of it, erm... basically, at the end of it, after he'd experienced it, basically, said, you know, that's my life down there and, when he deposited that house brick, he really did put his whole life at the foot of the cross, and a transformative moment happened in that person's life, and that was just, like, completely thrilling, especially, if you think about all this hard work and high technology, and at the end of the day, somebody's converted by a house brick.

That's brilliant. And so does that... thinking... tell me a bit more about [the other Church], and what that is...

is a monthly multimedia Mass in [*Cathedral*], and we've deliberately billed it as a Mass, because we want to go for the, kind of, Anglo-catholic feel. Erm... it's, it's got all of the high technology, and DJ-ing, and visuals, and... er... but it's also got creative prayer in it, there's quite often an element of movement, and pilgrimage as part of the service, of going to some part of the building, and interacting with prayer activities, in some way, and actually using the space and the building by night to... and erm... drawing upon, I suppose, the strengths and... and the tradition, the Anglo-Catholic tradition... so there will be robes, there will be incense, there'll be candles, procession, movement, a sense of mystery, a sense of awe, as part of it. And also, drawing in, I suppose one of the really exciting things has been drawing in the [*Cathedral's*] strengths, along with our strengths, and mixing it up together, really, and one of the [*Cathedral's*] great strengths, and its biggest, is actually the building, and what a stunning resource that is. Because so many people say (I did my MA research) that the [*Cathedral*] itself is a sacred place to them, even people that were atheist said, erm... it has this effect on people when they come in, and it seems to attract spiritual seekers like magnet, which is really interesting. But the other strength, it has the liturgical strengths... we have the Precentor working with us on the liturgy, so, there's somebody who actually helped write Common Worship helping us to plan what we're doing, and... and, because, er... because of his great liturgical knowledge, you have that depth of knowledge, you know how to, to work stuff to its best, its best vantage and to, to play with it, it's not quite concrete any more. It's clay, you can mould it, and use it to its best. And also the choristers, some of the songmen come and sing, erm... and so you have this really interesting formulation, sometimes, one minute you might have a DJ with music, and next minute's someone might be singing a Psalm. And there's this moment, where a plainchant, where people go, 'Is that live, or is it pre-recorded?' And there's this moment where you realise that this perfectly gorgeous voice that's floating over the acoustics, is actually standing in the corner, singing it on the fly. It's been quite incredible really... the range of people that it's attracted, and the range of backgrounds, and ages as well, it would have been the sort of thing that, on the face of it, a lot of youth workers would have said, 'No way would that attract teenagers,' and yet... erm... some people have bringing their youth groups because... they love it. And it's quite interesting, `cos I've been asking someone, you know, 'Can you... can I quiz the kids on what they like about it, and which bits they're grabbed by?' And she came back to me and said...erm, 'They're not really sure, but they just think it's really cool and trendy, and they like it, and they don't know why.' Which is really interesting, and yet, at the other end of the scale, there can be, er... retired people who are also deeply affected by... and it seems to be touching people at different levels, and from totally different church backgrounds. It amazes me that, like, there's this one person who's ex-Brethren who's totally blown away by it... but also, and also the Anglo-Catholics are really happy too, and the Charismatics and Evangelicals, who are normally into more informal stuff, and also the random tourists, who've seen a flier or someone plugging in the lights and have decided to come along. It's really interesting. And I suspect it's something to do with this power of something which is ancient and yet... renewed, because it's approachable. And I think some people really relate to the ancient and some to the renewed.... hmmm.

That's really interesting. We could talk lots about that, but I'm not going to. Are there any particular authors who've influenced you, your view of church, of mission?

Hmm. I think, in the past I've been very influenced by Len Sweet, and by, erm... particular at a time, I think it was in the late 90's, when we were feeling a bit, erm... saggy and tired, and why were we doing what we were doing. And I, erm... went to a conference that was very helpful, but also he talked, erm... I quite liked his book, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, where he talked, erm... about the epic, I think he's talked about in other books too, and I've just found it was something I related to very easily... the way he describes stuff, I thought, 'Aha, yeah, that's what we do,' and that's a really nice way of describing, the experiential, participatory, image-based, connected... made a lot of sense... So I've found him quite useful. And also, not only as describing what we were but therefore, where we're going, what's the next step, how can we morph and change. And I suppose, more recently, it's been Stephen Cotterell, actually, I've found him immensely inspiring. Erm.. I really loved his model of church as being holy, catholic and apostolic. Which are... they're, kind of, very trad. words... and yet... the way he described them, that basically... er... in order to be an effective missional presence, you need to be holy, you need to be connected to God... you need to be catholic in that, you need to be connected to each other... and, apostolic, in that you need to be connected to the world. And if any one of those three, and he drew a diagram with, like three circles, like the symbol of the trinity... and if anyone of those three were missing, then you're basically squiffy, and out of kilter, and you're ineffective... and so, it was a very good way, I found, of looking at ourselves and saying, 'OK, where are we squiffy, where are we...' `cos I think it's natural to weigh yourselves into one of those corners if you're not careful... and ignore a different part of that triangle. So, er... yeah, I found him immensely inspiring. And... er... I've been on a few committee meetings with him, and, yeah, each time, he sort of makes me feel just a little bit uncomfortable and yet, ever such a lot inspired, which I think is ever such a good combination, `cos you end up looking at yourself and thinking, 'A-ha, I need to work on that bit, or we really need to think about this to get more missional,' so, yeah , really inspiring author.

Hmm, yeah, thanks. You know, you've mentioned quite a lot of erm... traditional terminology and traditional practice... are you from a traditional background?

Erm... originally, yes, I was. Originally, I grew up in Rome and then, erm... stomped off. Erm... and, kind of, stripped it all down, and kind of, got rid... an awful lot of it, and went very ultra-evangelical, and then quite alternative, in that it stripped out that stuff as well. I mean, still very biblical, erm... but in recent years, actually, I've been moving more towards the ancient stuff, because I've realised that it is more missional than people think it is. I think we've probably chucked out the baby with the bathwater. I think it does actually speak to people. I think sometimes, I dunno, we can make church a cafe, but at the end of the day other people do cafes better than we do. So what is it we do...? Erm... we can be a poor relation of Starbucks, or we can actually share what we really have, which is Christ. So yeah, it was interesting. I mean, in the   journey we chucked out liturgy, for instance, altogether, liturgical prayers and just had songs and talk, and actually, people coming in were expressing... in some way a need to say something, but they hadn't got the words. They hadn't got the words so they needed liturgy because they needed words to say... erm... and that was intriguing... and so, actually, we brought it back, because we realised that throwing it out didn't work. What... what... needed to be done was the dust blowing off it, and it.... being, I suppose reborn and renewed and, erm... relevant.

That's really helpful, thank you. I'm just going to switch this off....

Participant A, Interview 2

I'm fine with being recorded...

The things that people are saying are getting more and more relaxed... right... OK, so what I'd just like you to do is just describe what happens when you gather together...

For worship?

For worship

So we're talking public worship on a Sunday?

Yeah, if you meet on a Sunday... but, I mean, not just what you do on a Sunday... at different times as well.

It might vary a bit...

That's fine...

Well, let's pick a Sunday... yeah, people sort of wander in... they don't necessarily come on at the start time. They might come in earlier to set things up, they might come in after the start time... so it's a drift, it's a gradual drift and head for the coffee and the biscuits and the cakes, and cakes seem to be appearing more often. And at the appointed time the service starts, or possible five minutes afterwards, erm... erm... it's a little bit flexible, the service will start and someone will gather and welcome people officially, but actually, generally, people have been chatting to people more, and more, and more, and more in the groups before then. Erm... and, yes, so that would be how our public worship would start... and then, depending on whether it would be a Communion Service or not a Communion Service, then different things would then happen. If it was a Communion Service, er... there's a fair amount of liturgy and some singing goes on... some creative prayer, some discussion... sometimes we'll have a little talk, but it won't be a long talk... it might be a meditation, it might be a story, but quite often the discussion is figuring more than it used to... but yeah, people are discussing stuff more than they used to, and it might feedback, or we might just leave that to the groups. But, erm... that would be traditionally what would be called the Ministry of the Word, erm... but we just chat and study the Bible and things. Erm... we follow the Lectionary, erm... which makes forward planning easier, and also feels like we've got a connection to the wider church, and if people visit, and if they've got a familiarity, if we've got visiting Celebrants, they'll, erm... know where we're coming from, and where we're going to, and what the theme is. Erm... yeah, and then we'll move onto the Sacrament. In normal   Services it's tended to be pared down to the absolute bare minimum to remain legal, but there are other things that might get plugged in... sort of poetic stuff, erm... [*The other Church*] is a completely different kettle of fish... probably best to tackle that completely separately. Erm...   Services have been going for about two years now in [*the Cathedral*], and because we're reaching out to a different crowd, in a different building, and it's a fresh expression of [*the Cathedral*], erm... culturally it's different. We have

actually introduced the coffee beforehand, and that was a result of dilemma, in that we did want to have coffee, but by nine pm it was too late, but we were a little bit worried about the whole Anglo-Catholic fasting thing before taking Communion. But that doesn't seem to have been too much of a problem. In Roman Catholic circles you only fast for an hour anyway, and the Service is an hour and a half anyway. Nobody's minded, and some people just take some hot water, but they do get, then, that having something in their hands, and chatting and building up community before moving into the main service which, actually, is very formal in lots of ways. There's the beanbags, and the rugs, and low lighting, and music that you'd hear outside, so that bridge is created, erm... liturgically it's Common Worship Order One straight down the line, but playing with all the different options... really working it to its, till it creaks and tears, working it in a different sort of way. Maybe chanting more... saying more things, playing with music, and interaction with music, liturgy, erm... and... erm... we've really introduced some things we never did before... like, collects – well, we did occasionally... erm... Psalms, and that seems to have built a little bit into [*the other Service*]... so somebody just said, 'I quite like Psalms, can we play with them more and just use them?' And I'm finding in Service planning meetings, people are honing in on what's the Psalm, and saying, 'This is really interesting, can we do something with this? Is there a song version, or can we write a song version?' So that's interesting in what's going on there, in the cross pollination of [*the two Services*]... but with   , and even though it's very formal, we wear robes, we carry crosses, we have processions, we let people loose around the [*Cathedral*], round about, where the intercession would happen in a normal service. And people absolutely love that. And yeah, even though it's very formal, actually, it reaches people, and I think one of things we noticed was our informality... when [*first group*] sort of squatted in [*the Cathedral*] for six months while our roof was being redone, we noticed that the informality, too much informality put people off. It didn't feel like church, it was a bit scary, they didn't quite know what the ground rules were... erm... I'd say what's happening with   ... it tends to attract other people... people visit from other churches... but also it tends to attract people who've lapsed in some sort of way. So that might have some familiarity, so they might have been brought up in a kind of Catholic School, or something, but... they've moved away. But actually, even so, other interesting things have happened, in that... people from [*another Church*], who really aren't into formal stuff, love it... some of them love it. Which has surprised me. And I think it's because we're playing with it, and working it really, really well, working all the different options, and also playing with it musically, erm...   say they don't do liturgy, but actually they do a lot of liturgy, they sing it all, and it's mostly written by Matt Redman. So... yes... singing liturgy is alright... erm. That's interesting. Yeah, but actually, Ben brought a load of people from Brid... from his lads church who loved it. And I thought, 'My goodness, what are they going to think of this?' and they loved it, and they're totally, erm, totally un-churched people. I think it's the sense of, we were trying to create a sense of transcendence, a sense of otherness, because... erm... some of my MA research into Spirituality and Culture said, erm... things about... erm... people don't go to church because they don't think it's spiritual enough. Erm... so we were trying to create that sense of otherness, of transcendence, of going into an environment where erm... there was a sense of awe and wonder...er... and so, I think we seem to have achieved that quite.... The sort of comments coming back to us... the negative comments coming back to us are, sort of, about the acoustics and the PA, and sometimes it's draughty... but we're, not so many negative comments about what's going on in the service, which is nice. Er... yeah, so different things in different services. It's not a Communion, it's a

normal   Service, it can vary even more... you tend to get stuck in a rut from the point of simplicity. In that, a hymn sandwich sort of works for us, and we haven't just fallen into that... we haven't just fallen into that, it's, it's developed over time... we realised we didn't want to do all of our singing on one block... and it feels less hymn-sandwich-y because there's ambient music behind the liturgy... and the teaching, and the prayers, and everything. And also, you're not going stand up, sit down, sing a song, stand up, sit down, sing another song, sit down... so you don't get... and also there the permission to sing or not sing, pray or not pray... just flop out on a bean bag and fall asleep... which people have been known to do, actually... generally stressed people who've had a hard week... erm... yeah... so, is that enough to what happens in Services? There are a variety of things.

That's great. And just listening to some of the things you've been saying... Doug Gay has this idea that Emerging church is coming out from, from a kind of Low Church Protestantism, who are engaging with things that were thrown out at the Reformation by Low Church Protestants, and maybe shouldn't have been. Do you, do you think there's some truth in that...?

I think that's absolutely true, and I don't think it's just Emerging church that are doing it... whether it's the Emerging church... I think the Emerging Church has had something to do with it... but whether Taize and, erm... I'm sure there's other people as well...

Yeah, I mean, he makes the point that Taize and Iona...

And Iona, yeah, and maybe some of the prayer groups, that happens. Like in [*the City*], there's a place called St Bede's where spirituality is explored, and lots of... it's run by nuns, so it's Christian, but there's also lots of interaction and experience of lots of different forms of prayer... so quite Catholic... so all these streams are adding in to the Evangelical church, which is actually way less suspicious about these things than they used to be. People actually seem a lot happier with icons, erm... even my Northern Irish Protestant relatives seem a lot happier with icons... er... than used to be the case in Northern Irish Protestantism... erm. Yeah. So there's something interesting happing there... And I think some of it is a cultural thing, that people are realising that words aren't getting through and where we have to use pictures... and actually, I think, as people are brought up in a visual culture, they're less distrustful of imagery, erm... yes. That's intriguing. But of course it's not just imagery, there's multi-sensory, meditation, prayer, er... all that sort of thing. Some of it, I think, is desperation, the old ways don't seem to be working, so we'll try anything really. And... yeah, anyway. I think that's right.

That's interesting... it just struck me as you were saying, as you were saying about those things, it sounded quite similar to what Doug has been saying. I wonder... how, how does the group... do they feel any... erm... relationship with the Cathedral... or is, is [the Cathedral] just a place where they go?

Yeah... I think... something that's quite nice is that there is overlap...erm... I kind of see it like three overlapping circles... I think... there's the [*first*] group in there, and [*the other group*] is the bit in the middle where the three circles overlap. [*One*] is feeding in, erm... and [*the Cathedral*] is feeding in... and people in [*the Cathedral*] do regard, they do regard it as being... you know, being a Fresh Expression of [*the Cathedral*]... you know... the Dean comes, the Dean comes and celebrates and preaches sometimes,

and is very involved and helpful. Up until the Precentor moved in July, he was helping and planning... well, he still is helping and planning on the advisory group... erm.... But obviously that had a very definite plug... but the Canon Chancellor is now sort of trying to take that role... and attempting to despite the fact he's trying to do the Precentor's job as well as his own... erm... hopefully when we get a new Precentor in November that will make life a bit easier...erm. But yeah, they are involved, and the music people too, some of the choir are coming in too...erm... and then, I suppose the third part of that, that triangle, is people from outside who want to get involved in [*the Cathedral*], who are maybe from other churches around... but come to that, and sort of help at that...erm... so there's that sort of trio... and churches that want to support it and do support it in prayer, but also in, maybe little tasks like helping give out Communion, or... erm... helping put the chairs away, that sort of thing... erm... yes, so it's nice how much it is on the agenda, and is a [*Cathedral*] Service rather than just us. `Cos lots of people use the building, lots... erm... and it's not like that... like when [*first group*] used the building, we were very much welcome guests, and were made very much welcome... erm, in hospitality, and use our wine, use our wafers, if there's anything you need, and if, we didn't use robes, but if we did use robes, they were very much there, erm... so they were very helpful, but, but... there's something different in this, in that it's more like home team... erm... and how would you say that? I suppose in things like... erm... it's in the   diary, erm... and we can put in the diary things that the Vergers need to set out for us, and obviously we can draw upon wine, and robes and things, but also we can make requests of other departments as well, can we have a this, and can we have a that, as it's a big organisation... but er... yeah... we can put requests in sometimes. But also, like, the songmen coming in and singing in the... er... you know, depending on whether it's the holidays or not, and trying to get, er... professional singers along, so we each feel that it is actually part of the... [*the Cathedral*] as well. And some of the nice things... oh and   Stewards as well...   stewards are, er... it's on the stewarding rota so we, yeah, so the rota stewards come, sign up and do the stewarding for that service. Er... so yeah... it's comments, and the nicer comments have been from people less familiar with the service, who were stewards... who said things like, 'Actually,' who were also guides, 'Actually, in the Middle Ages, if they'd had your technology, they'd be doing this sort of thing and imagery, you know, we can see the links between this and the medieval wall paintings, erm...' and, er... other comments, like, "I wish we did this at the 10am," you know, and that sort of chapter and staff, they would see potential of bits that could be fed back... which is lovely. Yeah, so that's, that's quite inspiring,... and I think, I think the things that excite me most are the people who aren't Christians... erm... a friend of a friend brought some friends who weren't Christians... a friend who wasn't a Christian actually, who then went raving about it to all their mates, inviting them along too, so that sort of thing's been happening in the, sort of, people invite people, and then they invite people. So it's gradually growing. And the   community, erm... Twenty-odd, erm... coming... it's usually about twenty on a Sunday... erm... but , [*the Cathedral*]... we're suddenly having to deal with much, much higher figures because the level of people interaction is harder, but is quite exciting. Oh, and it also makes jams by prayer stations, where you dealing with 175.... you know, suddenly you have to think a little bit harder about traffic management. And everything takes longer... so we have to be careful we don't overrun. So, it's a good problem to have. So it must be doing something right. Yeah.

And how often, how often do you celebrate the Eucharist? I mean, do you, were you saying that , that's every time you meet?

That... that would be, every [*Cathedral Service*] would be Eucharistic, `cos we bill it as an ancient-future Mass, erm, erm... other, erm... in [*the* other], we used to... before [*Cathedral*] started, we'd have Communion every other week... so, it's sort of... that still sort of happens. If you go to [*Cathedral*] you'll get... you'll still Communion every other week. And so, we'll do a   Communion, and then two services that aren't.

And how do you tend to do Communion in [the Church that is not in the Cathedral]?

We have a low central table, erm... and some of the things which spooked   people out, and some visitors, were things like, the fact that we pass the Communion round... and didn't know quite what to do with it. And some people in... in High Church circles, you don't even touch the cup, and suddenly being forced to touch the cup, is a bit... if you are high church, it can be a bit spooked, so it's sort of, I suppose, reaching out to a different audience... a different... a different mission field more than an audience. Yeah, and yeah... in   it would be a low table, and we'd be in a circle round it, and yeah, it would still be an ordained Minister using some form of authorised liturgy, er... although we are allowed to play with it. And I think we feel a little bit freer to play with it in   , erm... and, erm.. yeah what else? There'd be... generally there'd be a Confession, we'd make sure there's an authorised Communion prayer.., erm... we'd make sure that Absolutions and Blessings... would probably be done by the visiting Minister... although you can play around and use 'we' forms of them. Erm, and although we've got some ordained Ministers within   now... we're still inviting local clergy in, because what it's done over the years is creating links between us and other churches...er... it was absolutely fascinating when I got ordained, just how many people I know wanted to lay hands on me, because the local clergy knew us, which was really lovely. Er... but the links were there, and we want to keep those links going... even though, you know... I or one of the other ordained   members could do it, and we have [*a local Chaplain who*] comes, and is part of the community. But by Sunday, actually, he's worn out and... needs to recharge, most of the time.

It sounds, by what you were saying, that it's quite important to you, to erm... kind of respect the Anglican Tradition, that... that [the church] is within.

Yeah, I think we've chosen... most of us... well, actually, we did a thing in Christian Unity Week, where... where we discovered that, I think none of us were originally Anglicans, or possibly one of us. But it really was virtually everybody had chosen to be Anglican from elsewhere: Presbyterian, Methodist, er... `cos we did things, a prayer activity about being thankful, er... for the traditions you've come from, and the things you've learned from them. So we discovered, you know, that we've got Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, House Church, all sorts of different denominations represented... but people had chose the Anglican tradition because of its... I think mainly because of its breadth and the fact that, actually you can do all of this wacky stuff, but also there's a sense of rootedness, and a sense of... and within that there's a structure, and I think that actually, it's easier to be free within some form of loose structure. So if you're given a completely blank sheet of paper it's actually harder, erm... and also within

house church circles they've got to work very hard to prove that they're not a cult, that they're an official thing. So, we're obviously an official thing `cos we're a Church of England Fresh Expression... and it makes it even easier now, you know, because before we said, you know, we're sort a part of the Church of England. But now we can say we're a part of the Church of England and a Fresh Expression, so they know what sort of part of the Church of England we are. Erm... So, I think that, there's a lot of room for movement within the Church of England tradition... erm... there's very few things that aren't encompassed by this huge, broad sweep of Anglicanism... erm... and er... yeah, support and safety... and lots of deep wells to draw from in terms of inspiration.. so yeah, we relate to that, but don't allow ourselves to be strangled by it, in a way...

Did that... I mean, obviously, a lot of the caricatures of Fresh Expressions, Emerging Church particularly, erm... is a kind of anti-institutionalism. Do you think, was that ever there in   ? Is it something that you grown out of, or is it something that is simply never been a part of who   are?

I think, er... everyone goes through their rabid teenage phases... and I think, er... I think we were probably more rabid about, not about Anglicanism as such, but about er... er... very authoritarian, Charismatic Evangelicalism. Which I think some of us have come out if, or experienced, or had bad experiences of, er... so I think it was more about that, really, erm... which maybe sent us to explore other avenues of Anglicanism. But then again, also, there's that teenage thing that you respect your parents, and learn from your parents, but you also kick against your parents in your teenage years; like, I don't wanna do it that way, `cos I'm different, would be my own personal... erm... yeah. I think actually, everybody's moved, we've all grown up a bit, we don't feel like we need to be rabid teenagers anymore, erm... and also, actually... I'd say, what's happened overall is the Church of England has shifted, but also Charismatic Evangelicalism has shifted and actually bought... brought on board many of the things that, you know, eating and drinking together, building community, being passionate about justice, lifestyle issues, all that sort of stuff has gone into the mainstream Charismatic Evangelicalism, and it's... it's moved too. Oh, and multi-sensory, that stuff too. So, er... yeah... I think we've both moved.

That's interesting, fascinating. Erm... yep, so, just, just sticking with the Services; one last little point, all the gatherings that you have, what do you think are the most common themes that run through the times when you meet together. What... what might be themes that emerge, or the... the themes that you choose to focus on, that kind of...

Erm... it's an interesting point, `cos even in the Lectionary you can zoom in on your favourite angles, can't you? Erm... I think community is something that keeps being visited and re-visited. Particularly, that's a response to our Society's individualism, and also the sense that, lots of people are sensing that we need to be building and forming community, hence, lots of eating and drinking. I mean, it's not because we're greedy, it's because it builds community. Erm... so that keeps coming back. Er... I probably didn't mention what we did mid-week, and I probably should. Midweek would generally be, erm... we eat a lot again, erm... if we're not eating we're down the pub. And once a month we have service planning, and our preferred method of that is to go to   a Belgian Ale House... and you can get, some churches do these notice sheets where all the lectionary readings are printed out on the same sheet, and er... the church I was, er... a curacy with was, and so we've got into the habit of

grabbing a stack of those, and spreading them on the different tables and then different people could move around different tables, and then we could join together and, erm... cross... cross, er... ideas across each other. And er... yes, that works quite well. And we've been doing quite a bit of that. And if we don't then we'll have a meal round somebody's house, and try and do the same thing and go off in different corners and then come back again. So there's a high level of interaction, but different people have been responsible for different weeks. Erm... er... other weeks, we've got really, really into *Lectio Divina*, and prayer around food, we've done prayer and pizza where you shove a pizza in the oven, you pray, and then when the pizza goes ding you eat the pizza, which means you've had a good twenty minutes of praying before you get to your pizza... erm... or praying through different courses, having some prayer and then some food, and then some prayer and some more food, erm... but *Lectio Divina*, we picked up when we went to Ampleforth, last year, and again, I think that was a bit of a search, of how what can we learn from the Benedicitnes about hospitality and community, and their way of life, and actually, it's actually quite nice being there listening to plainchant, and the food's good, and the environment's good, too. And we're going back again this year. And one of the things, Father Bede did some sessions with us and one of the things was *Lectio Divina*, which really, really fired people's imaginations... of some of the people in   who've really struggled with Bible study, that this was a way they could relate to, sort of chewing it over, and finding words and questions that, that arose and then, erm... chewing them over and discussing those and feeding them back, and it seemed to work really well. So yeah, that's midweek.

Hmm, I wanna comeback to this word 'community', `cos that is a word that comes up again and again in Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church, and I just, I've just had a thought that I wanna kind of put to you. In the idea of exploring community and sharing meals and all that... is there a sense that.. you're, in using kind of ancient-future Mass you're also exploring the idea of an Eschatological community, in the idea that all that's gone before. Now you can tell me you're reading too much into it, but one of the reasons I've said this, is that one of the criticisms of Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church is that there's no Eschatology, and, erm... I just wonder, as you've been explaining some things, that there is, actually, an Eschatology in your practices, whether you've ever explored that... I just wondered...

I'd be interested to hear, unpacking there is no Eschatology bit... er, if you could explain further about that.

Yeah, one, one of the, it's a criticism one of my supervisors has just made, erm... is that in terms of the writing, erm... there's no explicit, 'this is what we mean by Eschatology'... Eschatology doesn't seem to have a particularly prominent place within the writings of Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church. Erm, so that was his criticism. Erm... fair or otherwise. Erm... and I'm just wondering, having listened to some of the things you've just said, and some of the things other people have said, whether actually there is something very eschatological in the way you're viewing community in the terms of your worship? But I might be reading too much into it?

Hmm, I think... there's a lot about community in the Trinity... you'll hear a lot about that in Emerging Church circles... you'll find Rublev's Icon of the Trinity virtually everywhere. It's a bit frustrating, `cos I was given it as Wedding present sixteen years ago, erm... and it really, really spoke to me: it spoke to me

about Eucharist, it spoke to me about Trinity, about this extra place at the table, and it spoke to me about community too. So I think it's coming out of a Trinitarian theology... and there is a sense, there's a sense in which a baton is being passed from community to community, and wanting to pick up that baton and picking up what's been good from monasticism and good from communities in the past, and in our more recent history, communities   in 1970's and communities which inspired the Nine o'clock Service in Sheffield, even though it went horribly pear-shaped... but that inspired us – before it went horribly pear-shaped, obviously... erm... and er... we have very strong community in the early days, but it was so strong it was hard to get into. If a community is too... fused, it's very hard for newcomers, so we had to relax and open up boundaries... but now we're missing that community in saying, how can we rebuild that without losing erm... incoming people. You know, how do you build stronger community... maybe rhythm of life or some focus that will be attractive to people, rather than stating this community's so strong I'm not going to get in to the shared history, so you have to give up too much to get into this. `Cos we did do a lot of sharing of stuff and things... money and stuff as well, but erm... Es...Eschatology... I think the reason... I think the reason is probably... in the Emerging Church generally... is a reaction against that American, that whole American 'the end is nigh' stuff, and you know, let's go... it all gets a bit rapture this, rapture that, Left Behind series, it's all kind of a bit.... Where we have mentioned it, certainly my focus has been, erm... some people may call this denial, my focus has been, and it's probably permeated by the whole St Francis... I think Martin Luther said it as well, you know, erm.... if God's coming back in an hour's time what do you think you'd do... well, I'm gonna hoe my garden, `cos you're doing what you're called to be doing then... that shouldn't matter. So that, kind of... focus, on what is our calling and what should we be doing, erm... in the light of trying to live every day as if it is, actually we do have a liturgy that says, that 'We want to live today as if it's your... our first gift to You; we want to live today as if it's Your last gift to us, the end of our world... everyday it's your first and everyday it's you last.. erm... is actually quite a helpful attitude...erm... and that's permeated our lifestyle. So when we mention it, it's to do with that really. And there is a sense of a longer... a bigger plan... a bigger story going on.. but... er. And I think [*Cathedral*] gives that more than [other] Service...it's there within [*first group*] too, hints... At [*the Church*] we're standing on ground which St. Cuthbert blessed...   There is that actual link... that St. Cuthbert stood on that bit of earth and blessed the city, and that's why they built the church there. They went to great trouble to build the city walls around that spot... and so the sense... we do have a sense that something has been passed to us... erm... but... I'm slightly wary of wooly, Celtic spirituality, so erm... everyone seems to have jumped on the Celtic bandwagon and watered it down a bit... but they don't generally stand in the sea all night singing the Psalms, er... or er... not terribly into fasting and beating themselves up... yeah. So yeah, there's that sense of a broader history, and our part within that broader thing. We did a thing in, actually at Greenbelt, with tree rings, and er... it was   ... and we took, you get beams from the South Transept   , and make bread boards out of. And we bought one out of the   shop, and took it with us... it's got all these tree rings in it. The whole theme of the Festival was 'standing in the long now', and so we go people to draw, you we had these big blackboard bits, which became the top of the altar table, and people drew their ring on that... and there was a sense of offering themselves to God, but also a sense building... you're standing on the shoulders of giants, you're building on what has gone before... but you're also preparing for people who came after... so in that sense your vocation isn't just your vocation, it's... it's your vocation that has, that you're sort of...

you're holding that baton, and then you're going to pass it on. So you're vocation's in time and space as well as just in you, in terms of geography and personality. Which... I found quite a helpful concept... the tree rings thing... hmm, may be that answers it....

Yeah, it's just something that struck me, thank you. Right, I need to get back to my script. Erm... I'm interested, in how as a church, you go about Christian initiation... and whether you ever talk about membership.

We try not... and that's something that hasn't changed since   was there... we really do try not to have the ins and the outs... although, there is a sense, now that we're getting youngsters in.. that with the youngsters we do need to have ins and outs in terms of when a child is born, they are a part of our community, and we welcome them into our community... erm... but, that's something kind of special about children, actually. With adults, as soon as you visit, you can be part of the community, part of planning, part of this whole journey with us... it's not like you've got to wait until six months with us, or until your theology is right, or until you've ticked some boxes.. or whatever. I think Anglicanism itself provides safeguards in terms of the lectionary and the liturgy...erm... and also the community provide safeguards too... So it's very easy to open the doors and say 'Come right in, come and help us.' Er, so fuzzy boundaries are really important. Er... and being able to come straight in is really important... erm. Yeah, initiation, we've not yet, really, had the experience, or really been able to have the experience of, well, not for a long time anyway, of moving people from a state of no faith to a state of some faith... obviously where they would admit that. Erm... generally it's been people who've had a faith, it's gone or been wavering... and then it's sort of rekindled... it's been that sense... some of it's been very private. We know that some significant journeys have happened, but people haven't necessarily shared what's happened, except for some little clues... apparently Ian Mobsby became a Christian at a   Service... but he never told us `till ten years later... we presumed he was one already. Immediately, you know, we treat people as part of the community already, you know, there is a sense in which we're all on a journey. But in so saying, we're sort of exploring an idea... I'd quite like to do a course... we don't particularly want to do Alpha... we want to do something a bit more sacramental... a bit more fuzzy, that we can play with a bit more, and a bit more discuss... and I think Emmaus might be our thing... and I think we're pretty settled that we'll do Emmaus every other week, between [*Cathedral*] and erm... Because once a month we've moved our Service to 4pm so the kids can come more easily... and er... so on the 8pm weeks we're going to do Emmaus, I think, next term, probably. Unless something drastic happens... and finish it with a night of prayer, or something like that... so that will be an interesting experience of seeing what happens... particularly... well, we'll advertise it in [*one*] and with our networks, but also within [*Cathedral*]... and see if anyone comes on board as a result of that.

Er... with children... some of our community decided to get them baptised, and some of them decided to wait a while until they knew what they were doing... er, so we had an interesting experience, and I wouldn't recommend it liturgically, but I didn't get the choice... er, it was sort of plonked on my plate as a sort of *fait accompli*... I had to do a thanksgiving and, er... a baptism as the same service, which, ended in a jolly party in everything else. So we had an interesting time trying to differentiate between these two things... and I think we managed it by delineating the space, so we did the thanksgiving and stuff

with oil and catechumins, so a sense that you're starting this journey... and the person that you thank, er... the thanksgiving... we gave shoes: that you're beginning on this journey, er... special shoes... and kind of had a little presentation and a Bible, erm... and this is, you know the start of your journey. And then, a bit later on, we went off to the font as a journey, and then, er... the other child, who was getting baptised... we then did the second part of that, we did the baptism part of the journey... but er... that worked quite well, actually. You know, some people go to this part of the journey straight away, and other people wait a while longer before they do it. Erm... so, it was challenging, but actually, what we came up with was really good. Er... ended up being quite a long service, which is another reason why I'd recommending not doing it all at once, actually...

Erm...Moving to, kind of... well, I'll just ask the question... What kind of qualities, what kind of lifestyle, er... are people being encouraged to embody?

Right... er... a holistic one... er.... and that's since... we want to keep fuzzy boundaries between our...er... Sunday life and our weekday life. We don't... kind of... want people to be just Christians when they're in church... I think this is less of a problem in Emerging Church... other problems are the case, but not that one particularly. Erm... but also, we're bringing our music, our music from the secular world, and art, our props and our prayer activities... so there's that holistic thing. But also, I think... we're also looking at the way we live our lives... you then think... the Celtic thing we did get very influenced by is that worship is your whole life... and so, that things about, you know, prayers for making bread and sweeping the floor and... there would have been a prayer for beating up the computer, but they hadn't invented them. And that sense of, erm... consecrating the rest of your life, and trying to be more prayerful about the rest of your life, about how you live your normal life. And I suppose that impinges upon justice, that actually, justice, the environment, yeah, there are a lot of things other churches are now getting into... fair trade, compostable... er cups.... and er... you know, doing the homework on things, Like, it uses the same amount or less energy to have these... as long as they're paper recyclable cups, as it does to have a mug, because of the amount of energy in making the mug and washing the mug in hot water. After over the lifetime of the mug it works out at about the same. Which is nice to have done the homework on that... on making those decisions. You know, a few things... so we have quite a few people who grow their own vegetables, or buy organic...er... we have a sort of veggie box scheme going on... and still is actually, but I've bought out of it, because my vegetables kept going rotten `cos I didn't cook them quickly enough, `cos my life is too crazy... but, you know... supporting that, you know, and yeah, growing stuff. Yeah, so trying to be just and Christian about how we live our lives, and the choices we make in our lives... not just being choice about personal morality, but about corporate morality, like banking ethics... you know... people using a bank that has the reputation of being fair... a number of us are with the Co-op... others who aren't with the Co-op, or Building Societies that still are, or banks that has a good reputation on that line... you know, they've done their homework on that before deciding who they're gonna be with. That sort of thing. Being just.

Thanks... erm... you kind of very helpfully answered two questions in one there... so I'm gonna move on... erm... when you get together, and have your gatherings together, what would you say is working really well as a group, and what do you think, actually, is not working quite so well, what, what are you beginning to look at and asking what... what do we do with this?

Right...erm... what's working really... I think community is working really well at the moment, er, and empowerment of the people, if that makes sense, people just running with things, erm.... There was a while, when, because I was the paid one, if I wasn't careful, I'd pick up too many jobs. But actually I went on sabbatical in January, for three months, to do, er... er, well, it was more of a busman's holiday, really... well, we were doing the stations of the cross...er, projected... the whole Easter story, actually, projected all the way outside [*on the Cathedral*], on the wall out there, all over the place... whilst I was doing that, I didn't do any normal [*work*]... people picked up on jobs that, probably in retrospect they should have been doing anyway, but I never got them back, which is great.... And, er, and that's good... the level of community involvement and people being responsible for the services and the running of the community is very high.... Er, I'd say pretty much everybody going is involved in some way... but on the other side, I'm thinking we really need to work on the publicity, getting new people in. Although we do have an interesting scenario in that we end up being in competition with the other Fresh Expression [*in town*], because now there's a new thing   on a Wednesday, and, er... there's another new thing... well, slightly less new   being going a few years now, three years, and so that's there as well. So we're not the only Fresh Expression anymore. And I think they're more likely to pick up on new people, er... so we need to work out how to draw more members in, and also the other factor that's changed more recently is the whole credit crunch thing... erm... and actually even just before the credit crunch things were getting sticky   and a lot of people have ended up commuting.... In fact, my husband's commuting to London... in fact we're thinking we'll have to move our small group to London seeing as if there another three commuting... so there's a lot of that stuff going on... people commuting to London, Sheffield, Leeds... and because people can't get the work in   anymore, and that takes er... takes a lot, er brings a lot of pressure onto people... erm... people's time, people's energy as well, which is another thing which somehow needs working on. It's very difficult to know how... `cos there's the whole environment thing, and you have to balance that against your family... and actually if you commute by train it's not so bad. Erm, but, yeah, but, balancing that against your family, and work-life balance, and church-life balance, and so just balance generally... how do you balance a life which is being fundamentally unbalanced by forces beyond your control? It's a big challenge. That and getting people in. Which we don't have any problems with whatsoever with [*Cathedral*]... we are in competition with ourselves   .. which er... we can only really do something that big once a month...er.... But er. If you're only going to go to church once a month that would be the one you'd pick... that's hip and happening.

That's really interesting, thank you.... So, just, just on the back of that, I mean, as a group, are you beginning to think about how are we going to engage with this new way of life, this commuting as far as London? Are there ways you're beginning to think that through, or is it just too early?

I think we're hoping that some people will be temporary... certainly for my husband it's only until Christmas. He has to teach a course   in January, so they have to employ him then at least...erm. For others, it may be long term, it may not be, because of course it's not a solution that's sustainable for donkey's years. You want to get out of it. So it's like, do you want to address the community, or do you want to support people with that. I mean, so people are trying to develop community on the train. So I see some emails going round saying, you know, which train are you on, erm... you know, can we,

maybe... if you're on the same train as me maybe we can share a carriage.... er, so er, that's, that's good to see... people are trying to hook up on the train... so I couldn't go on the 5:30 train, but if you're gonna go on the 5:30 I'll go back with you....

Erm... final question. Erm, sounds a bit wordy when I look at it, but I know what I'm trying to say... I hope you'll understand as well.. erm, sounds bit up itself.... What theological motifs, or what parts of the Bible..., erm, do you think some up the beliefs and the aims of [the churches]?

I do like the Apostle's Creed... I don't think it's just me that likes it. There's this whole kind of... you know, the community of the saints and the resurrection of the body and life everlasting... ooooh, that's a bit eschatol... I can't say that....

What is it about those things that strike you?

It's the whole next verse of a song that's been sung before, or the baton being passed on, in the sense of imagery that something that's been done before. But also in the sense of wider community, that communion of the saints, so it's not just us. It's sort of people rooting for us with some who've been there before, that you're part of Christian community that actually stretches across time as well as across geography...erm. And the sense that actually, what we're ultimately heading for is heaven on earth. Oh, and actually, Bible motifs, yes... yeah... I've seen it come up a lot, it does seem to be one of those that people go, "Ooh, let's do something on this"... the Revelation, 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth, the old heaven and old earth has passed away...' and the sense of heaven being a visible, physical thing rather than a fluffy thing, erm. That's, er... that's been quite, er... inspiring.

Why do you think that image particularly?

Erm... I think it is its physicality, but also the sense that it's happiness, but it's an earthly happiness... it's not a floaty heaven... that's gnostic and disembodied. It's erm... and the sense, the very deep sense that the tears will be wiped away off the people who are really suffering. Er, so that's quite an inspiring motif. Er, other ones... Paul's body analogy keeps cropping up in all sorts of places, and I think it fits Emerging Church ethos on...well I don't really want to say every member ministry, but I will... shorthand. That sense that everybody's got something to offer, and together we are creating something with Christ as the head and... er... I've been... I personally have been mulling over the whole issue of... I think because the whole women Bishop thing keeps coming up so often. Keep reading arguments in the press, you know are people going to move over to Rome or not, and whose going to move, and why might they move. And the people who, I think, won't are the... traditional Evangelicals who believe in headship in inverted commas, but my sense is that Christ is the head, and he's a bloke, so what's the problem? And what we are is the shoulders I think rather than the head, as church leaders. So, just mulling over that. But anyway, it's the body... that different people have different things to give... but somebody's gotta organise it... and maybe that's the job of the shoulders, or the spinal cord or something... but not the head. Christ is the head, it seems to me. But yeah, body analogy has been very useful. And useful for the gift of tongues, the gift of prophecy, gifts of something else... you know I think we look at that and think, we might believe in those in things, we might also say you could read this as a sort of, somebody has a video, somebody has a track by 'Chicanes', somebody else has some leaves and a plant pot for a prayer

activity, and that all comes together... so it's very much a corporate planning of worship. Erm, yeah. And the looking after the weaker parts, that as well... Because some people are deeply hurting, and that has been something which has been tremendously... not sure how you'd say it... empowering, and helpful, and healing for people who are in a hurting place suffering from depression. They've loved the fact they haven't felt they have to get well before they can take part in planning worship and leading worship. That they've been able to do it just as they are... and have felt extremely valued because of that.

And that comes back to that idea of community again...

Yeah, yes it is... yeah. Er... I have heard the feedback from the people who were hurting that they felt patronised in some communities.... there was community there, but it was, "Oh we're your community, we're going to look after you"... and it's like, it's like, I'd like to look after you, too.... Er... `cos actually, quite often it's the hurting people that have the, the pastoral gifting to spot when somebody else is hurting and they're not letting on.

Well that's really helpful. Thank you, I'm just going to....

Appendix B

Participant B, Interview 1

Yep, OK...   I give consent for the interview, 7th of July

Right, thanks   ... So we're just going to go through the question... erm... and... if I want to ask a bit more... erm... then I'll just try and unpack... er... the different things. So... question one... erm... what, in your opinion, is the primary calling of the church?

Erm... I think... yes, to be the community of the kingdom... so, to be a community... so it's very people-centric... so obviously with Jesus obviously at the very centre of that. And I think... yeah... an ethical community as well....

Ok, so where do you... when you say an ethical community... erm... where do you take your lead on that... what do you mean by an ethical community?

OK, yeah... good question. OK, ethical community in the sense of... it's a community of believers... but we, from our perspective very much struggle to define who the believers are, and who the believers aren't in [*the church*], so... from our perspective, it's very fuzzy-edged. So right at the centre of it is Jesus, so when we talk about our church ethics, we look at it in different ways, but... not the way the church would talk about it... not just, 'What would Jesus do,' but 'What did Jesus do'. We would ask that right at the centre of our ethics... so I guess you almost say copying... not blindly.

So...so, the... so the idea of a Jesus-centred community... erm... this is very clearly and intentionally the Jesus of the New Testament... when you say, what did Jesus do, so this is very clearly, erm... yeah...

So we would read all of Scripture through Jesus...yes.

Right, that's really interesting,   , that's really interesting.

In that sense... what is church? Hopefully quite a distinctive community... not in the sense that we want to be counter to culture, but... just, probably by who we're being will give us some distinctive.

Now when you say, a fuzzy-edged... is there any... but you also talk about distinctives... is there anything that you would say makes it quite clear, that you are in or you are out Are there certain things that you would say, that's a distinctive, there....?

I kind of want to answer it both ways... yes and no.... Erm... no, in the sense we struggle in [*the church*] to know where the church finishes and where   begins... and we like that... we like the idea we can't find or quantify the edge of the church, which gives an issue with practical matters, like child protection, and whatever we're responsible and accountable for, and what we're not in the immediate sense. So in that sense, erm... it's not clear at all. Within it, we do provide ways for people to belong in different ways. So that's akin to what Baptists call membership, but something we call partnership, which again is about personal accountability and lifestyle and all the rest of it. So it's a way for people to

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belong and... and open themselves up to discipleship. But that having been said, when we analyse the people who've take up on that... it tends to be a certain type of people in terms of class... background, yes.

Right, right, yes... that's interesting. So what... what kind of class and background would it tend to be here in [this town]?

It's... not sure I should have said class and background now.... But people... the people then... I'm getting put off by this thing!

I promise I not trying to catch you out!

Yep... the people who do seem to take up on the partnership thing... tend to be people who... different flavours. One, they tend to have some history of church somewhere, might be part of it, in their story. Two, there might be people who work... so they're understanding of commitment, so like, committed to getting to the office for nine o'clock every morning, those types of commitments would be there... but understand commitments in very neat and tidy ways... with very neat boundaries as well, so their commitments would get extended beyond a certain point. And those type of people tend to pick up on the partnership thing. Obviously, might enter into it... even though it's supposed to be an open-ended commitment, it doesn't always seem to come alive for... when you analyse their lives, and how they're working out they're living out this partnership thing, sometimes they're streets ahead.

Thank you. OK... the second general question, then... how do you define postmodern culture in England?

How would I define it? Marks of it... fragmentation... fragmentation, I'm not that old I guess, but in terms of.... Fragmentation, in terms of people who don't see one compartment of their lives, so fragmented identities being connected to another part... so they might have bubbles as in... church-world, church-bubble, work-bubble, family-bubble, and all the rest of it. So that seems to be an important part of it. I guess, endlessly, the comment, 'Oh that's really great, that's true for you,' which we get endlessly in our discussion groups at the church. They're not seeing that there might be some overarching truth, and the tension between those two... holding the tension between those two, looking different from different perspectives... there might be some central truth, but it's looked at from different perspectives. Erm... postmodern culture... yeah, that sort of fragmentation, understandings of truth, and, sort of, behind that understandings of reality. Yeah.

That's really interesting, thank you. Alright, let's get to the more specific stuff, then.... Erm, what's your aim in engaging with local postmodern culture?

First of all, to change the question: erm... cultures, I think, in the sense that we very much understand [*the town*], not as being, erm,...a unified culture, so, certainly personally... do you want me to talk about me personally or the church? Hopefully, there's some overlap.

Well, let's talk about you.

Alright, maybe some overlap... I'm not sure how much always.... Personally, seed of the gospel. So, I will be a seed, I will carry the gospel into a culture.... but then, as that seed takes root and grows and all the rest of it, then very much that culture would inform what church is like as church. Over-used word, 'emerges' in that culture. So I see that very much... yeah, as an aim. So you can use words like incarnation, inculturation, contextualisation...

That's really interesting. If I could ask you a bit more about that.... if you could unpack a bit more the idea of the seed, what would you see as compromising the seed? What makes that bit up?

What makes up their seed? Yeah, erm... that's a really good question, isn't it? Number of things really.... Within myself, I don't just carry the seed, I am the seed. So, living faith, relationship with Christ – the absolutely key part of that seed. And then taking that seed with me.... in terms of the stories of Jesus, the stories of Jesus as expressed in the New Testament, and echo throughout the Bible, and erm... stories of Jesus more contemporary as well. So I think the seed in those terms... and, beyond that, in terms of personal gifting, as you might say... attempting or hopefully having some abilities at, erm... that's the word... propagating... sounds like the old missionary society... propagating the seed.... Yeah, there are some good things in the past... probably those things.... I'll think of some more in a sec.

So, so the, the kind of, the seed... would you, would say that that's a kind of unchanging principle that then, kind of, goes into different cultures?

It's a person, yeah... unchanging person. Yeas, so, much more about a person than trying to take a set of beliefs about that person that would be, not gone at all, but diminished in the sense of lifting up the person of Christ above any sets of beliefs in him, or of him. Yeah.

Right, OK, so would you say that, that's quite similar... I'm not trying to put words in your mouth so feel free to, to disagree with me... would you that's quite similar to the traditional Baptist belief that you say 'Jesus is Lord', that that would be a creedal declaration, but you wouldn't have an authoritarian creed, as in the Nicene, that says you must adhere to this?

Yes, there's some very simple flows... Jesus as Lord, Jesus as saviour, Jesus as example... not trying to use that language necessarily... the use of the word Lord or Saviour might, may not be at all helpful for their culture. So one last thing in terms of the seed, as well.... perhaps picks up on this... being authoritarian.... a seed that dies.

Oh, unpack that for me...

OK, a seed that dies.... erm... so in that, different ways I suppose... In terms of myself personally, diminishment of self... there's always a tension between that and trying to lead people... hard one. And then trying to die to my own culture, and recognising that I'm, I'm fairly blind in this culture... that if I... If church is going to merge in faith, or if faith's going to emerge and we're gonna join in with Christ's mission, then through that... the fruits of that might be a Christian community, among other things. Then, I'm fairly blind, just as other people may or may not be fairly blind... and together we can discover Christ in this culture. So I need to quite a lot of dying, and that's a part of the [*the church*] story for me...

quite a bit of dying to old self, and coming alive... yeah in terms of a new self, in terms of a new culture as well. Yeah. Yeah.

Thank you for that,   , thank you... erm.... I wonder, if you could share any theological motifs, or parts of the Bible, that you find particularly useful in explaining your beliefs and aims to those of postmodern culture?

I struggle with this one... I could... for theological motifs, I could think of a few, but in terms of ones that will help me to express...?

Yeah, it's the kind of things that you could use to express... erm... express your beliefs to people who are very much in postmodern culture.

Yep, yeah.... I think... I'll talk about ways... we... I suppose we do communicate the gospel. One in the sense that, more of a theological understanding, *Missio Dei*, God up front. That would be, pretty much, right toward the beginning of any conversation... not that I bring them Christ... but, trying to find out if, how Christ is here. And that's a sort of mutual exploration with them... be it, they met Christ in a dream, that just.... taking them the Jesus stories, the actual stories, very much the stories of Jesus meets a person as well, they're very common. Seem to help people just understand, and not generally drawing any points of out, but letting them draw any points out, as they often instinctively do. So yeah, whatever it might be, Luke, obviously, a great place for that. Jesus meets some person, then just together, just teasing out. But there are other... not just looking at Jesus but other places in the Bible as well. Yeah, there's an example I might give there... that wasn't Jesus. It was Moses, looks around and kills the Egyptian... and that story coming out, and there's an instant connection with people... people who've been in and out of prison, but that was murder one. They've picked up on it... picked up the pre-meditated nature, when he sort of looked around, and, that sense of stories, and taking the stories. So that's helpful. The idea, the idea that God upfront seems to be helpful with people.... what else did I put down...? Not sure I'm answering your question here, but I'm going to keep going. In terms of... often starts with exploration... obviously wouldn't use this language... but exploration of power... erm... with the people. So they would see me as being 'of the church', or representative of the church, or being the church... some of them are on that scale. And, erm... they have certain presumptions about power, but often, in that exploration, as they get to know me... and they get to realise how the relationship is starting to function... they start to wonder how power is going to work in this relationship, and get quite surprised... typically people who are quite broken people: people who've never worked, people with drug addiction, and things like that. Er... that sense of togetherness in this, seems to just... well, it's not what they expect at all. And at the same time, it does seem, to be... yeah, another sense of dying to power, I guess. My, I'm offered the opportunity of power by people, but trying not to take up on it... well, not take up on it in inappropriate ways, rather... inappropriate use of power that seems to create a fresh opportunity there. But at the same time, there is still something of the fact that I am, sort of, of the church, church leader type, has a humorous-novelty value... so not necessarily dying to that.... A sort of theological understanding... an interesting question to ask would be 'who hosts who'... very much, that I understand myself being hosted by them.... sort, hospitality gets turned on its head... it's not the

gift of hospitality, it's something they get to practice. It's my understanding of Jesus being hosted by the world, not hosting the world.... Yeah.

Does that, erm... does that idea ever come out in the way that you talk with people, you know, about faith? The idea of them hosting you, in the way you see the world hosting Jesus?

Yes, yes in the sense of lots on conversation around the smallness of Jesus and the weakness of Jesus... which are probably words that, in my traditional setting, you'd get outrage against. But holding in tension with the, sort-of, bigness of Jesus... playing up the concepts of his smallness, his vulnerability, his fragility, and all the rest of it. What he went through... his services for humanity, that sort of side of it... and how that's worked through in practice... and how limited he was as well. Because often these people often feel themselves to be very limited people... limited opportunities, limited ability, low self esteem, limited and alone, diminished in all sorts of ways. It's fascinating when they start to understand Jesus in those ways... there seems to be... sometimes they want a God... I dunno, it depends on what their background is... quite a few of them have a sort of, sort of nominal Catholic background.... they may struggle with that which, they may in time see... that it's God up close... yeah. God very personal, and in that sense extremely challenging. Yeah, it's bizarre, in a, a subversive, coming under the radar way. Far more challenging that just a big, authoritarian, powerful, up-top God...

That's really interesting, thank you.

So this is my experience, my experience of the last few years, not my experience of twenty years as a Christian, whatever...

It's really helpful, thank you...what about...

Oh, yeah, shall I tell you what I put down here... to cover your question... kingdom and church are... trying... there's tension here to try, to try and play up Kingdom, try and play up church as community, and try and play down church as, erm... institution as well. Dunno, you might wanna cover it elsewhere, but understandings, understanding of partnership or membership – there is a commitment... we use a commitment language there... which, erm... doesn't necessarily work that well with all the people in the church, but the commitment isn't to the expression '[*the church*]', even though we hopefully understand the [*the church*] being us, people and Jesus and all the rest of it, and all of those sorts of things. But the commitment is to each other – so we play up church as being commitment to each other, but also play up, yeah, kingdom, in that sense... mission and God's mission, God's mission, and mission what's... God's generosity, yeah, God's generosity flowing into the world... and joining in with that. Yeah.

That's really, that's really interesting. You said, at the start of that, 'playing up the Kingdom'.... could you explain a little bit more about what you mean by that, because that's quite an interesting statement?

Yeah.... In the sense that... if I use the word 'church', they would probably understand me to be, and, perhaps, others I've got with me, and them not to be... so we are not of this, and you are of this. So in that sense we're trying to bring what we are to them. If you talk about kingdom, and seeking, and using the language of... now, and near, at hand, around, and all those sorts of inferences... then it, it puts us

together in the search.. so we're in that search together. And we... not trying to say that we haven't got something which may be helpful for them, but also recognising that they may have something which can teach us as well. Yeah. So it just sort of changes the emphasis, I guess it's back to power again. That's been a wrestle for me, right from the start of [*the church*], how leadership should work, and how power should work in the church. I've not really resolved it, but I don't worry about it quite so much.

And how do you define 'kingdom'?

Not geographically... passionately not geographic.... erm.... Between East and West, or whatever. Interestingly, a few people, sort of transferred into us from other churches have that sort of mindset, but they wouldn't recognise it. They wouldn't necessarily talk about it in the local... so, not about geographical types, sort of countries, the Muslims and the white people,... not in terms of place... so we don't play up, generally, sacred space... so... which might be linked to our understandings of Kingdom. So Kingdom as in... very much... cliché really, can't think of a better way to phrase it really.... God's rule, God's reign... you wouldn't... we probably wouldn't use that language of rule and reign, either... it sounds a bit 'king', as in domineering. But, where God's at work, and joining in with what God's doing. So if I want to join in with God, and this Kingdom which will be the ultimate reality, then... yeah, a helpful way we do talk about it... well, I talk about it to help you understand it... there's a really good prayer: 'Jesus, what are you doing?' And then perhaps I might want to say, 'Jesus, please can I join in?' And then, if that's what you're doing, and it's in your world, oh, I'm sorry, Kingdom is about being in God's world, and about, then it's... the other things I would bring out would be... in terms of creation: that God didn't create the world but creates the world...so the idea that creation wasn't an historic event 'back then', but is an ongoing event... the sort of Hebrew, sustaining all things by his powerful word... and then the idea of kingdom fitting in with that, as an ongoing creation, ongoing... presence of God, and immediacy of God, `cos he's very much part of the ongoing... yeah... reality. Which only exists because he is. Yeah.

Thank you, that's a really helpful understanding. Erm... do you think that postmodernism has changed your understanding of Christian faith?

Yes... twenty years a Christian... became a very modern Christian through very neat, tidy understandings of the gospel. And I think... I was probably evangelised about twenty years ago by... it's a mixture... a sort of... the kerygma of the gospel, some sort of call to act, or whatever... and then alongside that – and that kerygma would be very neat, tidy, laid down teaching... but if you know those, sort of, three expressions of the gospels... my understanding would be, I may have this wrong (I'm not a great reader). I kind of understand three threads to the gospel in the New Testament – I may be wrong on this – *mysterion*, the mystery of the gospel, which I don't think you can naturally translate to the work of the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is just as mysterious and... whatever.... *Kerygma*, sort of laying down the teaching and all the rest of it, and then *evangelon* is much more active, good news, *evangelon* of the gospel, and taking good news, and repentance and, that sort of, action. And so, in terms of my conversion, it's very much about teaching, and then that was very much the modern mindset, of facts and call to act on that. And quite a human-centred response, as well. In terms of... how I've been coloured by postmodernism... I still hold onto quite a bit of that, because quite a bit of what you're

converted by, you're converted to as well. Though, gospel as mystery... has been quite key for me, in terms of Fowler's stages of faith... yeah, Fowler's sates of faith. So I was a – I can't remember how it goes now, I haven't read it for years – stage three, I was sort of the evangelical charismatic Pentecostal sort of niche market, where everything, everybody wants a neat and tidy answer... and you can handle Scripture and, generally you can find verses that will give you the answer as well. I've moved away from that gospel understanding of needing neat and tidy answers. I see some big flows and understandings of God in the Bible, I see a story of a person. I basically see Theology and... you know... not stories that diminish Jesus' story... the story of how God engaged with culture, and what he then did. But mysteries become a far more important part of that, as well. So, I've given up... a lot of things I can just, yes, Fowler talks about an exoskeleton of faith. I had it all neat and tidy, I had a few holes in my armour still, probably, which I'm desperately trying to plug... then... through various life events, through *[the church]*, through engaging with culture, that, sort of, dying to my own understandings, As well I guess. Through personal hardships, I had a son who was born deaf and nearly died...er... five, six years ago. Put me on a bit of a wilderness journey... and then into a bit more of a re-interpreting of my faith. I think culture, modern culture must intersect with all this, in terms of then deciding what my, sort of, exoskeleton of faith I'm going to decide my internal skeleton of faith. And I find myself now, that I have understandings that are far more based on faith than on rational argument. That, I think the rational argument took me on that journey, in Fowler, but I've pushed on down the Fowler scale, not to a better place, I wouldn't necessarily argue, but a far more... in a sense a more fragmented place as well – struggling to explain this – more fragmented... so.... Keeping this skeleton thing running, I've got a few bones missing, I've probably got a floppy left arm, and I'm not sure my right leg works below the knee. If there's any bone left in that it's a bit floppy. So I got a lot more gaps, but it's certainly got a more profound faith as well. Which is left based on, sort of, neat, modern understanding. And then I hold in tension – and there's another thing, then, my understandings, particular about gospels in terms of culture and postmodernism – is that the question? Has it changed? Yeah. If other people... how do I know they're a Christian, is one part of this. If it was very neat and tidy, then I guess there's a prayer they said, I think it went "thank you, sorry, please." And you put a few relevant words in between, you've got a bit of licence to stylise it... And I find it harder and harder, what might be someone's moment of crisis conversion. If they do have a point towards that, I want to respect that. But at the same time, I wouldn't want to play that up; I understand that in my own mind as being their version. So I'm a bit lost about when people become Christians, now. I see process, process, people moving towards Christ. And the ultimate mark of that is ethical, isn't it? Yes, ethical. You might want to put it in terms of fruit... fruit of the spirit, and look at becoming more Christ-like in character, as they meet with Jesus. But, actually, the point of salvation, I find it harder and harder who the Christians are. Hopefully, I'm becoming clearer and clearer on who Jesus is, who we're heading towards... so I'm becoming clearer on the goal, less confident on how people are doing on their journey to the goal. But probably clearer on working out in encouraging people in which direction to go. If that makes sense. So, more Jesus-centred, more clear on the directions, yeah, the vector, the direction to take toward Jesus. Harder to work out where they are on that journey, and less understandings of my role to work that out as well. Which has certain problems when you get to things like baptism.... `cos then you're sort of, sort of trying to make some sort of judgement to help someone decide if there at a point in their life where that's appropriate for them, or not. Last thing out of that, is recognising that the truth might look different from their

perspective... I'd want to hold on to that – what's the jargon? – the meta-narrative... I want to hold onto that, that, the huge story of Jesus that sort of overarches all, but recognise that it can look very different from different perspectives.

Why don't you unpack that a little bit for me, because obviously that's a pretty big statement...erm.... how you understand the meta-narrative, `cos you talked about story a little bit earlier on as well. So, unpack that for me, how you see this meta-narrative.

My understandings of Jesus?

Well, you used the word meta-narrative, which obviously, is a big word, in lots of ways. Just explain to me what you mean by that.

I would want very much want to hold onto history being linear, in the sense that it has a direction. It's not cyclical or anything like that. And then, within that idea of history being linear and having direction and all the rest of it, certain understandings: understandings of creation, as in God, yeah, created and creates, he initiated and continues to hold, sustain all things, and all the rest of it. I want to hold onto that understanding of God. I want to hold, I want to hold onto, what am I going to hold onto? In one sense it is what I want to hold onto, I guess, there has to be a quite a bit of abandonment and letting go of other things. Erm... I want to hold on to understandings of sin and fallenness... I'm probably on... I oscillate, now, between understandings of the thing of original sin. Understandings of Adam as the original story which, right back then, so I moved toward the idea of creation and sustaining creation now, and more the idea that, Adam will be an understanding of all of us. In terms of how God created the world, I've got a science background, I'm pretty relaxed, but I'm not quite sure, and I'll find out when we get to heaven,

That doesn't seem to worry me. I know some people make arguments that it could really affect their theology, but does that matter now? Perhaps because we are fragmented that doesn't particularly worry me. Erm... understandings of Jesus, absolutely central to all this. And my understanding of why did Jesus come, what did he come for...erm... and wanting to, yeah, huge place for the cross. But it wasn't just a build up to the main event being the cross, but his whole life was exactly the same of that. It was a laying down of his life. It didn't start at Calvary, or whatever, that was his life, that was incarnation, that was the vulnerability of God, and all the rest of it. God being, yeah, Jesus being revelation with God as well. So... can't remember what the question was, now.

You were just explain meta-narrative.

OK, there's a meta-narrative, in terms of Jesus being...erm... let me think... so yeah, there's this big story of Jesus being about God presenting himself to us, but achieving something through that as well. Being a bit less focussed, I guess, on the penal substitution end emphasis of how he achieved things as well... That was a helpful for people, and it's a helpful lens for some people today, and quite a helpful lens for some people who've been in and out of courts of law... not sure other people who've been before a judge, and been sentenced, and gone down for it would find that model necessarily as helpful. But other models of the atonement have been quite helpful as well. Moral influence theory, that Jesus and Victory

has been very helpful as well, particularly people that we come across a lot, who need to see victory, and are very much the poor in various ways. So the story will be linked to these types of things as well. So the story being very much, not changing for who you are, but different flavours that stand out at the front of this meta-narrative, depending on who you are. Then in terms of the story of being more about the future as well. So my kingdom theology touched on that earlier, would be a future reality which does break into the present, and we can pull the future into the present, in... and when we do, it tends to be in symbolic ways. So yeah, you know, John's gospel and miracles being a sign, and things like that. But, but there's future which can break into the present, we get signs of that in the present. At the same time, also, right through the story, the story's about suffering and pain, it's not just about victory, it's about suffering and pain and smallness. Which, in our setting, has become very important to us as a church. Bit of a vague, fragmented, ramble but hopefully, there's some fragments in there.

Erm, do you use the idea of – maybe you don't use the word 'meta-narrative' – but do you use the idea of meta-narrative when you are trying to explain your faith in postmodern culture?

No

No? That's not a helpful motif, even if you used a term like 'big story'?

Well, like I said just then, I might talk about a huge story, but I wouldn't talk about *the* story. I'd talk about huge story, but then I'd move, really the question could move on from there, as connections start to get drawn. It might help them to make sense of their story, in that sense, we're starting to assemble a meta-narrative, because here's a story that will inform them about their story, help them to make sense of their life and what the future might hold. But then, I'm not going to make some claim about *the* story. It might be implied in what I say, in some sense, but it doesn't generally seem to be very important, because it's about a person, and Jesus' relationship. I'm trying to think how much Jesus made that claim- I've never really thought about it like that. I'll have to think on that.

Ok, that's really helpful, thank you., As a leader of [the church], what's your greatest hope?

Erm, greatest hope for [*the church*] would be... that it... from where it is now, so it's a five-year old church plant, emerging church, whatever language... as we grow up, that we wouldn't try and be proper church... `cos I try to think of things we could avoid that... there seems to be a pressure within our psyche that now we're moving on that means starting to clone things other churches are doing. Like we really need to have a worship service, and that, the centre of church is worship, musical worship particularly, which we've got a great place for, but that we stay mission-focussed. Not in the sense that we would go and do mission, but we would join in with what God is doing in his world, that would be how we function as a church, so we would join in with what God's doing. Yeah, worship is our relationship, talks about our relationship with him as we do that. So that sense that... very much continue to plant church into cultures. The way our church functions, it's eleven groups, those groups – it depends what language you wanna use, I wouldn't use the language in the church – you could call them house churches. They have quite a lot of autonomy, independence and all the rest of it, but really express Jesus in those little micro-cultures where they are, little geographic places or networks of people. We would stay faithful to that, and we wouldn't build up an increasingly centralised animal... as

well, as we get bigger, to have grown, To hold the hold thing together... we wouldn't worry about [*the church*] breaking up in lots of ways... we wouldn't be irresponsible and just let things be unsupported, there's a role for leadership there that might need unpacking. Yeah. So that's from the original desire to work out Jesus in our culture. Local theology, to say it in two words. Yeah. Local missional theology. Three words.

Thank you. Erm, so that's your greatest hope. What is your most constant frustration?

Erm... hope waa that. The frustration... when people joined us... most people we'd meet – there's always the sort of language of that post-Christian, post-this, and post-that – in terms of post-Christendom and post-Christian, most people that we meet have got some... already have some experience of church. Not necessarily, they spent their youth in Sunday School or anything, but they've already got clear understandings of what Church is, and all the rest of it, which informs all sorts of... [*interview paused for delivery at the door*.]

Yeah... our biggest frustration. In one sense it's the people and, in another it's me, I guess, it depends how I look at it. It's trying to help people and be frustrated in that, to die to their preconceptions of church and Jesus, so together we can do this in a fresh way. Not fresh for the sake of freshness, but fresh in the sense that, 'Let's get Jesus, let's work out where we are at, what's around us, and work this out together.' I find it very hard, particularly if people join from other churches, they just don't get what we are at all, as a church. All they see is that we don't meet on Sundays. Which is fairly irrelevant to people who I think, to use the expression, penny-dropped. And when the penny drops that becomes irrelevant to us as a church. And they focus on meetings, as well, church on... church as a series as meetings. So we're not buildings, we're not one location anymore, which is pretty obvious, I think everyone believes that. But then, church becomes a calendar, and what makes church proper is the, sort of, the parts of the central life calendar. So, because we've got a meeting on ten o'clock Wednesday evening, or nine o'clock Wednesday evening, and it's got an official name in the church calendar, then that is church, and other things aren't. And the frustration of that. I guess it's another way of saying sacred-secular divide. Yeah.

So they still do church, they still go to church, and try and impose that on the church... but it's like, I am church. And that... the dominance of church, in that thinking, of church as being gathered legitimates church. As opposed to church being scattered, legitimates it. And actually, church is legitimated by being a dynamic or flow between those two. Yeah. Trying to help people see that.

And what is your greatest fear?

For me or the church?

Erm... well, as leader of this church...

Erm... probably a number of things. As [*the church*] gets older, gets bigger... no... as [*the church*] gets bigger, and seems in that sense to get more valuable, because it involves more people, we become increasingly adverse to risk. Not just taking risks for risk's sake, but there's something... the stakes seem

to have gone up, and we gambled with nothing at the start, there was nothing to lose, or any stuff to win, in terms of whatever. But this might be in terms of people, in terms of our church, as we've gotten larger and established... that's probably a good word, established – erm... that aversion to risk, aversion to try and follow Christ and being fluid. Oh, I've got a good phrase: the rootednisation of charisma.

Ooh, go on, do explain...

Oh, I don't know quite what it means.... As [*the church*] was growing, hopefully some of it's involved joining in with what God's doing – his Spirit flowing out into the world, his gift – and as we've joined in with that, that's had an effect on people's lives, people have got involved, and numbers have grown. To then sustain that, we've had to bring in routine; without the routine, what God had done, would simply have fallen to the ground, and that was an absolute neccesaity. The problem was, in all that, then being, what we've had to do, in terms of... hopefully not, hopefully just building some sort of light structure, which obviously then rootednizes it, and makes it harder for us to follow God.

Or put it another way, personally, my biggest frustration, my biggest fear ever: we started with mission, and degenerated it into church. And I can't see a way around it; it seems to be absolutely necessary. So for me, I just want to get back to day one almost.

Erm... have you got a particular story from this setting, that sums up well what you're trying to achieve?

Yeah... I can think of one. You know, lots. Erm. We're... yes. A lady... we had a church holiday – we have lots and lots of church holidays, that seems to be, in terms of a practice of the church, that's absolutely key to us. Lots of holidays with lots of friends come, endlessly, and.... a lady had become a Christian a few years ago, invited... her daughter came on the holiday, she was about twenty, not the slightest bit interested, went home from this holiday and spoke to her friend, who was a lady aged about forty, who had, who was a Catholic. She'd had a living faith through that, not saying a Catholic can't at all. But, it introduced us to her, so we met with her, and... yes, there's a background and context in one sense, my understanding would be... there are about 3500 Super Output Areas in the East of England Region, where they calve up the stats. This estate is number two on deprivation out of the 3500 in the East of England Region. And she lived on this estate, and we did our normal thing. We, we analysed – and this is another fear of how our church might go – as church comes we extracted her from that. She sort of lived there, and we extracted her from that, and she moved, she came off the estate to attend one of our groups. That was all great. And we were all, 'Wow, we've attracted someone to our church.' You know, it felt like mission to us, but actually, she was just extracted, and attracted. This is about three years ago. About three or two years ago, three months in, I was dropping Cathy off one day, to her tower block (sort of lower-rise tower block) and she just made a reference to her neighbours coming round the night before, and they had a bit of a pray-up together. I was sort of fascinated, so "Ohh, they believe, they're Christians?" And she looked a bit, sort of, confused by that understanding, and she said "No, we just sort of.... did they have to be, and we just did?" I was interested, so I sort of explored it a bit further in conversation, and it turned out it wasn't the first time that church, or whatever it was, had broken out in her flat. And she obviously didn't understand this as being church because it wasn't legitimated by us, or anything else. Bit of a Catholic understanding influencing that, and her own ones. But we have a series

of groups, and that is [*the church*]. And... then the question being, how to join in with what God was seeing to be already doing. And I asked her permission... if I could... meet up with some of her neighbours, or anything like that. And then a fascinating story occurred over the next year, which is a mixture of something very much 'God upfront' but, and as you'd expect, all the other influences coming in. So Cathy immediately invited all of her friends to church in her flat the following Thursday, or whatever. And we went on this journey from then onwards, where people off this estate – of about 1000 people – used to come into her flat each week on a Thursday afternoon. She just did loads of food, and they came to church. And the word 'church' was used by her, and she's obviously quiet good: she's a little mumsie figure, drug-addiction as well class A drugs, and she invited all her friends along. And they came along to church. And they all arrived on the first week, probably about twelve of them, and trying to work out what, then, to do, or whatever, and getting a bit lost. But over the coming weeks... the flavours that seemed to emerge were: in terms of how I needed to be, I worked out, it wasn't very clear, but I needed to not sit on a chair, but sit on the ground between chairs to be small. And try and work out what God was doing. In this case it was, not saying it would always be the case, it was joining in the *mysterion* of the gospel, you might say, the sort of mystery and prayer – practicing spirituality seemed to come right at the start, for all the people there. They weren't working, probably never had worked, and I think everyone there just about, had a class A drug addiction or were hardcore alcoholic, and all the rest of it. You know, in and out of prison. Erm... it was just joining in, but right from week one people were praying. And... this is... that seemed to have come from nowhere, but of course, the lady had been involved with them all already. And we'd pray, and we'd pray together – not that we'd pray for them – but that we, as in the whole group, would pray and various people would pray. And having these most beautiful prayers. And they seemed to understand that, even though, prayer to Jesus – and I'd used the name Jesus – but most of them wouldn't know the Jesus story – so you could insert the word 'teapot', and it didn't really matter. It was just a word, and it wasn't filled with meaning from the story, but God was at work in a way, without people understanding that story from 2000 years ago. It was blatantly obvious, and people were just... I don't use the emotional measure necessarily, but I remember week two, a lady in tears, just praying, picking up a bit of the understanding from just chatting. There's no formal group session, or discussion on a particular topic; just in tears, praying for the "f-ing prostitutes", and she obviously had God's heart for the poor. It was fascinating to see them next week, people wanting us to pray. Some of us initiating the prayer, but also "Your turn to pray together as a group". And then, after about six months, `cos there were some kids, some of them had kids, pre-school kids – we'd just gently introduce some stories of Jesus. No Bibles, I doubt many people could read there.... And then, just the stories of Jesus, and just letting people... no... just letting people just, well, preach at us from hearing the story. So just tell, loosely, a story of, I dunno, Zacchaeus, or the women at the well, and then people mailing those connections. And they made immediate connections between those stories and who they were praying... about to say who, but probably 'with', would be a better understanding. Then more people were coming, so we ended up with a network of about twenty-five people – no neat time, end time to the group, and all the rest of it. In terms of... I struggle with the model a bit... but, who was it... Laurence... belong, believe, behave. There was no sort of pre-behaving – people were... well... not class A drugs use there, but they were smoking joints while we praying there and stuff. But same time, people... obviously were really encountering Jesus, and the story, and trying to make sense of themselves, and who they were, and re-interpreting who they were, which was

absolutely fascinating. And then, thrown into all that, were a number of factors. All of them had very painful lives, and all the rest of it: the lady's daughter committed suicide, which introduced, obviously, a huge impetus to try and understand things further, which... she was about twenty-one... had lots of mental health problems, and all the rest of it... she was a very broken girl. And the... fascinating... the group then going up to a Catholic church in London for the Service. This bizarre sort of mix of us and this church that – we never understood the word church to understand who we were, it wouldn't have helped them, I don't think – meets, sort of, another church, the Catholic church, who were very welcoming, and this bizarre funeral service, where I get invited upfront to jointly deliver the Mass with the priest, and this who bizarre, sort of, 'who am I' and all the rest of it. There's all that grist for the mill; people who were trying to figure the whole thing out.

And then, also, into that, another key thing for me. Yes, we decided we'd meet twice a week... it... this is slightly out of order probably. So some people were wanting to go deeper in one sense, so we sort of... some people wanted to push on at different speeds to others... that could occur. And actually, to let people who wanted to have more... people who wanted have a quieter bit, we left the kids running everywhere. It wasn't like we convened the group, it's just conversation came and went during the course of the afternoon, and I'd sort of leave at supper time, and it turns out the group was still going six hours later... with coming and going. And... so we had another little bit on a Friday, I think it was. And then a couple of times, probably a few months, chatting with the lady, about how it was all going, talking about it all on a Monday morning, and people would turn up. The doorbell would go and people from the group would turn up, "Oh, that's great", invite them along and join in the conversation, and great. And it turned out that this group really ran through the week, we might have had a particular focus on Tuesdays – whatever the afternoon, Thursday and Tuesday – but it was actually... that sacred-secular divide seemed to have gone far more, and the culture of these people allowed that in one sense, they weren't going off to work world, 9-5, or anything like that. So in that sense, it allowed that. But the sacred-secular divide didn't seem to exist... and there was just a sort of sea of people together. And then the story moves onward with the group, and it was fascinating, it was like church coming, all my models of church weren't working, she was obviously the leader of this, and I wasn't. If you ever told her she was the leader of this, it wouldn't have worked. All my models of leadership were just... resources we could use, were all just totally irrelevant.

And... want to follow the story through... so it was fascinating, exciting, it was going forward. Then she tried to kill herself. Because her daughter... the sort of, aftermath of her daughter's suicide. And then, about a year ago, she then died; probably not suicide, we don't think.... There was no notes or anything. Just overdid it with the drugs, and then, oh.... six months ago, her brother who was part of the group, as well and just devastated by the whole thing, and they'd already had other deaths in the family. And death was a common part of the group. All the people in the group knew people who were dying of drugs, and everyone was in their twenties, thirties, forties. And that... that... then... came to an end after that bizarre... yeah, mission language... she was our gatekeeper – you know that phrase? – into this network, I was only there, under her wing in that sense, but she never understood it like that. But that was obviously the case, and that sort of came to an end, really. So... God up front, following God, da, da, da. But there was no way... we tried to manufacture things to take it forward after that. We... different

places that we could meet, and all the rest of it. But we've got something different on the estate now, actually, someone who wasn't involved, someone at the funeral: a neighbour. And, just, starting again. So in that sense, that story in various ways, it felt like we were really... this is what [*the church*] is really about. We're very much – we haven't touched on this – we're very much values-based as a church, not mission-statement base, but values-led, values-centred. But that story... proves more than anything, it's a... it's our motif, probably, as [*the church*], in one sense, the story of that woman and what Jesus did among those people, and finding Jesus at work.

My background would be... four years ago, I'd never walked into, never been in a tower block in my life. So obviously, I'm white, I'm middle-class, public-school educated, and until four years ago, I hadn't been in a tower block in my life. And there's enough of them around for us to put our feet into... not because I've avoided them, but because I just didn't know they existed. They were a landmark, "You turn left at the tower block," but I'd never known anyone who lived in one. My networks had never been involved with anyone, particularly anyone outside my class group. Some with my church. Yeah. So that's... whatever the question was... sums it up.

Yeah, that's an amazing story. Thank you, and that really does sum up what you've been sharing this morning. Erm... hmmm. OK, last question. Erm... are there any particularly authors who've influenced how you view church and its mission?

Number one would be Stuart Murray-Williams. Not just from his books, but speaking with him quite a lot. So that answers the question, but it's not particularly related to his books.

Is that because you don't like his books?

No, I do. I've probably read them all. I just know him very well. And he's been very supportive in various ways. So, in that sense, he's pretty influential. Another, pretty influential book on me, in recent years, Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*. Bit of an old classic, but... his ways of trying to work back into the Jesus story. And... yeah, look afresh at the gospels. That's been very influential on me. Another one, in terms of missiology, erm... *Constants in Context*... Bevans and Schroeder, I think?

What is it about that book?

There were... it was... there are three types of understandings: sort of church, and salvation, and mission. And I was very much, yeah, classic example of Evangelicalism... but then, can't quite remember how it goes, now.... I think that's type A, I can't remember. But finding out I'm much more type C now, whatever it is. As well, so, salvation not just being about – we've touched on this – salvation not just being about pulling souls into a lifeboat, the church as in. But salvation being about seeking God's kingdom in the world, being about all of creation, obviously people being, sort of, the pinnacle of that, the Bible would say, but.... Not just rescuing people out of this fallen world, but being God's agents in the world. Yeah. Yeah, so... yeah... that book there's pretty influential. Trying to thing, who else. No.. probably those. I've read lots of books, but I think it's just them.

Yeah, it's just helpful to see the people who you think have influenced you... What is it, particularly, about Stuart Murray-Williams, that you connect with, that's inspired you, that's informed you?

Probably his underlying – if I've understand him right – his underlying... what do you call it... not just spirituality... but, sort of, worldview, and his whole post-Christendom thing. And underlying that, much more: the Anabaptist thing. Which I've never really gotten in for the Anabaptist thing, but I imagine if I looked at – if there was such thing – an Anabaptist membership form, we had to believe the following ten things, I suspect I could tick all of them. Understandings of church, as being very much, in one sense very fuzzy-edged, and all the rest of it, but also very much a community of discipleship, and not just getting saved and joining the club. Very much about being values, something... something I've been influenced by him by.... He doesn't write about it particularly, I think, but underneath his writing, about being values centred and not purpose-driven. Very influenced against the purpose-driven stuff, probably. Another book I've been influenced by: Purpose Driven. Which would be my, sort of, heritage as well. That, trying to be very efficient about church, define exactly what I should do, and then be as efficient as possible in doing it. And now, I'd be far more focussed on doing things with the right heart, in the right way. And of course, I'm human, so I want to see success in terms of numbers, I guess, for want of a better word. Yeah. But trying to think of other people's writings on values. Oh, Hersch and Frost, read a bit if them. Often with these people, it hasn't been so much the lights being coming on, it's been want... in my own struggling way, trying to grapple, giving myself a framework for... and they give me some scaffolding and help me to understand what I already believe. "Oh, I can understand now, why I intuitively think that's right, because I, yeah, I subscribe to those types of beliefs and those views of what the world's like, and what mission's like, and all starts to click together." So it gives you some sort of framework, theological framework, and be a bit more ordered, so I can get a bit further. Yeah.

Thank you   .

Oh, actually, if I can just add one more. Lectures at College, probably. I went to Spurgeon's. So it's not really writings again, it's the person again, not the book. John Colwell, who's a lecturer at Spurgeon's, in Ethics, and erm... not the time.... later on, a resourcing from that... in terms of ethics, which is linked to Hauerwas, and people like that, and sort of, axiological, virtue-based ethics. And I was moving away from, sort of, efficiency, teleological, ends justify the means ethics, which I saw a lot of in my past, and rules-based, deontological ethics, where I can summarise the Christian faith in a set of rules, be it the ten commandments, or whatever else. Yeah. John Colwell. Yeah.

That's interesting...

Oh, one more. Colin Marchant, yeah. But, again, it was the person. He became my mentor for three years, when I was a Newly Accredited Minister. So it was an author again... very fortunate that it was personal contact with him, not his writing so much. Yeah. Yeah.

Thank you,   .. let's just switch this off....

[Tape ends]

Participant B, Interview 2

Yep, that's fine, you can record this, Graeme, says   .

Thank you,   . Alright, what I'm going to do is just chat about that gatherings you have as a group, so if you could just start by saying, when do they take place, where do they take place, just, kind of, very basic.

OK, gatherings in our church, in [*the church*]. The current... there's a calendar, so to speak, sort of periodic calendar. At the moment there's a monthly thing, on a Sunday afternoon, at 4pm, which is... we call it the whole church gathering, half the church has been to it. There are, erm... distinctive community groups, sort of home-based groups. People would... might attend more than one, but have one as their home in the church...so, erm... three of those are on Monday nights, half-seven; three are Thursday evenings at various times; one's on Tuesday lunchtimes, that's current; and the children's ones, they're all on Friday evenings, early evening. So that's in terms of that. So, do you want to talk about non-periodic, less periodic?

Yes...

OK, other gatherings of the church, which would be very significant, would be holidays. So probably about seven, eight holidays a year... as in, we go away residentially, somewhere else, define them like that. Erm... whole church go away, and genuinely, unlike the whole church gathering, perhaps about seventy of us, camping weekend. Girls go away for a weekend, kids go away for a weekend, blokes go away, and they went about twice a year, camping. And those... and when the men go away, it's.... like the last a few weeks ago, was like, sixteen men but eight of them would be people who would understand themselves to be [*the church*], and eight of them would be service users of the homeless centre – so like a mutual holiday. Camping, in a wood. Yep.

And that's quite impressive to get such a big take up for all the holidays, as well. There's a shade of commitment to it, isn't there?

Yes, and the enjoyment of it. Yes... So that's one sense. Other bits and pieces. We've done teaching-type meal things, or learning meals. We do sometimes: table talks.

And what would that involve?

It would involve... the next one's coming up around stewardship. Erm... it would involve someone, maximum of around ten people, eating. And at the same time, it would involve someone front-loading the conversation in some way, with input on a topic. And alongside... facilitating, helping people to discuss, explore it... theological reflection, I suppose you could call it. So that's table talk... it's a bit of a misnomer, as it may not involve a table.... quite a few of our church don't have tables, so it's a bit of middle-class... unfortunate label.

Yeah. And the regular kind-of gatherings: the regular one's will take place in people's homes, I guess, where would the Sunday one take place?

That's currently in the community centre. We're at the awkward size... still... who knows. We might permanently be small in number, but we're too big for anyone's living space in that, anywhere in the church, so we've had to go institution in that sense, into an institutional rented hall, a council community centre, which is a, sort of, local estate. So we picked the most deprived part of town to put it in, which is also where the church with the least car ownership is.

Right, OK...

Yep. Actually one other thing I'll say about gathering. Gathering... church gathering... we... in that sense... there's a semi-formalised way we gather... I dunno... like, next week, we...a bunch of church will be gathering at a guy's flat, er... he's got mental health issues, helping redecorate his flat... he's moved into a council flat... so that will be a core aspect of church life, just as much as a... churchy small group.

Yeah, yeah. Erm.... I'm, I'm really.... I'm really interested in... erm... what you do when you get together. So you... kind of mentioned there...., kind of helping each other out, and people... people with specific needs. What are the general things you would do when you would meet, both weekly and for that monthly Sunday gathering?

OK, erm... in terms of the monthly one. It's rode through quite a number of reincarnations. We struggled to know what to do with it, to be honest, I think. Well, I do, anyway. In a sense... we don't just a want a traditional church service. But once you've got a bigger number together, and people with quite low confidence to participate... our multi-voice participatory hopes tend to dissipate away... so it tends to be more of from the front thing. We wouldn't really have a monologue talk, we'd have... we're exploring some topic... might just be in an academic way, but we'd explore whatever it is, hope... you know, Easter, or something. Or it might be... you know, the last one was much more round things coming up in church life... we'd eat together at the same time. The children might be a part of it right though, most, mostly... sometimes they'll have their own break-away group, for a part of it. We'll use more kinaesthetic techniques to explore things... like we explore.... we set up a social enterprise: so we all had sims kits we made, like 'Sim City'... sort of arranging furniture, ways to explore what the space might look like, and what outcomes might happen for it. So that was more like a church meeting.

We do have the church meeting to make decisions, about twice a year. Very, proper Baptist.

And is that constitutionally-bound, or is it...?

Yes-ish. Yes it is, we have a constitution. Yes. We'd invite open participation by all, though we have ultimately got the equivalent of a membership who have to, kind of, make the decision on behalf of everyone. Yep.

So that's our sort of monthly, thing. We might have some sort of music there. In terms of our weekly gatherings, we probably about, thirty-forty percent of the time will centrally-resource those, as in via, a curriculum, resource notes. But no heavy... pressure to comply with that. Erm... and that would involve, typically, most of the groups... eat, have food, entirely down to them that meet together, so there's that sort of weekly meeting. Most of them... then there may be some sort of musical worship... more likely

some sort of reflective exercise, might be listening to a song, 'Youtube' video clip, or something like that. Not necessarily participatory, in that sense, some sort of questions around a Bible passage or topic to facilitate the discussion. Probably some sort of exercises, might involve activity stuff to help people to reflect and open up to the topic in conversation. Might be a theme of four of five, like we're doing a 'God's eye view' series at the moment, sort of God's perspective on, 'what is a person', 'what is community', etc, yeah. But that's sort of, more church parts of our programme. I guess those two things... yep. Yep. We do church jollies as well.

Church jollies.

Yep, we sometimes call them mission trips for a joke, and then we call them church jollies. Where... in two weeks time a bunch of us are going up to Glasgow, to help muck in on the Park, a rough estate up there. Some friends are church planting. So a bunch of eight of us are going up there at half-term. Take the paint brushes, and... get to know them Hopefully tread lightly and just encourage them. Hopefully working with a group from the local school of mums, who's decorating in their playground. Yeah.

Erm... and are you a kind of... are you... are you all a kind of similar age, is there quite a mix of ages?

Erm... the age profile, in terms... does it reflect the local community, as well as other churches? We tend to have quite a few people who are younger. Not many late-teens, got children, not many late-teens, ooh... not very many teens really, but yeah, early twenties. But we peter off at about fifty, really... a few honorary grandparent figures, but not many.

It just sounded, as you were describing the things you do, that you go away and you're able are just... you're off to Glasgow... it sounded like quite a mobile group of people who were of a certain age who were able to do that kind of thing?

Yea, yep. The folk going... some of them work... and we've talked about the make-up of the church before. Most don't work, as in, have a paid employment, and in that sense work. Hopefully they work in a wider-sense, in a proper sense. Yeah.

I'm interested in whether you practice, or whether you have communion together.

Yes.

Erm... how often, how you do it... yeah...would love to know about that.

Erm... we do. Some of our monthly gatherings. There seems to be a fear of it in the small groups... so even though we, sort of, encourage small groups to practice communion, there's a nervousness about doing it. Particularly if I'm not around, you know, someone, whatever the word is... priesting it, presiding it... whatever understanding they've got. So, monthly gatherings, in the small groups as well. We don't have a set liturgy for it at all, although we encourage people to follow quite a different... liturgical, well, I say liturgical... there's a resource sheet saying, hey, why don't you use this bit of the Bible, or that, or use... I dunno, Exodus, and lambs and Passover; why don't you use the feeding of the five thousand; who don't you use the vine...? Yeah, or whatever... or the more obvious cross stuff, Corinthians. Or we'd

set them up with some questions so it's entirely down to the group how they do it. So someone will facilitate... it would be very much a community event. The only thing I try to argue against is spiritual silence and quiet in private contemplation... that seems to not really be about communion, as we argue it. So it's a communal event, participating in God and in each other. No alcohol... `cos there's quite a few people in the church that wouldn't be helpful for.

And is it, is it quite an active event... if it's not... if it's not meditative. How does that pan out, how does that play out?

Well, I'll just give you an example of one. So... I was with someone, at someone's house to do it. Stick the bread and the juice in the middle, and say, 'What do you see?' Actually... people will share... their own perspectives on communion, and share... when it works well (doesn't always), usually share Christ... so share stories of Jesus. In that sense bring Jesus alive in story-telling. That would be one take on it. And then encourage people to eat and drink. Quite often encourage people to have more than one piece of bread... very superstitious... only have one piece... no one wants seconds. Strange meal. Anyway... it might be in the setting of a wider meal... we'll do it as part of a wider meal. A sense that... to focus on it. Oh, Passover meals we do, annually. We understand that as communion as well.

So how does that pan out?

That's liturgically-structured. Actually, I've put together a booklet, which sort of... it's a take on... sort of raids various sources of Passover meal. So... sort of... from the Bible... time with Jesus... Passover meal going right back to Exodus, as in, Modern Jewish... modern Christian spin-off from it... a sort-of fusion... more liturgical with responses. Very rare for us, that, but we do do it. Yeah. Mmmm.

... that's really interesting... and presumably anyone is allowed to take bread and wine.. .er... bread and the juice?

Yes. So that... in that sense... do we ever have altar calls in our church? We probably, actually do... which would be communion: 'Do you want Jesus? Tuck in.' So in that sense, we probably have an altar call in our church... in that sense... it's not an evangelistic technique... but it is a way for people to approach Christ. So we don't... sort of... say, "You mustn't, dot dot dot", but more, "If you want to, dot dot dot, then..."... or partake – good old fashioned world – partake in Christ in this meal.

I find that, quite refreshing to hear... erm... obviously coming from a Baptist tradition...erm... quite often the churches make a lot of that small bit of Paul that says, you don't want to heap judgement upon yourself. What do you make of that text, and how that plays out in communion, `cos I never had much time for it myself?

Trying to make me feel safe and unguarded? Erm... it goes with drinking... whatever it was... eating and drinking condemnation on yourself. I suppose it's someone who's uncritically doing it. If someone wants Christ, then they want Christ. If someone just wants the sort of thing, this status symbol, whatever it is in communion, then the community.... perhaps if they'd been stuffing their face beforehand... then, yeah. So... just encouraging people to approach Christ, and turning that negative into a positive.

Very healthy.

So social... communion. Very social.

Yeah. Erm... what, what... just moving on a little bit, what do you think are the most common themes that run through, erm, your... kind of... gatherings together? Are there specific themes that come up?

Erm.... Human identity: what does it mean to be human? That'll often take the form of self-esteem, lot of people in the church have very low self-esteem. So sense of... sense of worth and values, so in that sense a creation theology... I guess, really behind it all. That would come up again and again. If it's... sort of... atonement flavours often come up. And that'll almost be the same again: the value, that Christ died fir us... and the value... well, indicates of us, how much he values us. Those themes are certainly very strong. Erm... often, as well, we have quite a few deaths in the church. So... not relentlessly, but quite often actually, there are key things that church gatherings are funerals... and grieving. People who are young, die in the church... or people who are younger. There's a chap... next week... no, this Thursday, age fifty-four... has died, used to be a rough sleeper, has died, or whatever. That sense... that'll be very much around grieving. Making sense of suffering as well. So, suffering will be a common theme for everyone, as well. So yes, Christianity is about suffering... the God who suffered for us... and meets us in our suffering, as a ... less as a celebratory 'now' of the kingdom of God, and in terms of 'Now, wahey, it's all great and wonderful'. It's a reflection of the people in the church and where they're at.

And how do you... erm... handle the funeral time together. `Cos obviously, you don't have a church building... so what do you do there?

This one... erm, often there's been... people who've died before... there hasn't been that many... they've been significant events in, sort of... Catholic families. So that's tended to be recognised... different cultures involved... but this is our first one where we can be truly '[*the church*]'. Probably, this will be a burial, because he wanted it, in his clown suit... he used to be a clown... not an open casket.... Erm, a graveside little thing in the daytime... it would have been nice to have had the body there in the evening, but sadly, we can't really organise it... and then, you can't have a night time funeral... burial. And then, afterwards, a memorial service when everyone's around... which'll be a mixture, and we'll apply some structure... in which other people can participate... with a lot of people from beyond the church will be there. We'll just be telling the story of that guy's life... so, bringing him alive in that sense and... really, helping them reflect... helping them to bring Phil back alive by telling his story.... And there'll be an act of forgiveness, letting the self of the hook... and that just gently really, helps people see God's let us off the hook, forgiven us. It's an awesome responsibility to forgive self and all the rest of it, act of good bye... farewell. Some reflection on suffering as well, as a recognition of grief, and the God who's the God of... yeah... who grieves... who's part of that process. It'll very much be a communal thing, with bring and share food, as well. Yeah. That'll be a mixture of us and the local carnival community... so half and half, probably. Don't know how it's gonna go until afterwards... no idea. Hopefully, they won't be offended by us being too flippant, as that might seem as a funeral... to informal. That's something I'm excited about... being able to collaborate, and that.

Erm, I wanna move on a little bit... just to talk about what kind of... erm... what the approach is to initiation, membership, within '[the church]', erm... Yeah, are there any particular types of Christian initiation that you've practiced and then, yeah, whether membership's something that's openly discussed... is it something... yeah... what's going on there.

Yeah... so, sort of rites of passage... pathways in... to sort of the covenant community, perhaps... erm. We have something called partnership which is... because it's a Baptist church... you might say is akin to membership... which is an annually renewable covenant. We're very light on ethical, sort of, criteria... being part of it... extremely... well, we wouldn't argue at all from a particular ethical standard of living, a set benchmark. We'd talk about it being around... not even that you are moving toward Christ, necessarily, but you want to step into that. So, stepping into discipleship... so it's stepping into discipleship, accountability to others, not to church leaders. Church discipline, that accountability to one another... so Anabaptist in that sense, I guess. Erm... well that's the theory, it doesn't work in practice. But that's how it supposed to work. Erm... commitment to each other. So it's a three-way commitment: primarily, it's a commitment to God, traditional language there, as Lord and Saviour, but we'll ram in the 'example' as well, play up the three years of Jesus' life, three years of his ministry and before that... being indicative about how we should all live... can live as Christians, as... that commitment to him as Lord and Saviour.... so it's aimed at Christians. We let people self-define, there's no interview process.... but, I guess, there's the health warning for all, in doing this you're stepping into Christian discipleship. But that commitment..., commitment is not to [*the church*] in any corporate sense, but commitment to each other. So it's opening up our lives to each other, sort of 'one another' stuff, in terms of discipleship. But also committing to people who aren't committing back, so committing to the wider church community, even if they might both be committing to you... committing to them, and committing to... but more vague, hard to define now... but I guess what you might call, the 'out-commitment'... committing to being good news, being Christs to the contexts: my household, my workplace, my street, whatever people want to make it, relevant to them. So, a three-way commitment. And then, through that, which is just simply said by people... people indicate that they've come back for the year, which you can any time during the year... step into that. We're not so good at fuelling that discipleship process, I wanna develop that... we do a few resources, like a life MOT people can do with each other. But that, I guess, is an initiation thing... which we actually have an event for each year, in January. We could do it anytime, that's one part of it.

Another part of our initiation would be baptism.... We'd encourage people to think if you're not sure you're a Christian then get baptised, become a Christian. In a sense that's another altar call, like our communion, the other one is our baptism. And you want to become a Christian, get baptised. So, we're play that up very much as a starting line, baptism, right at the beginning of things. We try and focus more, we're not very good at it... desire is to be less on preparing people for baptism, and more on resourcing for the walk after baptism, put more emphasis as a corrective of where we're at. So that's part of our sorts of rites of passage.

And... in terms of when... when someone's going to be baptised... is that what you're looking for... a desire...erm.... to, to follow Christ?

Yes... and submit to him. Yes. Submit.... to get into churchy language... we play up lordship, or submission, or surrender. Probably use the word 'surrender' more, when we're talking in the church: surrender to Christ. Yep. New... sort of taking creation theology onwards, we'd play up new creation, as a dying to old and new self. New very physical self, as well. We'd never talk about the heaven ticket, or anything like that. Apart from that... apart from the heaven ticket that starts now, the life lived now. Yeah, so... so there's those rites of passage: baptism would be a... sort of, social, communal event, and I wouldn't do the baptism. I might, sort of lead, the service, the act, in that sense. But the people in the water actually doing the baptism, well, there'd be, well, whoever wants to get in, anyone gets in who wants to. Typically about... I don't know... head count of about between four, five, ten of us around the person getting baptised. It can be quite funny, a couple of times we borrowed a Baptist church's, it can cause a bit of a flood... as you're baptising, and we all jump in the water. And yeah, so that communal sense.

And actually, another part of that liturgy we've used recently... personally introduced something, I got it from some Chinese church. It's a liturgical act, presentation of a certificate, which is about 'Now Jesus has got one more set of eyes to see with, one more set of hands to love with,' so that's quite a lot more... that's entering into God's mission as well. Becoming Christ's agent in the world. There's a certificate to that effect, which they've produced, which involves a liturgical act of touching them... sounds dodgy... touching them in various places. On the hands, I might add, rather than on the heart, in case of women. But that might change at the next baptism, I don't know. It is a common thread through it. Yeah.

Actually, it might be worth picking up on the communal sense of us all in the water. And when we say, 'We baptise you,' I won't say it, but everyone gathered would say it, 'We baptise you in the name of...', sort of use that traditional Baptist... whatever you call it... you know, 'We baptise you in the name of de de ded dedde,' and we all say that together. And we play up, 'We baptise into the church,' alongside all the other flavours, this being one we'd pull up to the top, the church being Christ's body. Play up that this is Jesus' body. Yep.

Hmm, and what kind of...erm... percentage that come along to [*the church*] *have been baptised at* [*the church*]*?*

Don't know. Never counted. Erm... I think last year... we had an influx of baptisms last year... six or seven folk, I think, baptised. So this year... yeah, this year. And the years before that, typically... average of two a year, I guess... between three and one. And those people... mainly from... I think, on the ... somewhere in-between un-churched and de-churched, if you understand what I mean. So in terms of someone who's totally un-churched... it's more of a spectrum, isn't it? You put a marker for de-churched, and un-churched is at the very end of the scale... and it's somewhere in-between those two, typically.

Erm... you've kind of touched on this already...

Oh, rites of passage: can I add one more?

Yeah, go on.

Some of us... not in a very public sense, don't wanna put a spotlight on it... celebrating people starting... celebrating meal as well: "I've be off, dot dot dot drug for a year," which wouldn't in the spotlight, but.... celebrating some rites of passage in that sense. Breaking free from things. And then... mourning meals when they fail. Revert.

Right... that quite like, quite like a family really, isn't it, celebrating the small things and the big things together?

Yes, yes, and I suppose birthdays as well. Birthday parties, that would be a key part of our rites of passage, birthdays. In the sense of people... a celebration right in the middle... in the midst of... not all church, but yeah... when ten or fifteen go down for a chinky or a take away or whatever, mark someone's birthday. There's that sacred-secular divide, and we try to erode it, erase it.

So in terms of... hmm... let's see... you've mentioned this a little bit... want kinds of qualities, what kinds of lifestyle are people encouraged to embody?

...we wouldn't want to too tightly tie that to a particular act... rite of passage... obviously that's a god spur and a focussing point... and a... touchstone for the future... a focus for a particular event, but it would be around heart stuff, I guess you could call it. Heart stuff, or motive. Or why... so, in that sense... be like Galatians, is it five? You know, self control, gentle, humble, that sort of ethics, alongside a, sort of, theology of God and how he operates in his world, what creation is, and all the rest. As opposed to... we wouldn't... we never really refer to other... various lists... 'he should have only one wife of deacon".. or "Thou shalt not"... we won't go there for our ethics....

Right... OK... it sounds to me.... that... that... correct me if I'm wrong, you tend to be looking for a more motivational... so that, so that the fruits of the spirit that you mentioned there, about character issues...

So in that sense, we'd got to Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, beatitudes type-stuff. It seems, as soon as you ask the ethical question, 'What should you do?' will then drive you back to the motives, 'Why' question. Axiological ethics, or virtue ethics, as Stanley Hauerwas would say, I think.

Well... yeah... yeah...

I've never read him, I've only ever read people who've read him.

Right, OK...So, from the people that you've read who've read Stanley Hauerwas, would you say that there's something in that 'virtue ethics'....

Yes. It's less about position, more about direction. Yep. But there has to be some sort of recognition for the protection of the community... that people need to be at a certain point of stability... progress, probably. But we haven't completely gone down that line. But yeah, we'd have people who are, sort of, have been using Class A drugs who are the equivalent of elders in our church... still ongoing, using. Not all our church know that... some of them would have a heart-attack, I think... so.... So that is quite down the 'virtue ethics end of the scale, yes.

And, are you... are you the only person privy to that information at the moment?

I try and be... try and share it wider with one or two, in terms of being accountable... when that has happened, typically as it's breaking out in anew context, there's no way I can lead it, there's someone indigenous might be leading that work. We... we've never used the word 'leader'... there's probably a helpful title for it, I think... trappings and misunderstandings with it... but they obviously are leading it, sort of key agent in it, bringing Christ there. Yes. So... I try... I try and share definitely with others who... who I would value and would be able to say other things... the recognition that weaker people... other people who's ethical lifestyle might impinge on their own.... Bring temptation to them, cause their brother to stumble. So that would be a key part to the ethics as well, in a pragmatic sense... not causing your brother to stumble, even if you don't wanna challenge them on it, at that point in time. That might not be Jesus' next thing for them.

Hmm... hmmm. Erm... what... let's move on to talking about mission-type stuff, and let's start with the, kind of, personal level. What.. what ways are people encouraged to engage with the culture around them, and what ways... do you as a church help people to engage with people around them?

Erm... I suppose, in an attractional sense. Didn't really pick up on that earlier, but, in terms of our small groups, at certain times we might do something... we might encourage them to do something much more... purely outward looking. It might be something quite traditional like an Alpha course, or something... but we struggle with the theology of that, a bit, perhaps. So in that sense, encourage them to bring someone, in-drag someone into that. We might be encouraging them to go out, and we'd start that in someone's home beyond the church... in some setting beyond the church. We provide opportunities, like down the homeless centre, and we need to, sort of, engage with those folk, and... go out and participate with them in that. We don't... we don't do any particular training in it... probably we should do more so, as a sort of compensator... for that constant sort of... I don't know what it is... cross-currents towards... preferring your own needs, your own desires, for your church club. So we don't do anything there, in particular. Probably recognise that as something we need to correct, like cross-current. I've forgotten the question really.

It's about how you encourage people... in what ways you encourage people to engage with others around them.

Hmm. What with that culture, or with others, as in...

Well... well, within their cultural contexts. So yeah, around where they are, where they live, maybe where they work, or places they go to.

In sort of overt structured way, not very much. A few activities... I think... well, others say... it doesn't feel like it's always within, but from without, people say, 'we are...' like, our home mission fund visitors, if that's what it's called these days, home mission fund, whenever they come to us, they go, 'blimey, we're supposed to assess for 'are you doing any mission', you are mission,' that's what they always say. But from within, it's interesting, it doesn't feel like that, it feels like we're... dipping in... sometimes we're joining in with God's mission in his world, and often we're just getting on with our own thing. So it

is, hopefully, more.. part of who we are, naturally who we are... not about our programme, or activities, or training...

No, no... that's coming across very strongly. So, people are encouraged to invite, to kind of specific things when you're getting together...

Yeah, I suppose, in a sense, it helped to... we wouldn't... we wouldn't so much, this is dangerous I think, we wouldn't so much say, have... go and do some mission, we wouldn't say we have a mission, at all. We'd almost say the mission has us, and we're just part of... part of the *missio dei*. The danger of that is... `cos it's sort of more... not surface the whole time, 'Let's all go and do, dot dot dot,' and next week we must all speak to two people about Christ, or whatever, or help two old ladies across the road, the danger is it doesn't get done. It's more diffuse... at its worst, deeper at its best.

And is it, is it linked... do you think it's linked to, kind of characters, that you're trying to encourage people to form, to have formed in themselves. So we were talking a minute ago about, yeah, their discipleship and character. Is... is... is.. is the kind of... is that connected with the mission?

It's a sort of self-propelling cycles, yes. So, hopefully, it's just deeply who they are... and work in progress. But naturally who they are, it will be their instinct, their character, as opposed just to some activity in the church they enjoy, or don't do....

Erm... when you're gathering together in your activities, what do you think works well and, of course, the other side to that question, what do you think isn't working all that well. What do you think is working really well?

I wouldn't want to generalise, but things that do work well... when we... restarted a new church in a new setting. So instead of saying, 'Let's go out and in-drag someone,' when we break out from who we are as a church into a new place, it's all sort of... that the way of living, though, on the threshold of where we are at, sort of risky new place and become church... like down the local homeless centre, and teaching them some sign language. Go on holiday with them, and... that's where... exciting members... something new can grow out of that, and often does seem to... often like.. often like a new church plant, a new expression of church in that culture. We seem to be quite good at that; treading lightly and being quite patient, but being intentional alongside that. That works well. Compared with other churches... not very helpful, necessarily, but relational, highly relational about things, sharing more about life than a church diary. That seems to work well, compared to others, though we realise we're just nibbling at it. Could go far, far deeper in terms of shared money, and all sorts of things. But I guess it's working fairly well, in a relative sense. Erm, being... intentionally vulnerable... or being real, you might say, not just for the sake of being intentionally vulnerable, but sharing ourselves, our weaknesses as well as our strengths and successes, that... outsiders often comment on that; being a fairly significant part of who we are. It feels quite normal from within, but it depends which group you're in.... They're not... sort of, clones, the groups, they're not all the same, that works well.

I guess... it depends... depends which stage my mind's at... things don't work well... people behaving like a mature Christian. In what sense it feels like very slow progress... people becoming... working out their

salvation. And it tends... it can become quite human-centric... that postmodern influence kind, 'Yeah, whatever... everyone work out their own truth,' bit feely-touchy.. less respect for an external authority... God through his Bible, through other means, through his community. 'We're all individuals, and we're all self... self... whatever the word is, self-steering, and just do our own thing,' that can be frustrating at times. That sense of not being a community.

And how do you... if that's something that's not working so well, and kind of is an issue, how do you try to engage with that?

Hmm... at the moment... so just helping our leaders and other people who are key influencers in the church reflect on the tension between people being a victim... `cos everyone is just a victim, and is very, very tolerant... so what it means to be a victim, and whether that's always helpful language. That's part of it. Oh... I've forgotten the other part.... But... er.... The other things was more significant... oh, yeah, tolerance, that's it. We used to... I think in the early days of the church... think tolerance was a good value, but now we're very anti-tolerance. Recognising that tolerance is... letting someone be what they are, and you are what you are, and creating distance, stepping back from people. Stepping forward and having sparks, and argument, and breaking through to community on the far side of conflict, but that's perhaps about embracing conflict, and having more fights in the church. That would be wonderful. We're conflict-averse, perhaps.

So you would see conflict as a positive?

Not sure, erm... it's an absolute... there's no way of getting round... getting to a deeper sense of community except through conflict. It was like the small groups stuff... is it, forming, norming, storming and performing, and all that... that's all part of the same thing; conflict, yes. About... yeah... you get head-shocks cuddling. If you're going to cuddle, then you're... you're gonna get a load of head shocks in the church, it's gonna be spiky and painful. If good conflict... if you manage conflict well, with good values, if you can... but it's difficult in our church with a lot of people from very broken relationships, where they have no long-term relationships, they have no idea who their brothers and sisters are, or lost touch with them all. When relationships get difficult, they just disengage, things blow apart. Matthew 18, Jesus stuff is hopeless, it really doesn't work. I don't know what he'd want to say to us in our set up, but we can't make it work at all. Can see it working in a middle-class setting, perhaps more... which it would work... wish we could work out how to do it properly.

Hmm, that's a really interesting comment, and very helpful. Thank you. The last question might seem a little bit... kind of out there, and not really connected, but at least in my head they are connected up. I was just wondering what theological motifs, or parts of the Bible you think sum up well the beliefs and the aims of [*the church*].

OK, erm.... a cross with Jesus on it, as opposed to an empty cross, which would be more my own tradition. There's that sort of motif, isn't it, and icon you might say.

Why do you think that?

Suffering Christ, as opposed to a fast-track to Easter. So... I must admit, Easter Sunday doesn't get much of a look-in. Most churches, everyone piles in on Easter Sunday, but be half-full on Maundy Thursday. We might get half-full on Easter Sunday, but we'll really push Maundy Thursday, rather than Good Friday, or whatever it is... the cross... the Passover meal and all that, we'd linger on that... so that might be a motif, you might say.

Was you just looking for biblical motifs, or...?

Theological motifs... things that speak of God, really.

Yes, I dunno what it was called, now. That Russian bloke, who painted that picture of God, the icon painter, that everyone copied.

You mean with the three people sitting around the table...?

They were like, 'you're not painting God, `cos you're not allowed to', so painting, Genesis 18, is it> Abraham and the three visitors, so social doctrine of the Trinity, in other words; the communal God, God and his family. Relational, the whole relational thing would be a key one for us.

For me, perhaps more than the church, exile. And understanding exile as being good. But not good, helpful

Would you just pan out what you mean by exile?

Well, it's sort of taking the exile motifs of the Old Testament. Exile, as in forty days in the wilderness, or exile on the cross, three days later, exile as in Elijah, or exile as in the whole of salvation history. And in that, also picking up... picking up... it's back to the death thing, really, isn't it... that we sort of... the downward trend into exile, going out into the wilderness you might say is another one... is key in terms of dying to the old self, and the wilderness begin a fertile place. So holding the tensions of wilderness as fertile, a fertile void, as much as the uplift to perfection. So... that sort of sense of exile, I suppose in that sense, Jesus didn't make the world perfect, he aimed at perfection. And the... the path to get to perfection is through exile.

Right... and so... would you pull on Stuart Murray, on his understanding of exile... or Brueggemann as well. The sense of... actually... the church the being the church must be on the margins of society, or are you meaning something different?

I suppose so. We haven't consciously embraced that, that's just who we are. So we understand it as being about who we are. To claim that as the... what the word? To claim that as the meta-narrative of the church... just because that's where we're at, might be a bit cheeky to overplay it. So, it's certainly very relevant for us. Extremely relevant.

And you used the phrase... sorry, I just want to make sure I've got all the phrases rightly, so I know exactly what you mean. You used the phrase, 'salvation history', what... `cos that's got a few different meanings... what would you mean by that?

I'd mean the Nike tick. So... I... I... I... see a tick shape, or a sea-gull shape, of two curves... the starting point are half-way up, going down in that curve to exile, wilderness, death, dying. Then through that, and only through that, the upward arc to higher, new place, perfection... and obviously that sort of shape of salvation history. So through sort of... yeah... creation, starting point, you might say. Then fall, the downward arc, redemption, upward arch. Seeing it in the whole of history; my life, repeatedly... repeated pattern in my life, the key way in which I can grow, my discipleship process.

Right, so... is that seeing a kind of creation-fall...erm... then an exile, Israel, Jesus, erm, dying and then liftinf to resurrection and then redemption?

Yep. So the actually... not just that that's the mechanism by which you can get to the end point, but that process of self is very important... yeah... very important... self. And you can't... you can't just short cut to the end point... not explaining this very well. Erm...

So, actually, looking more at...

Well, actually you could say... say that Jesus' ministry... Jesus' three years of ministry, are three years of exile from heaven... or forty-two years, whatever it is... So it's not just Jesus hangs around for the mechanism of the cross... but ... it's something far deeper than that... it's showing how we should live.

Yeah, so you're looking at it personally, humanly... these are the human processes people go through.

Yeah... so in that sense, Jesus as Lord and Saviour might be more mechanistic... erm... but he's also our example. In the sense that... working out our salvation, putting to death, the... old life. Yep.

Actually, another motif, quite big. It's a personal one to the church, but I find it quite helpful. The smashed tiles: so if we're a tile, going from a tile... a nice neat shape, and being broken... and then what healing looks like, making a mosaic out of coloured tiles. As opposed to try and re-assemble a tile. That's our theology of healing, in a way... the wounded healer. Yes. Then there's Father carrying the nail-marks in heaven as much as the Son. All of the... brokenness is part of perfection.

That's very helpful, thank you. I'm going to stop the tape now.

[Tape ends]

Appendix C

Participant C, Interview 1

OK... This is   and he certainly gives permission for this interview to be recorded.

Thanks,   . OK, we're just gonna go through the questions and we'll divert if necessarily. Yeah, so what, in your opinion, is/are the primary callings of the church?

Erm... to be the people of God. Erm... to... reflect the nature of God, the will of God, and the ways of God in the world, and to be... a servant to the kingdom. Erm... and of course that would embrace issues of worship and discipleship, teaching, I would prefer to use the word community than fellowship, but there's more of that later on, really. Erm... and I think that... the church being a reflection of the nature of God who is Trinity... the church essentially needs to... not, model... as something external from itself, but actually reflect the nature of God and be community... I don't think it can be the church of God if it isn't community, of some form. And I think in a postmodern, post-Christendom context, the church needs to be a ... kind of an icon image of the nature of God. You know, if you need to... ideally, and this is idealism, if you encounter the church then you should encounter something of the nature of God... and his ways, er... and the values that come with... with his kingdom. Er... and of course there's a missional aspect to that because, of course, God's nature is actually missional, you know. God's nature is compassionate, and love, and restorative, and redemptive, erm... essentially, love, that's my starting point. Whatever the nature of God, God is love. Erm... and I guess manifest and expressed in all kinds of different ways.

I think the church should also... part of its calling is, again... mirroring God's nature. Covenant should be something that's realised; covenant relationships. So... I mean, one of the Scriptures that's been really important to me is... has been in thinking about our own community, and about church, where there are established, emerging fresh expressions, or espresso churches, you know, the great commandment to love God with heart, soul, mind, strength; love your neighbour as yourself, I think if the church could do that, it'd be cracking. Er, that's the idealism, that's the aspirational, intentional statement. But, yeah, that would sum up my understanding of the calling of the church.

Yeah... would you say that... that Scripture would be indicative of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be somebody who is in the church, somebody who embraces being a person of God?

Yeah... yeah, I think when the guy asked Jesus, you know, 'What is the greatest commandment,' Jesus could have said a lot of things, but I think he summed... summed law, but royal law of the heart in that. And I think, yeah... I think it would be... would be very difficult to be a disciple of Jesus without taking seriously, you know, that... that commandment. And then of course it's all unpacked, you know, Sermon on the Mount, another kind of foundational text. You know, 'What does it mean to love God, and love our neighbour, love ourselves?' look at that royal law worked out in Matthew 5:8, you know. The wonderful, theological, philosophical worked out in the beatitudes, and then they're like, 'what on earth does it mean?' And then it's kind of unpacked. How do we, kind of, love our enemies? How do we love

ourselves? How do we... how do we be true: let our yes be yes, and our no, no, and how do we not lapse off into adulterous relationships, how do we deal with the affairs of the heart, the issues of money, sex and power? I think... no... in a sense, loving God, and loving ourselves, and loving our neighbours as we love ourselves... yeah, that to me is summary. Any if the church can, somehow... I don't like mission... I don't like mission statements, I don't like vision statements, I actually hate them. You know, I'm waiting for key performance indicators to come in to churches soon, er... but if there was a value statement: does church exist to love God, love ourselves, love our neighbours, then... I think we'd be steering along the right kind of track really.

Er, OK... tricky one, now: how do you define postmodern culture in England?

In England, right.... What's wrong with Scotland? Discuss. Erm... Postmodern. Well I have to confess to you, that having studied aspects of postmodernity when I did my Master's at Newcastle, which was really good, I tend now to use more the language of post-Christendom, and I'm aware that sometimes the terms are interchangeable. Erm... and other times they're not. Erm... for me, postmodernity.... kind of bullet points, if that's alright, and then you can pull out those things from me.

Postmodernity to me is the ending of one culture... you know, it feels to me, and the origins of [*the Community*], actually, was a kind of intuitive sense that we were living through the ending of... of a culture that had been around for a long time, call it Modernity, whatever, so there's an ending. I don't know... for me postmodernity is not... you can't easily define it because we're not there yet; we're in it, we're emerging into it, but... how can you easily quantify something? And perhaps the nature of postmodernity is... is not to use the criteria of quantification, and quantifying things as we have done in Modernity, if that doesn't sound too... you know, confusing.

I think also... if it's the ending of one thing, it's also that in-between stage... of... of what... what... what is going to emerge, what is coming about. I think England today, culturally, society-wise, is in that kind of, things are passing, things are going, things are changing. You know, Dillon, 'Times they are a-changing' just to me, sums up where we're kind of at. Postmodernity speaks to me of diversity, and pluralism, and the rejection of the meta-narratives, and a kind of absence of... 'What's the story, if there is a story that, kind of, coheres and sticks us and glues us together and makes us society?' And I think we're in a bit of crisis in England, but also, great opportunity... for me postmodernity throws us as many opportunities as it does challenges. And I think... I think there's a vacuum created by postmodernity that is a great opportunity to live out... live out the gospel. I almost said, speak out the gospel, but I actually think words have become more meaningless in a postmodern context. And yet narrative, I think, is a really quite important thing. Postmodernity is very confusing, erm... er... it's diverse. It's... in England today, it's characterised by incessant choosing... erm… Oliver James' book on 'Affluenza' – I don't know whether you've come across it – I found that a very, very easy-read, popularist psychology, but just a fascinating insight into Britain today, you know. With... and psychology would pick all of this up: the obsessions, the disorders, all the kind of dis-functionalism within the human spirit... and... and I think James says in his book that he's exposed the lie where choice is all about freedom, whereas choice actually leads to confusion. I think endless choice is exhausting, endless choice is confusing, endless choice is, I think, more rooted in a consumerist, marketed-driven-ness, than it is true freedom.

Tractor in the middle of Oxford!

To me, postmodernity is... is... is more about... I won't pretend to know a lot about Philosophy, but what bits I've read... you just sense there were... there were men and women who were thinking outside of the box and asking the questions, 'So what... what's the value system, what's the thinking governing who we are?' And therein lies the potential of postmodernity; for us to think more philosophically about what's going on. I think Postmodernity in Britain, I noted this last night... where did I put it, let me read my writing... there's a kind of... we live with suspicion and cynicism, and... and I think postmodernity almost... encourages suspicion and cynicism. Erm... if modernity encouraged enquiry and critique... it's almost postmodernity, to me; suspicion and cynicism. And we've lost the ability to trust, and we've lost the ability... kind of be... what's the word... generous, hospitable, erm... believing the best of, kind of, one another. Erm... the, er... a name of a film that had quite an impact on me, I didn't like it all, was 'Trainspotting,' years ago. But there is that famous phrase in there... erm... 'Laughing in the dark,'... and to me that's a postmodern statement. It's actually dark, it's a bit shitty, a bit scary.. but also, kind of, a little bit exciting, we get an adrenaline rush out of this, but... but we'll laugh... we'll, you know..., we'll mask the pain of it with the anaesthesia of humour and laughter. And if we don't do that we'll shop, which I think is an anaesthetic to avoid things. Erm... I think biblically I would look at postmodernity within the context of exile, I think. I... I ... I would say that Western culture is in exile, the church is in exile, erm... and with it has come, culturally, a loss of idealism. Erm... I think there's a fair bit of naivity, but I... I think there's a loss... in an... idealism. I think we're adrift, ermm... and in our adrift state there's, kind of, fragmentation, erm. My fears about postmodernity is in the so-called freedoms that it, it generates and propagates, we get fragmentation, and with fragmentation comes, not so much diversity, but tribalism. Erm.... and if we haven't got the story to kind of cohere and help us live together, I fear that we'll come a more violent England in a postmodern culture.

Erm... other things? I could say lots of things, really. Erm, I think issues of identity postmodernity raises all kinds of issues of identity. Who am I and what's life all about? The big questions really. Erm... that to me is the plus side of postmodernity, that it's actually raising those issues, but I'm not sure it does anything but just raise the issues. So... come on to the other questions, but how... how the church and communities address issues about identity, and belonging, and security... er... who I am, I think are important in our mission. Erm....

The Media, I think is just huge, and... I haven't worked this out yet. I'm trying to work out what the relationship is between media, electronic media and postmodernity, and how one fuels, fires and informs the other. Yeah. Just the kind of.. I think Huxley said, 'there would come a day when we would drown with information,' and I think we're kind of... you know, we're arriving there really. And where is postmodernity in England is... you know... modernity kind of questioned God and tried to find, put a place in God, you know, private religion is OK, all this kind of stuff, postmodernity wants to shift God out of the scene. But the irony is, I meet so many people who are essentially searching for the transcendent. They don't use any of the language that we use, necessarily, in our churches, but their lifestyles, their aspirations, erm... and what they read, and what they view at the cinema, almost is a quest for the transcendent. So it's like, Chesterton said... you know, 'Christianity's gone to the dogs, but, history reveals that actually... it's always the dogs that died,' or something like that. You know it's like people

say, 'there isn't a God,' but, I meet a lot of spiritual people, very challenging spiritual, people because they're on a very different paradigm from the Christian paradigm that I hope my life is rooted in. Is that enough?

That's great, that's great. I wanna ask you a bit more about the exile motif... if... if culture... if we are in exile, what are we in exile from?

Well... culturally I think the context is of.. a loss, say of the Judeo-Christian tradition that I think has informed.... has informed culture in Britain for many a year. I don't think it's been the only influence, but it has been a big thing. And I think you can see that in our statutes, in our laws, in our union acts and parliamentary systems, you know? To me, no expert but, just intuitively, when I look at art, when I... you know, dip into literature and books and things, I just sense as if... we're living through, kind of, end times. I don't mean, kind of, Biblical end-times, but just, kind of, the sense in which what was fixed and known and assumed, it feels like we're on the wane. I suppose the loss of hope I think is a... is a common thing in cultural exile.

When it comes to the church... erm... this is kind of one of my big concerns and passions, really. Erm... I actually believe that the church in the West is... is... is in, if you like, under the judgement of God, and I think God has put the church in exile in the West. And, and... reading of church history would suggest, whenever God, both in the bible and in church history, put people in exile, allowed people to go into exile, it was because they'd lost something. And, you know, I would proffer, we've actually, we've lost our relationship with God. We've... erm... been away in a far country of activity and busyness and frenetic protestant work ethic, doing Christianity, and I think we've lost relationship, we've lost what's at the heart of the gospel, which is relationship with God, ourselves and one another. And... and it's interesting within monastic movements down throughout the church, it seems that God has allowed a monastic movement to raise up, to call the church back to something that had been lost, calling people back to the gospel, really. And erm... I'm interested in this as a personal reflection, that when I was doing the [Baptist Union] Presidency, and it was the, erm... it coincided with the 'Make Poverty History' and it kind of fired up again my... my commitment to issues of social justice. But... I just got really frustrated, and irritated, and annoyed with myself and the church that... exposed to the reality of the facts of poverty and injustice and exploitation and slavery, as much today as in the days of Pharaoh, more than in the days of Wilberforce... the church was fannying around singing songs. And I know that's a caricature, but to get people to engage with... what for me is, is a gospel issue, is a kingdom issue, is a nature of God issue, I would think, 'how dare we ask God, what right have we to ask God to bless us in what we're doing, when we... we turn a blind eye to the poor, to the naked, to the neighbour in our midst, to the suffering, and being exploited, and er...', does that make sense to you? And I think... I love the... there's a Max du Pre definition of leadership which says that the first task of leadership is to define reality, and er..., I don't want to be a Jeremiah, because I don't want his experience, but I... I ... I do feel a bit like someone who wants to say to the church, 'actually, we've got no clothes on, the Emperor's got no clothes on.' And.. and because I relate right across the church, but often am in situations where there is allegedly growth, it's actually harder to talk about exile in those contexts, and to talk about, 'OK, guys, let's get real in this context,' er... yeah, we've had a few people added to the kingdom, and that's great, but the reality is, the church in the West is in major, major, major decline, it's just haemorrhaging. And

every piece of analysis that everyone's ever done, as far as I understand it, the only church that actually has grown in Britain in the last two years is the Catholic church, and that 's because of Polish folks coming. And, you know... you know, the heady days of charismatic renewal and the house church movement, and all that stuff, of which I was a part, part of the Wimber thing, and, it... it... it's schism and fragmentation, and er... we're not cutting it, in a way that our songs, and our preaching and our rhetoric and our spirituality and all the rest, they say, you know, it's advancing, and I just kind of say, 'it's not, it's not'. And er... so... and I wouldn't put it in as grotesque a terms as Ezekiel where the people were, you know, in the temple worshipping God and he cleared off and they carried on. But... to me... there's a sense of which, there's a sense of the absence of God, erm... that I, I feel that we, we're just a bit lost. I mean, I was at a charismatic gathering, and a good charismatic gathering, not so long ago, but it felt so samey. It felt just like it did in the 1980s, and in fact we're were singing some of the songs that were from the 1980s. And if you look for new movements, whether they be political, religious, you look for the new language you look for the new songs, and it's not around. It's just speaks more of, kind of, exile. And that's not a... it's not a pessimistic statement, `cos... `cos like... erm.... if I'm talking too much, just shut me up. But... but... the... my last Sunday in... in Northern Ireland, I had a blank page...erm... to preach on, `cos I'd followed the Lectionary up until that point in the cathedral, but they'd just given me a blank page. And ten days before I... was preaching, I was down in Kent, and just kind of flicked through the Scriptures, which is not methodology for finding the sermon, but my bible fell open.... between Malachi and Matthew... and my particular Bible, it's just two blank pages. And I kind of laughed and thought this was really funny. And then, in the kind of amusing moment, I just felt God, 'that's your text,' like, when nothing's happening. And erm... it caused to do a bit of reading around it, and I just think that, you know, there was exile, God put his people in exile, they'd abandoned things, they'd lost things, they actually created an image of God, this is what frightens me, they created an image of God that, as I read the Scriptures, God's saying, 'that's not like me, so I'm clearing off.' And er... you know... and... and... what image were the religions... he was a pretty nasty, mean God who, kind of, smashed babies against rocks, and you know, didn't like anybody who, you know, wasn't, didn't belong to the people of Israel, and step out of line and you were just done for. I mean, just really, kind of harsh, cruel, vindictive, nasty, angry God, who has to be placated. And I... I just wonder of God... God just removed himself, put his people in exile..., in order that they kind of had to detox, `cos the first word from God after, is it four hundred years, is that cry of a baby. And the world sees a totally different image of God, you know. And that image, this is the image of the invisible God and it's, it's a Christ who is compassionate, and full of love and grace and mercy and has come to save and redeem and bring life and bring beauty and goodness and all that kind of stuff, and.... I just wonder with that in mind whether... there aren't things we have to let go off, actually have to renounce, actually have to repent of...er.... in order for us to discover something new of who God is. Or rediscover, actually rediscover who God is. Er... and er.... yeah. I mean, look... to me the chur4ch is in exile, we're in crisis, and... I guess one of the... one of the concerns I have is, particularly in Baptist circles, because we... there is elements within us of our... our evangelistic DNA, and we... we kind of do mission, that we do just sufficient to almost keep us from having to face the big issues, culturally. You know... it just keeps people saying, 'No, no, no, such and such is coming to faith, actually we have lively services, we don't need..., why would you change it,' whereas some of the place3s that encourage me, not just in the presidency but in my other travels, other denominations, are those contexts where, actually, they either haven't got a clue

what they're doing, or they've been at death's door, or they've died as a church, and then they've had to... kind of cry out to God and they've discovered something new of God, and they've discovered something new of the church... erm... actually the church has come secondary to discovering something about God, and they've also discovered there's something about gospel, and discovered something about culture, and almost the church is shaped by those experiences, whereas what we've got is the starting block of the church, and everything has to be, kind of, viewed as what we're doing as a church. And, and we don't look at culture through, kind of, untainted lenses. I mean, we all bring our backgrounds and traditions, but we have to look at culture through the particular expression of church that we've got now... so... sorry, rambled on there.

No, that... that brings me nicely onto the next question. Er, which is, what is your aim in engaging with postmodern culture?

Erm... erm... well, perhaps I need to qualify this, because I'm part of a community that has two and a half, three thousand people... kind of all over the place, so I could give you a particular, little example, but it's local, it's better if you see something of the wider context. Part of it is principle, and then I can give some examples of, kind of, practice. How do we... how do we engage.. I think, philosophically we are more concerned as a community, and this would be true in kind of local as it would be globally, we'd be more concerned about communicating the values than living out any vision. Erm... you... you know that we have a rule of life, a new monastic rule of life: availability and vulnerability. And I think they're gospel values, and my concern as an overseer of the community is to encourage people to live out the values in whichever sphere of influence God has called them. So, I mean you're doing your doctorate, another of our companions is doing her doctorate in Manchester. She's in the Health Service and she's looking at how availability and vulnerability, our vows and rule of community; what it would look like in a GP practice, OK. If that was the ethos, and er... same for my mate, Rob, who's the head of Allied Beds in Scotland... you know, he is trying to write policies for his particular section of the NHS which is rooted in the values of our community; that, actually, relationships matter more than reputation; that, actually, medicine is about an embracing of risky living, and that, you know, the litigation and fear culture that so dominated contemporary society needs to be challenged `cos it's getting in the way of risks.... you know... in order to advance medicine and be a health service, as opposed to just a, kind of, service provider.

So values would be an important thing, and living out the values... you know, we talk in our community about our mission is to live in the story that God's given us, and to live it out. And living out the values, hospitality would be a really big thing. Give you an example, we... we moved back... my wife and I, to
. We'd moved houses, and now on   High Street in a house that's now ridiculous, `cos it's kind of two houses and a shop front, erm... and this was our idea of down-sizing... erm. And we rent out half of it, in order... for the whole. But there's a shop that, that the community runs
, and so, we've got involved in the local chamber of commerce, local business community and.. what we've sought to bring in aver small way is our values into the work place as to how we run the business. So, it's a social enterprise, but the values of, like, hospitality's really important, we want everybody who comes over the threshold of that shop to be welcomed, to receive hospitality, not to entertain the,. But genuine hospitality of the heart, to kind of, honour them. We want all of the folks

that we do business with, you know, our suppliers and er... the folks we sell to, to kind of be impacted by the values of availability, vulnerability, hospitality. Erm... faith practice, er... generosity of heart, er... a willing to take risks if relationships are more important than, in a sense, the balance sheet. And it's kind of resting with that economic sustainability, but actually, justice and er, you know, the bottom figure on the accounts page is not the most important t piece, it's an informing piece. Erm.... I... I think how we engage both, globally it sounds like it's huge, and it's not at all... if you need e to unpack that. We're just ordinary people trying to... find a way for living as God's people in an exiled context, asking how to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. But, er... living out a rule of life, and a rule of life's important to us... for us the gospel is quite a radical alternative life, and I think we engage with local culture by living quite alternatively and radically. Er... which of course, you know, engenders some suspicion and at time hostility.... er.... but I wish the church had a bit more reputation for being alternative. I think we've swallowed the 'let's be culturally-relevant,' and I suppose my cynicism - that's a bit of postmodernity within me – often our cultural relevance is usually thirty years out if date, You know, we're relating to the people who are in the 1970's, or something, you know, if that. Er,... Henri Nouwen says cultural relevance can be a cul-de-sac, it can take the church.... where I think the values of authenticity and integrity and transparency, erm... they're the things, I think, that speak of Christ in a postmodern culture. Erm... with that is the non-conformist piece, er... I think part of the mission of the community is to listen. I mean, I'm, like, doing all the talk `cos you've posed the questions, but... I think our mission is to listen: to listen to people, and to listen to culture, and hopefully listen to God, and er... you know, just listen to what's happening. Perceiving is a big piece of my... well, we don't have a mission statement. Friendship, we befriend people. We're... we're not interested really in whether they join us or not, and once you get that out of the way, you can actually make genuine friendships, which is great. It's no a recruiting agency, it's actually about... it's about celebrating the dignity of human life, erm.... And yeah, we pray, God, that our lives may be aspirationally-christocentric, and people will journey to Christ, and, you know, that's not our task to... proselytize, and get people in. Erm.. there's nothing more delights us when people come to an encounter of Christ and follow on as disciples, but... I think we've, we've kind of erm... we've almost deliberately now, and intentionally, abandoned some of the things that many of us in churches we're doing years ago in our discipleship or our evangelistic programmes. It doesn't mean to say we're not evangelistic, but... but we would be... I have to confess we would... you would hardly ever hear anybody talking about evangelistic or mission. It's not because we don't believe in them, but actually they're not heard by the culture in the ways in which we think....

Erm... we'd use the arts a lot. Arts are windows to heaven, and er... they're also about helping people discover they're created in the sight of God, so... we would engage a lot. So, in our shop we exhibit local artist's work, we have our own community artists, we run art workshops, music workshops, drum workshops, percussion workshops, music workshops, you know, story-telling workshops. We go to festivals, secular festivals, flower festivals, community festivals, that, you know, all of that kind of stuff we go to and we use the arts, erm.. You know, we don't go and hand out tracts, we don't kind of preach, but we go an play good music and.... But it isn't just about a performance piece, because there's a community aspect to it: so it carries hospitality, we talk about monastery on the road, erm..., we're at Gorsely Festival this year, which is a Christian Festival, it's a flower festival, er..., but we've done it at Greenbelt, we've... created a thing called scared space, and it's great. It just provides a place, and... and

we just let God do whatever he wants to do with people. We just welcome them. We maybe serve them a cup of tea or a glass of wine, or something, depending on the context. Erm...

We've got increasingly more involved in, in what I would describe as the public domain. So the examples I gave of two people in the health service... what we try to do is... is to live out the gospel in the public domain, because we're not... not planting churches, erm.... Well, yesterday I was at Shillingford, which is just south of Oxford, two of our community have what's called Bridge House, and it's going to become one of our community houses, in effect it is now. They live on the banks of the River Thames, it's lovely at Shillingford Bridge and, erm, I was meeting with them yesterday because... they're going to create by the river Thames a labyrinth, and a sculpture park, and, you know, it's kind of... well, some of the folks in the church around them just don't get it, you know> But... but... but they're creating sacred space somewhere and... and they also... they've got a great heart for the wounded and the vulnerable, so they've got three or four homeless folk effectively living on the campsite, at one end of their campsite by the banks of the River Thames and... you know, one of the guys was at table yesterday just, you know, I welcomed as we would welcome Christ at the table. That's them living out those values of availability and vulnerability, er.... They could be doing all kinds of things, but they've chosen those values. And we're trying to write more resources for people in the workplace, in the home. And so... so it's difficult to quantify what we're doing locally, but actually, spheres of influence, people in all kinds of contexts living out the values is, I think, what makes the difference.

Erm... we invite people to journey with us, come and see. That's as big kind of... and we'd have quite a lot of people, unbelievers are part of our community. Not as companions but as friends of community, who hang around with us `cos they... they like the bits like hospitality, they like the music, they like adventure, or whatever, so that would be fine. And some people have remained friends for years, and you know... they're just on the beginning of the Emmaus Road. They haven't journeyed back or recognised anything at the moment, but... that's... that's the way we express our commitment to local community. Erm....

And we... we... we ... we seek to provide, through our lives and dour houses, `cos there's more than just the Mother house, now, places of prayer, hospitality, space for people who are seeking God and actually a bit of a home and shelter for people who... are either un-churched believers, of which there are thousands, or people who don't know if they believe in God any longer. They wouldn't necessarily call themselves believers, but there's something that is still there in the human heart, but they just need speakeasy places where they don't have you conform, they don't have to sign up to anything. And ironically their often the people who troop off to do all the liturgy in our chapels, and... yeah... you know.. ask me...

That's really interesting. I'd be interested to se... the one thing you didn't explain was what you mean by living in the story. You talked a lot about living out the story, which was really helpful...

Well... I....I don't know if it was Newbiggin or Brueggeman who talked about the scriptures are God's covenantal text. They're... it's... it's almost like a love letter... it's a means by which God communicates to his people, and invites his people into relationship, which has a deep impact upon how we read the

Bible. You know, you asked, 'has postmodernity impacted my own view of faith,' and... it has in many ways, one of which is... finds expression in how I read the Scriptures now. I used to read the Scriptures to inform my mind and give me knowledge of God so that I could pass it on to other people, the Bible to me now is written to transform... I actually wrote for the Spiritual Formation Bible, and I think the Scriptures are written to inform and transform our hearts and minds, so that we might be in relationship with God, and in deepening relationship with God. And I think there's, erm... it's the Tom Wright stuff, it's almost like there's a drama in the narrative of Scripture, and God invites us to participate in that drama, or that story, and that's what I mean by living in the story. Living in the... in the... kind of living out the themes of the story, I mean, I think one of the big themes is hope. You know, later on you ask me 'what are the things that I kind of find positive or encouraging, or something,' it's the hope that comes from God's story: hope in the midst of darkness. Trainspotting is like laughter in the dark, er... well, I think faith actually gives us the ability to laugh in the dark, not as a means of denying the reality of the pain and suffering all around us, but because it's rooted in hope. So I think that's... that's the living in the story bit. The living it out is the missional expression, really. And if we live out the story we become storytellers of God's story, we actually become living embodiments of the story of God in our lives. So that when people read the Scriptures there's a kind of... erm... a kind of... there's an accord with what they're reading and encountering, and with what they're reading and seeing and encountering in the lives of God's people. It's when there's discrepancy. I mean, I'm talking about life themes in the Scriptures.. Jesus says 'you have the words of eternal life,' in the Scriptures, God's story provides life, words of life. And we... we live in those words of life, and we live out those words of life.

Er... alright... let's move on. Er... Are there any theological motifs or parts of the Bible that you find particular helpful in explaining your beliefs and aims to those of postmodern culture?

Well, I think it... the.. one of the big theological things which has influenced my own and the community's life is the whole rediscovery of trinity. Erm... I think it was Moltmann who said, the loss of the doctrine of the Trinity has led to an excess of individualism within Western culture. And I think the more we've returned to some of our Celtic roots, we've rediscovered the importance, really, of... of Trinitarian belief, and... you know, not to view Scripture, for example, through the eyes of an individual, but as a community look, and discover the community of God. So, Trinitarian thinking. How does that shape us? `Cos... `cos again in our community, who used to be one of the leaders, and Andy says, unless it's got.. unless it reflects... unless what we do reflects something relationally, then there's no point doing it `cos it doesn't carry any of God's DNA in it, and.... and I like that. I mean, you need to explore it, but I like it... because so easy you can just lapse into the project, the doing of something, and actually miss out on the relational components. Erm..., the gospels have become... erm.... of paramount foundational importance... I mean, we thought they were important, when we, kind of, journeyed, but... but it was interesting for me because... coming from an un-churched background, I'm profoundly influenced by the gospels in my first couple of years as a Christian. I kind of unintentionally lapsed into... the letters of the New Testament, and kind of, got into a, kind of, doctrine, and describe and didactic theology, and... and the community has kind of liberated me and pointed me back to gospels. And particularly the Sermon on the Mount, blimey, it's our life theme. It's the origins of monasticism, Matthew 5:8, so that's really important.

The Johannine tradition's become really important, erm.... that has a bearing on us missionally, 'come and see. So, you know, that kind of invitation to come and see, to... to journey is really important. It's not bringing people to a prescribed outcome, it's just journeying with people and generally not getting in the way. We've been much more Emmaus Road than Damascus Road, thank God for Damascus Roads, but I would say it's the exception, it's not the norm. Erm... yeah, there's that whole piece in... the Celts were very influenced by the Johannine tradition, and the kind of concealed, erm... aspect to the nature of God, the mystery of God. Erm... whereas Roman tradition, Petrine tradition, Evangelical tradition, it's... it's Scriptures, Word of God, the teaching of the church... and... and that's all fantastic stuff, but it tends to lead to a kind of, 'we know it, we've got it,' and I think the other side, the Johannine tradition says, 'we've got, but just in part,' erm.... God does reveal things, and... and there's a whole relational side of things, 'behold the mystery of God.' Er... which has.... has shaped and kind of influenced us... erm. The , erm..., I think it's the Bible Society have just published... ooh, I think it was this year or last year... they took up on Bono's challenge, to the references in the Bible to justice and poverty, and yet where do Christians ever say anything about that. So Bible Society have done a contemporary version, where they've highlighted all the texts, of which there are several thousand, er... in the bible. And the whole, kind of theme of justice, is becoming more important to us in community. To, to, to view... our lives and scriptures and what we do, through the lens of 'what does the Lord require of you but to... you know, the humbly and the justice and the mercy,' they become important lenses. And it's crazy, you know, because, you know, everybody knows the Micah 6:8, but it wasn't the huge... if you analyze what we doing in church when I was in church, it... it featured, but it was usually kind of there on the agenda among other things, It wasn't the lens through which you did the whole piece, but it wasn't a core piece. So justice is a big issue.

Erm... the language of covenant, which I think is there, Old and New Testament, it's the language of relationship. Erm.... and... a particular things that's... that's really got me buzzing at the moment is the whole notion of... of Sabbath rest. Erm..., and er, I've shared it a bit with our own community and in different contexts, and... and it's really resonating with people. It's... you look at the creation narratives, and, I've always assumed that the highest point of creation, like the pinnacle of creation is the creation of human beings. And yet, the end of the creation narratives both point to, on the seventh day he rested, and he looked out on his creation and it was cracking good, you know? And.. and that caused me to think, actually... there's something about, erm.. postmodern, western consumerist culture that is about working and driven-ness and doing and achieving and accomplishing, and we missed the pinnacle bit which is actually rest and relationship and beholding that which is good and beautiful and, erm... just written this piece that's in   ... am writing at the moment, about God has made us communers, not consumers. And.. and I wanna explore that further in our community; that God made us for communion with himself, er.. with... with our neighbours, it's back to the great commandment. And yet, culturally we've just become consumers, erm... And, you know, that... I mean, I don't know where that's gonna take us. I've got... we've been invited to be involved in Operation Noah, which is a whole thing on climate change. And erm... I do think global warming is a whole... is a big issue. Not because it's the issue, but because it raises issues with our relationship with the world.... My wife's a bee keeper, and, you know, we've got a major world crisis on our hands, looming, `cos you know, we'll walk round Oxford today, and it would be a miracle if we saw a honey bee. You know, see a few bees,

but... there dying out, and for all kinds of different reasons. And in America, they're gonna really struggle to get some of their crops harvested this year, because of the... and I think, you know... You know I was saying before about listening? It's actually listening to things like, 'What are the bees telling us?' You know, 'What's the... what's the rise in asthma telling us?' What's God saying to us, and all this kind of stuff. So, you know.... So reading things like, 'The earth is the Lord's the fullness thereof,' I'm... I read it because I thought it sounded nice in worship services before, but... but... but those.. those biblical narratives becoming more important: what does it for the world to be the Lord's, the fullness thereof? What does Romans 8 really mean, creation groaning, waiting for its redemption, what's going on here? What's the Colossians motif where all things come under, you know, the headship of Christ. So yeah.. they'd be... they'd be... you know, I've shared some of my own, kind of, passions, but most of those themes would be resonated throughout the community, they'd be the big themes. Erm... As well as the obvious ones for a monastic community: dessert, wilderness, exile. You know, those texts. 'How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land,' that's... that's one of the three questions that formed [*the Community*]. How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Who is it that you seek? And how, then, shall we live? That's why we existed. So we didn't have a vision, we just had three questions.

That's a really, really helpful answer. Erm... so how do you explain all this stuff to churches who might be more resistant than you are?

Er... By being canny and compassionate with them. Not condemning them... `cos I'm part of that as well, I never see myself actually as... as anything other than part of the church, and it's all different manifestations and expressions, er.... And what we're doing in exploring new monasticism, we're still part of the church.... I think my... my and our community's starting point would be to help people respond to God's gracious invitation to return to him. I do think we've been away from him for a long time, I think we've lost something relationally. I think we've lost something at the heart of the gospel, which is knowing God, loving God, being with God, rather than just doing. You know that lovely cartoon that, you know... 'Look busy, Jesus is coming,' it kind of sums us up, erm.... Particularly we Baptists; we're just so flipping busy. You know, it's just extraordinary. So, you know, I'd invite people. You know, it's on safe ground, whatever tradition, to invite people to return to God, to love God. I mean, people... people are gonna struggle to argue with you if you say, 'you know, we're called to love God.' Erm... they then struggle, if you go on and point a few things out, where we might have, like, moved away from God. And er... so, I think it's invitation, first, back to God. And then it's reminding people of the great commandment, erm... I guess one of my favourite passages of Scripture is the John 21 thing, you know, with Peter... erm... he asked, did he love him..., erm. And er... I mean.. I... part of me, you know when the whole controversy blew up in Evangelical circles about the penal substitionary theory? I mean, part of me just wanted to laugh, and part of me... most of me just wanted to weep... that... that... here were Evangelicals doing what we've done though history, you know, fall out with one another. And... and... you know, herein lies scandal. To me, it wasn't the biggest issue that the church or the world is facing, and I think, you know... I kept revisiting John 21, and thinking, did Jesus say to people, now do you understand the penal substituionary theory of atonement? He asked him if he loved him, and er... you know, if the church can love God... if we love Jesus... sounds dead passionate. If we love Jesus more than anything else, than actually, we lay down those things that get in the way of loving Jesus: vested

interests, issues of power, issues of control, erm... when doctrine becomes more important than love of God, then I think doctrine's lost it. Erm.... my rudimentary understanding of theology is that theology is love of God. And I think, you know, we've made theology a kind of abstract academic intellectual exercise which... which often divides is, rather than that love of God which unites us. So I would be encouraging whatever church, background, Christian to... to love God and to seek God, erm... I recognise that I think there's a lot of fear and insecurity around in the church. Erm... people wouldn't name it always, and you have to help people, sometimes, to name their monsters. Erm, change brings about... it threatens insecurity, it illicit fear. You know, `cos some people love change, but a lot of people don't love change, and... I think there's a pastoral issue of relating to people's insecurity's and fears, but you're inviting people. We have to journey, we have to journey. There is no... there is no standing still, erm... you know, The... the... Selwyn Hughes used to say, 'It's only a matter of degrees between a... erm.. what is it, I've forgotten the word... a rut and a grave.' Erm, you know. And some churches are in ruts, and if they don't move along that rut, they'll soon become a grave. And there's sufficient evidence for us to see that if we've got our... kind of, eyes open. Erm... I would want to... encourage people to... to be built up in faith. This is why I think spiritual formation is really important. You know, helping people to be grounded in God, helping people to love God, helping people to... to have their security in God rather than in any particular expression of Church is a spiritual formation issue, faith issue. And once you build people up in faith, then I think you can start to counter the fears and insecurities that they have, erm.... And... you know... it's jargon really, I do think, unless the church moves from maintenance to missional, then it's... stuffed, `cos we'll just end up maintaining what will become a museum. And even then, in two or three generations it will have gone. Erm... and we've got to move it from a pastoral model, without abandoning pastoral offices, we've got to move it from pastoral to apostolic. You know, erm.... I mean I... I work quite a bit with some of the black-led churches, which is ahuge paradox, `cos I'm talking about exile, they're talking about revival, erm... you know? But actually, there's common ground in love of God, and we're both passionate, Celts and Africans, Afro-Celt is a really good mix. Erm.... but... erm.... what I think some of the Black-led churches can teach us, is that they actually have got some aspects of the apostolic absolutely spot on. They have a kind of expectation, and a love and a passion for God, and erm... they are making difference in, in Britain today. Having said all that, my challenge to them is... that in the main they're making differences in their sub-cultures. Erm... fabulous differences, and there's a knock on effect but, you know, when I was down in one of the churches preaching three weeks ago in London, fantastic time, wonderful hospitality, great generosity, honouring of the servant of God who brings the Word of God. You know, amazing stuff, expectancy, great thing happen, I just love it. You know it's like... it was on the day before my holiday, and it was like My holiday had started, it was absolutely wonderful. But, erm... but I'm still gonna hold on to the fact that, er... I think the by and large the church in the West is in exile, erm.... Yeah.

OK.erm.. you've answered this a little bit already, but do you think postmodernism has changed your understanding of Christian faith?

Erm... yeah, because I think, erm... coming from an un-churched background, and into, almost, the certainties of faith... I mean, I had quite a profound experience of God, erm.... not so much in coming to faith, but in call to ministry, it was a bit more Damascus. Erm, and then I went off to Bible College and...

and nurtured in the certainties of the faith, and I was very sure. Errm... and I had to... I had to kind of exhibit sure-ity of faith, erm, in the pulpit and elsewhere. And I think what postmodernity has done is given me the freedom to say, 'actually, I'm not so sure'... er... you know? It's enabled me to be more true to who I am, actually more true to my heart, and... and of course it's more vulnerable, but that's one of our rules of life, anyway, so I'm stuck with that one. Erm... But it... it's enabled me to be more honest, erm... I mean, that doesn't mean I was a lying preacher, but, there were just occasions when issues of conscience emerged for me, when I was doing the... the stuff, and just feeling, 'I'm actually not sure I believe this stuff.' Even though there's some evidence to say this stuff works,' I'm... not sure I believe it. And er... yeah, I think postmodernity has given me a freedom and a permission to, in a sense, question... assumptions, erm... to be a little bit more unsure about things. The irony is that my love of God has deepened, I think, through that process. Erm.. er... I'm kind of more sure of God now, but am not sure about loads of other... loads of other things about God. And I think his human resources policy just sticks on occasions. Just... I really struggle with it, erm... But no, there's a bedrock of faith there which just... is good. It's not all up for grabs. Well, in a sense everything was up for grabs, actually, but God remained, which I think is really lovely. That's good of him, `cos it's not anything to do with me.

Er.. what else has postmodernity done? I think it's just enables me to free to speak more faith publicly... it's taken me out of the sub-culture of the church, erm... it's taken me out of the pulpit, really,. That might sound a bit, kind of, bizarre. This... this thing I said before about the Johannine... the concealed... the sitting with mystery, erm... the being with God, the whole kind of contemplative tradition, I think sits quite well with postmodern stuff, er... er.... I'm much less... less deductive in my... my kind of teaching and.. less kind of assured really... more exploratory.... It's kind of... I've got something down here, it's, yeah... postmodernity has helped me be a lot more creative and visual about my faith, erm... and has allowed me... given me permission to... to value my intuition, and to trust my God-given intuition, whereas before I, kind if, suppressed my intuition... and yet that was crazy,` cos that's the way God made me. I have to rationalise backwards... you know, I kind of like.... if people ask me why you believe, I kind of like... somehow... go backwards... but the starting point for me is the intuitive... it's the being, the sensing. And er... I guess postmodernity has... and people would be horrified by that, but postmodernity has given me permission to do that, erm...

Much... postmodernity has made me much less propositional and truth-statement-ing, and much more exploratory and story. Lauher, the writer says that...' you know, one of our tasks in a postmodern culture is to... in the midst of all the endearing myths in to tell the enduring story.' Erm.. But... but telling the story is different from, kind of, haranguing people with these huge, great propositional truth statements that they've got to buy into. And I think, Jesus, 'some and see, come and hang around,' er.... I think it was just lovely.

John's Gospel: I love it. In our morning office we use the John 6, 'To whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.' I mean, it's... it's a rubbish faith statement. It's like, 'Is that all you can say about Jesus?' You know, 'You seem a canny bloke, you have the words of eternal life, OK.' I mean, it's not until you get to the end of the gospel that you get this amazing creedal statement. I... I love that, because it's like, Jesus is much more comfortable than the churches with people journeying, and hanging around, and coming and seeing. And of course it's out of relationship with him that they grow in their

understanding of who he is, and then... it impacts their behaviour. And I think... we've sometimes gone askew in churches when... when we look at behaviour first, and then... and then... you know, it's really important in our discipleship groups that people are... I was gonna say indoctrinated... disciple in the things that it's really important to believe in. If they've, kind of, got their behaviour right, and they've got discipleship-doctrine bit right, then they can belong. I just think... I look at the gospels and I think Jesus did exactly the opposite. It's the Grace Davie thing, you know, belong, believe behave, and that's the way of Jesus. But somehow we've adopted the spirituality of the golf club, that it's behaviour and etiquette, and believe exactly the right things, you know, the rules of the club, and then you will belong and, hey, if you... if you really belong then you might get on and be club steward, golf captain for the year, become a deacon or elder of something. You know, and I just think, no. And that... I think, unconsciously as well as consciously, postmodernity's kind of... given me a different set of lenses with which to view faith, really. Er... and certainly to look at... to look at other people. Yeah.

Ok. So as one of the leaders of [the Community], what's your greatest hope?

Erm... without trying to sound really spiritual? Well, my greatest hope is... is in God, OK. It just needs to be said, because, I.. I haven't got a lot of hope for the... I haven't got a lot of hope for the expression of church at the moment, if I'm honest. I haven't. Erm... I could be quite depressed, erm... but... but with God I'm kind of not depressed. To... to.... to pull it out a little bit more. I'm very hopeful that if God is taking... has taken the church into exile in the West, then he's taking us into exile in order to, as I suggested before, call us back to himself. I think the fruit of exile is an excitement about what may emerge... erm. You know, I was with my own two eldest children last night and their husband and wife, and... you know... because they're under 40, they see the world differently to me, and you know, I've brought `em up. They've got the same value systems that all Christians... but somehow they represent to me hope for the future, because they're much ,more value driven, they actually won't do the things that I was prepared to do in order to keep the church going, erm..., they will be perceived on occasion as a bit, kind of, lazy, popping out and doing their own thing. In actual fact, when you get a long side them, they're very passionate and very committed, and they've actually got more bottle to do the things that are important than not. So that gives me a great deal of hope. Erm, not only for our lives, but for the community.

I'm encouraged by... what gives me hope? Well, watch this space; seeing what God's doing through exile. You know... if the judgement of God is upon us, then it's not kind of this punitive God who's just gonna smash us up; always it's to restore and redeem us, so... I'm kind of fascinated to watch this space and see what will emerge, erm... out of our brokenness really. Erm... I think, er... my hope is rooted in the... in the kind of belief that goodness will always overcome evil. And that, erm... and that beauty... out of that really, out of that belief is that beauty will overcome ugliness, really. Those are things that give me, kind of, hope. And I think... I see elements, both within the established church and within the emerging church... and in elements of fresh expressions, of people beginning to re-imagine what faith, and church, and life can be. And I think in there is the seeds of hope. I don't think fresh expressions has got it all, I don't think emerging church has got it all, in fact I am very concerned about aspects of the emerging church. Erm... I... I... I totally understand the reaction of the emerging church to the established church... but there are aspects of the established church that carry issues of spiritual

formation... that some issues of emerging church just don't have. And I think they'll burn out. You can't found something on just an idea, you've gotta ask, 'what's the spirituality that's informing you.' And I think there are aspects of established church where there are some good things happening. Erm... I find it absolutely intriguing that the attendance at Minsters, Abbeys and Cathedrals is on the rise, when most other sections of the church are waning. And I think it's about that, kind of, postmodern quest for sacred space. You know, Berger, the sociologist, talks about the loss of the sacred canopy, and yet people search fopr4 the transcendent, that people find their way to places they associate with sacred canopies, and cathedrals, somehow, seem to be the thing. And Baptist Churches often aren't. Erm. And... what else gives me, kind of, hope for the future? Erm.

I've met sufficient numbers on the margins of church and society to suggest that God hasn't given up on us. My most encouraging... by and large the majority of things that encouraged me during my vice-presidency and presidency we're nearly on the margins of the denomination. Erm, they were in Tower Hamlets on the seventh story, in a flat with two plastic picnic tables. That was church. And... and... you know, depleted elderly congregation, meeting with ten other congregations in rural Norfolk, by a staithe in the Norfolk Broads; there's just something very beautiful And I think... I might be totally wrong in this... my reading of church history is that people always wanted... tended to look toward the mainstream, but actually it was on the margins that you saw the first signs of God's activity. And I think there are some things on the margins that are really, kind of, good. But it's church like we ain't seen church ever before, you know. And therein lies a challenge. Erm.. I love Rowan Williams.... I've only met him once, only briefly, and I'm hoping to meet him in the Autumn. If the.... if Lambeth Council doesn't kill him, the conference.... Er... But er.... but I think he's really good news for the church because, er... I know somebody who was involved in the mission-shaped church report, and... they, they would be regarded as the guru in terms of missional church and everything. And I remember them saying to me, at Greenbelt it was, that Rowan is twenty years ahead of where they are. And er... I just think he's a gift to the church, he's a godly man, deeply spiritual, very humble, profound intellect; hate him for that, you know. If I could just... if he could just impart some tiny semblance of his intellect, it would just be amazing. Erm... I think he's got courage as well, erm.. I think he's a monastic at heart, But er... he gives me great hope, actually, because I think, he sees culturally what's happening, and I think he is a permission giver. And it's actually under his tenure that Fresh Expressions, it's actually under his tenure that things like street chaplains, you know, and it's under his tenure that he's... he's given permission for some expressions of the church to die so that resurrections might come. That's hopeful piece.

What about your most constant frustration?

Erm... constant frustration, apart from myself. Erm... yeah... I ... I wish that when you were on the margins... I wish that being on the margins you didn't have to be so knackered financially. I find that a real frustration. I.... I and the community could do so much more if we had the resource.... And that's... that's a day-to-day living frustration. Erm... It's a great faith-filled story, but it's so exhausting.

Big frustrations are.... I'd have to say... the church when it's... it chooses to be blind to the realities all around it,. That frustrates me deeply. What really hacks me off is power, I think.... there's a piece within modernity that has brought the evil of power to the surface and we... we... you know, control,

organisation, structure, strategy, you know... It's often power plays, and I think the vested interests and manifestations of the power in the church are its greatest cancer. You know, it's so difficult to be a kingdom people when people are peddling with power. And I just think there has to be a renunciation of power... you know, one of the great inspirations for me has been St. Aidan, and it was said of Aidan that he loved God and lived generously. That would... that would, erm... that would subvert the power thing if we would just live generously, I find it really frustrating. Erm... the power plays that go on in churches that control. The issues of, like, what? Well, women in leadership, well it's like... I don't actually believe it's a theological issue, it's an issue of power: who's got the power. And I think we can learn something from the Celts: if you take power out of the equation, then the issue of who's in leadership is not an issue. I just don't get the impression that there were loads of people in Hild's double monastery saying, 'What's she doing here, she's a women?' You know, I just... it didn't exist really, erm. So that would be... that would be, I guess my frustration.

I get frustrated with Christian leaders, not because I don't like them, because I have a real heart for leaders, and I am one, but er... I get frustrated with leaders who are so lacking in self-awareness, it just really hacks me off. I said to a guy, not so long ago, it's rare for me to sit and hear somebody else preach, but I was at a church, and it was... it was OK, it was alright. You know... they... they reckon their kind of a prophetic church, and I said to them, 'well, I've... I've gleaned more prophetic from the cinema than most churches,' and er... But he was... he was kind of like, just... nice guy, but just getting at people in his preaching. And I said to him `cos I know him and we went for lunch, I said, 'Who made you angry?' And he was... taken a back, and... you know, we had a joke of it, we use humour to kind of diffuse those situations, but... but it kind of concerns me, as I drove home, that he was totally oblivious to the fact that he had been rattled for the... previous six weeks he'd been rattled because he's trying to drive the church to do something, and they don't want to do it, so he was letting them have it, six foot above contradiction. But what really hacked me off was that he was totally oblivious to the fact he was doing that. I... you know, I would..., we had a community group leaders thing two... three years ago now, we have a training weekend every year with them, and er... you know, some of them had failed to grasp what was a passion of Trevor the abbot, concern for spiritual formation. So that we didn't just become nice community groups, and have a nice time, but we'd actually wrestle with issues for companions of what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and that's a tough call. And er... so I kind of said to them, 'I'm really disappointed, you know, there's a fair measure of my own disappointment in this, but I'm really pissed off with you, you know?' we... we... you asked us to spend a lot of time on this stuff, and we produced a resource. I think it's a lot more honest to say to people that I'm really hacked off with you, and you can resolve it. They can forgive you for being hacked off with you, you can forgive them, you can get on and you can deal with... and you're aware of heart stuff all the time. Sorry, that's a long answer, and those are the things that, kind of, frustrate me.

What about your greatest fear?

Er,... in relation to church and mission and postmodernity stuff?

Er, yeah, go on.

Erm... well it's that Max du Pre thing: define leadership, the first task of leadership is to define reality. I think one of my fears is that the church will not face the reality, will go into its own, kind of, sub-culture... I'm fed up of... Graeme, I'm absolutely fed up of singing songs of revival and triumphalism, it actually just... it actually... in fact, if I was around long enough I'd have to get out... so I really kind of, fear that we won't face the opportunity and the challenges that postmodernity brings. And we'll end up a remnant people,. Not living out the story, and certainly not communicating it to anybody.

Erm, I have a few... do you just want one, or can I go on?

Go on

Erm... I have a fear that as postmodernity poses all kinds of challenges for us, in the church we'll go in on ourselves and we'll start having schisms and witch-hunts, and... and... if we see... some people see postmodernity as a great threat, as a dark cloud, you know, like Islam is the great threat to the church, and all this kind of stuff, which I don't believe at all, erm... and... and the way to respond to it is to remain faithful to the gospel and then we'll start decreeing what faithful to the gospel is. And I think... I fear that there'll be a kind of witch hunt in the church, and we'll be spilling blood while the world is dying without Christ, we'll just be fighting one another all the time. Erm... and I think that's.., that's linked to my fear of tribalism and sectarianism, which is what made me... it did my head in... in Northern Ireland, really. Good things about, but the sectarian culture. And I fear in emerging... in a fragmented, postmodern culture, that the church actually just buys into it and becomes tribal itself, and sectarian, and we start to create enemies rather than build communities. So I think there's a... the Trinitarian piece that we mentioned before, actually leads you to building communities, You don't build projects, you don't build programmes, you actually build communities, and I think that's the task... of the church. Erm... And... I... I fear... I mean culturally what I fear... or globally, I fear for... er.... little things, really, I fear for America as it loses its place as a super-power in the world, because I think, military, they're supreme, and insecurity, and military power, and fear is not a pleasant chemistry.

Erm... I fear for the poor, because I think there's no place for the poor in a postmodern, consumerist culture, erm... or if there is, then it's just to be slaves to serve us, erm... And, I fear for... for... for people for whom, you know... we're all struggling with the economy at the moment, hey, we're struggling: we've had coffee in a nice coffee shop, you've got a nice motorbike, we're not struggling at all, you know, get real. But as... as the global economy kind of kicks in, we can't continue to live beyond our means, and just project our values into the future as if it will magically happen. Erm... my fear is ... is for the poor and the marginalised, and that I fear for the rich and the affluent who won't understand when the poor and the marginalised rise up and use terrorism to blow us to bits. Erm... you know, and the way to respond is to kind of obliterate them? No, the way to respond is to show mercy, love your enemies and actually feed them so they don't have to go bombing you. Just little issues... but they... they occupy my mind. And... I'm... I'm... there's a book called, 'A World without Bees', and it's frightening the living daylights out of me. My wife's a bee keeper; the lack of bees in the world, what's that all about? Is that a judgement of God upon us, you know... I mean, we actually need honey bees, they populate about two-thirds of.. of food in the world Now, other things can pollinate it, but they won't pollinate it so well, so

food shortage. So, those are things... and of course... probably I won't starve to death, but I know that millions will. Erm... and in the West, we probably won't do much about it.

 I also fear... this is an amusing bit at the end of our conversation together. I... I fear the loss of a Labour government, and that's very real, `cos in the North-East o England I lived under a previous regime, and er... it was got me interested in politics, and it got me angry for the first time in my life. The injustice... you know... so I do fear... I fear the power of the media to destroy what is not... he's not been adept in his leadership, but I know that Gordon Brown is a good bloke, a really good bloke. A very intellectual bloke, and a passionate bloke. And he and Blair, for all of his folly and for all of the things they've done wrong, I would argue they've done more for, you know... well, where I li8ve. They've done more for the North East of England.. I mean, it was a wasteland, well you know that, just absolute waste land. And if you go to Portrack now, it's a considerably better place. We've got Pete and Sheila coming to stay with us for a holiday for two weeks, just basing themselves in the other half of our house. And it's fantastic, it's just fantastic, whereas in the 80's it was 64% unemployment, and nobody cared a fig. So I do... that is a real fear, er... and in a culture of consumerism, where greed and looking after ourselves are important, it's the poor and marginalised that get forgotten about again. It's so easy to just ignore the people on our urban estates. I could spend the rest of my life having nothing to do with them, you know, and yet... some of them are part of our community, and I know that they're there, and I know Jesus is among them, so... So I hope that's helpful.

That is helpful. I want you to tell me a story that sums up what you're trying to achieve.

As a community?

Yeah

I could do with a pee.

Do you wanna break?

Yeah, let's just have a break.

[break in recording]

Erm.... the books that have really made an impression on me in relation to postmodernity and cultural issues would be people like Brian MacLaren. Erm, not because I think they're profound books, but because I think the heart of the man comes out, you know, in his generous orthodoxy, and writing about issues of postmodernity. So I would.. I would read MacLaren, erm... Walsh and Middleton, *The truth is stranger than it used to be*, was, you know, that's a few years ago now, but it was one of the first books that, kind of, gave me... some intellectual critiquing of what was actually going on. Erm, I've really appreciated the writings of Leonard Sweet because, to me, he writes as a postmodern writer. You know, even the lay-outs of his books, the concepts, the way he approaches things, so, you know, he's kind of informed the mind... John Drane... I read his books `cos I've met him and I've done some work with him, and find him very stimulating. He's kind of aggressive and prophetic, and kind of a bit angry, and yet there's a wisdom there. So I value his books. I mean, early years of kind of postmodernity was Grentz,

Hauerwas... er, Zygmunt Bauman who I don't pretend always to understand but, you know, helpful stuff. Erm... and then, obviously at University it was Derrida and Lyotard, and people like that. But... I... I value the writings of people on the other extreme, of people like Dallas Willard. Not because Dallas, kind of writes about the postmodern condition, but, as a philosopher, he does critique Western culture, but his writing is about spiritual formation, and his passion and concern is how do we root ourselves in Christ when actually we so easily take the default mode of rooting ourselves in the culture. And it's often a modern... it's modernity culture. And obviously Richard [Foster] would be on that. From a Baptist perspective, I've really enjoyed and appreciated meeting, and talking and doing things, and also writings of Stuart Murray-Williams, yeah. I think he puts... he puts things... he's a good observer, and he puts things in his writings that he's observed situations, and he's got an analytical peace with him ,which is useful. Erm, Colin Green who was a Systematic Theologian but who, for the past few years has been Prof. at Mars Hill. And er... he's just returned to this country, and I know Colin well, he's a companion in your community. He's just written a book with Martin Robinson, 'Meta Vista', which is looking at the change in paradigms, both in the church and in culture, in society generally. Erm... and, a lot of the people I've been privileged to be... like Colin Green, like Martin Robinson, like Stuart Murray-Williams, David Lyon, you know, the sociologist. Met him at a conference a few years ago, and it's as much the conversation as the reading of the books that's really, kind of, important.

I did make a list of some others. Peter Bergess, the sociologist, actually had quite an impact upon our community through his early writings, er... in the loss of the sacred canopy, the heretical imperative, you know, culture, looking at some of the transcendent. But it's heavy sociological perspective, but we found that useful. Graham Johnson, I think it's published as something else, but 'preaching in a postmodern world. Er, Australian guy, and er.... I mean he basically just takes a look at traditional Evangelical preaching and then, just kind of critiques it and says, 'This is not really, kind of, connecting with the postmodern mindset.' I think he did his doctoral thesis, and eventually published as, 'preaching in a postmodern world, erm..... John Carrol, the wreck of Western Culture, I thought that was a fascinating book. Erm, Mike Riddell, erm... `cos I love the radical within him, and I've met him, and he's gone from being a Baptist to being a Catholic, and his whole faith journey is kind of fascinating. I think those would be some of the key books.

I mean there are technical books but, when those writers write something I would tend to be out and about for them. The only commentary that has really grabbed me in recent years was the, erm... and the name escapes me. The 'Colossians... re-mixed,' er... it's a couple, actually. And the... I so appreciated that because I thought here is somebody who is actually approaching Scripture from the postmodern, and who understands culturally where we're at. And, of course, Colossians lends itself, it's the great book for postmodern, kind of, ministry and asking questions about what the church is. I guess those are the key ones, OK?

That's really good, thanks   . Erm... if you've got a story, that can sum up, everything that [the Community] does in one story....

One story would not do it...

Yeah, if you can share a story that gives us a glimpse... what you really want to see [the Community] engaging with and embracing.

Well... Right. There's a guy, we'll call him Barry, that's not his real name, but I'm only using that `cos I haven't got his permission to tell the story. But... he came to us after being out of the ministry, he was in his mid-forties, He'd been out of the ministry for about ten years, just burned out in the ministry. He'd had it with the church, had it with himself, disillusioned, ten years after... cut a long story short, he actually found himself at our Mother House, and... we just.. we welcomed him, we didn't try and address his condition we simply created Mother House that is a place that seeks to create space to seek God. And, erm... you know the.. other three days of not getting... not getting in the way of God, welcoming him, honouring him, being hospitable, he reconnected with God in quite a profound way, and has gone on to re-engage with ministry in a totally different way. You know, he's actually ended up planting a church, but it's a church that doesn't look like any other that most people plant. It's... it's very strong in its rootedness in God, spiritual formation. It's kind of co-pastored by a psycho-therapist. It's effectively like a little community and... and I went about 18 month, to meet this group, and er... they just meet in a home, and I met probably about twenty people whom I had lunch with. And they were the most imaginative, creative, dynamic, life-giving people that I've ever met who... most of them were... it needs to be said, most of them were professional people in all... from all walks of life, but professional people. But they had been... their life had been transformed by a guy who'd planted a church in a different way, and... and I saw the fruits of both their seeking God, their commitment and covenant to one another, and their real commitment to living out the gospel in the world. And actually, church to them... you see, they didn't even use the language of church, for them it was their community. Not [*the Community*], it was their community. But community was their... relationship and network which enabled them to live for Christ in the world. And I think... I know it's just one story but, in part, [*the Community*] exists to help people re-engage with God, do deeper with God, and then live transformed... in a transformed way that brings life and hope to others. Yeah, but... we've many other stories, probably better, to illustrate that point, but I think, you know, that illustrates something of what we're about. You know, dynamically, and erratically, and spontaneously, and audaciously, and incoherently, but actually what I think we're doing is brining hope to people, and hopefully to a renewed or re-imagined church, and to society. Yeah. Is that alright?

[*Tape ends*]

Participant C, Interview 2

Ok, yeah, I'm happy to be recorded for this research project.

Thanks,   . Erm, now I recognise that [the Community] is a very diverse group, so maybe you'd just like to give some examples, erm.. and maybe work out any general themes that run through these questions. `Cos what... as I'm saying them, you'll probably realise these are worked out for more local groups, so just... just work it as you think is appropriate.

It's... it's a geographically dispersed network of Christians across the world... covenanted together within the love of Christ, bound by a rule of life, erm... but with much diversity. So, you want me to give you examples of the kind of people?

Well, no, what I'm interested in here, is... is the gatherings that take place. So... what kind of gatherings take place, where do they take place, what are the venues...?

The... the... the two, erm... themes that hold community together: one is the aloneness with God, and the other is the togetherness with one another. Erm... the gatherings, which emphasises the together. I guess the big thing is the annual Easter workshop, which usually takes place at our Mother House, _____. But obviously, with a network of people of 2500 plus, we can't all get to an Easter workshop _____, so... echoes throughout the world now, around Easter, will be a gathering of community companions and friends. In the States, in Holland, in the South of England, in North of England, in Ireland, etc, etc. Erm.. other gatherings, erm... well, companions, er... they're people who've committed themselves to this way of life of availability and vulnerability. Some of them will meet together on a fairly regular basis, and for some people they will meet weekly. But there's no formal structure that say, 'you must meet weekly,' but I've just been down to Surrey, Guildford, and I, er... you know I was preaching at the Millmead Centre, I did a day t the Advent, er.. and Advent Retreat for them on the Saturday, and I met with some of our companions on the Saturday night for a meal. They meet every week, they actually meet for brunch on a Sunday, from about eleven `till about 2:00, four or five of them, as a weekly gathering. For other companions, it's usually a regular, kind of, once a month, in what we call community groups. And the groups will come together, they will often share in one of the Offices... but their intention in coming together is to explore what journeying with the Community kind of means. And then we have.. and then we have community gatherings, like next year, 2010, there are two community gatherings every month of the year in various places. We've just signed off... you know... the venues where they're gonna be. And they're just opportunities for people to gather together, and they'll spend a day together. It's usually kind of 11:00 until 4 or 5:00, and formally that's all we do in gathering together. Although, there are things like Greenbelt, where we have a big presence at Greenbelt. Similarly we've got folks who are involved in the Edinburgh Festival, or the fringe Festival. You know, to give you another example, ten of us have just been up to the Highland and Islands for, er... five days, doing some work in both secular contexts, school contexts, and one church context... a church without walls project that we've been working with for about five years. And the ten of us, when you're on the road for about ten days, and you're journeying together, great sense of community. And we've got this, erm... kind of, I dunno whether you call it paradoxical, where people would say, 'even though they don't see each other on a week by week basis, as you would have in some local church congregation, the depth of relationship, because of the common values and the commitments to companionship, is greater within that dispersed nature, is greater than in a local congregation that comes together to do a Service or whatever.' I don't fully understand that dynamic, but I know it's true.

I'm... I'm interested in talking about the Edinburgh Festival. What do you go there for, and what do you do when you're there?

Erm.. it will be... it tends to be the recognised artists in our community. So it will dancers, it will be musicians, percussionists (not that percussionists aren't musicians, but er...), it would be, erm... it would be storytellers. So those three would be represented on a fairly regular basis at the Fringe. They would go there to participate in the Fringe, they'd go there because they like the Fringe, they go there because we meet a lot of people who are spiritually very seeking, and often very open, and we meet groups who are doing community, but not Christian groups, and er... it... it's just presence in the Festival, erm.... And it's... in some ways it's... it's one opportunity of... of sharing the fruit of our own journey with God. So... so some of the dance may have found place, not in a workshop, but been formed within prayer and contemplation, and then it translates into a Festival context. Er... for our storytellers... it keeps our storytellers, erm... from lapsing in the default mode of just doing thing within the Institution of the Church. That actually if God's story is anything, God's story can be shared in... in the public domain, and... and when we do that we discover that people find life in it, you know? Like text-telling, all we're doing is... we went to, erm... it wasn't the Edinburgh Festival, but a few years ago we did the Epic, which was just telling Mark's Gospel, and we intentionally took it round the secular Festivals and... and we did a short... a short theatre tour, and er... it was just fantastic. And all it was, was just telling them Mark's Gospel. There was no embellishment, no kind of preaching, no commentary, just telling the story as it is. And it had very good reviews, it went down particularly well in Manchester actually. Erm... so erm... yeah, that kind of stuff, really.

Fascinating.. erm.. I'd be interested if you're able to answer this question... one of the things I'm asking the different groups I'm meeting with is how they practice Holy Communion.

Right....

And I'm wondering how that works in your setting, it being so diverse and a network.

Well, erm... I mean... in Celtic Daily Prayer, which is our Office book, the Community's Office Book, there is a Eucharist, erm... and next year there will be, I think three, four alternative Communion Services, er... because we're publishing more resources. Not just for the community, we'll make it more widely available. Essentially, this has come out of our life together in Community. That's a resource for companions and friends in Community. And people will often meet together to... to.. to break bread, to drink of the cup and to share communion Eucharist, whatever. Erm... every Wednesday at our Mother House, the Eucharist is celebrated. I'm actually going back from Durham today to preside at the Eucharist, and I think someone else is speaking, but... but I'm presiding at the Eucharist tonight at the Mother House. And we'll have that Eucharist whether there's one person there, or... or thirty people there on a retreat basis. Er... often when the groups come together, the gatherings, it's appropriate that we break bread together, you know. `Cos there's no worked out policy on Communion, but there's a recognition that, actually, within the liturgical life of the Community, communion is important. And I think there's this whole... piece I wrote recently about being in exile, and the importance of feast within exile, because er... when... when lots of things are changing, I think for a lot of people in community, things like Communion, the Eucharist, become a constant and provide stability. Erm.. you know, that all else may be changing around, but there are certain things that remain constant, of which one is Communion.

But, I mean.. we've got Catholics in our Community. We've got Low-Church-bordering-House-Church people. You know, there's such diversity. And it's just fantastic. I mean, years ago when we built a chapel, erm.. out of local timber, and we thought.. naively we thought, 'It'd be great to have this blessed or consecrated, or whatever,' and er... So we got in touch with the Anglican Bishop, and we got in touch with the Roman Catholic Bishop, and we got in touch with... actually, the Area Superintendant of the Baptists in those days. And er... bless them, they got their heads together, or they got their ecumenical officers together, and the great wisdom that came from them was, 'Don't let us touch it with a barge pole.' Because the moment somebody consecrates it, or you dedicate it, you provide a demarcation line, and... and so we... we live with this kind of an enigma, and loose canonical position... and actually, it's an open table. So... you know, we've got Catholics.... don't quote me, and I'm not going to give any names, but we've got Catholics who've come and celebrated Mass at the place and, actually, allowed... they've broken Canon Law, and allowed other people to participate. And we've had Catholics participating of... of Communion when a Baptist's done it, and... now, you know... I appreciate there's huge conventions, there's a great depth of understandings, and different understandings on the meal, but for me it's a sign of the Kingdom that we're able to bust the protocol, and just be covenant people within the love of Christ. And if somebody thinks they're receiving Mass, and other people just think they're receiving a bit of bread and remembrance, to me that's not... that's not the issue. That might be really heretical, but for that's a sign of the Kingdom of God.

Erm... when you all gather together, you know, the big gatherings...

Yeah, we'll never now have a one big gathering...

Yeah, but at the large gatherings, what are the... what are the most common things that run through... is it your community rule that again and again is... is informed and reinforced. Are there other themes, like Justice came up last time, that always come up as part of your DNA?

I think there are three foundational questions: Who is it I seek... Who is it we seek, how do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land, and how then shall we live? So whatever programme there will be, underwriting that will be those three questions. Erm... because it's at Easter every year, the Easter liturgy is very important to us. So there's often a gathering that will... will begin on Thursday, and we'll actually journey through, actually, to Easter Sunday and we end on.. we usually conclude on Easter Monday, so it's a kind Thursday through Easter Monday. So, we're conscience of the Christian calendar, we're celebrating Easter, but.. like... next year, give you an example. The theme for next year is, wherever the community gatherings are, there's gonna be one in the States, one in Holland, one in Exeter, on in Shillingford, Oxford, one in... and then the big one at our Mother House, the last one at where we are now. The big theme is gonna be, 'who do you think you, and where do you think you're going?' `Cos, what... what we're doing is, we're just reminded ourselves of where we've come from; the influencers, the people, the writers, the experiences, the memories, the 'who do you think you are,' like the BBC series. But also, where do you think you're going is pointing to the future, we're on a journey, but.. but underwriting all that programme is: 'Who are we seeking,' it's God, 'How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land,' we're an exiled people, 'how then shall we live,' and that's where issues of

justice, reconciliation, of community, of relationship, of forgiveness, they all emerge. Whatever theme you take, they'll all emerge `cos they're Kingdom themes and they relate to, 'How then shall we live.'

Ok, that's helpful, thank. Erm.. you might need to change some of the words within this question to make it fit within the uniqueness that is [the Community]... erm, but I'm interested in what the approach is to membership within the group. Erm.., what the approach is, what the system is, `cos there's friends and companions.

Erm... yeah... that won't need changing very much at all. Erm... brief description really: companions are men and women who've... intentionally embraced the rule of life (availability and vulnerability) as a life choice. We have since I last met you, reviewed our novitiate process, so now everybody who is.. is exploring journeying with the Community as a companion, er.. enters into a novitiate process, and that is often at least a year process. Whereby they'll be partnered with another companion of the Community, and they'll work through the rule, and it's... it's a discerning process. There is no element of recruitment, within [the] Community. It's really important to say that, we are not about bagging numbers, conversionist spirituality is not part of our DNA whatsoever. Erm.. you know, and in one sense, that's why we don't advertise, why we don't recruit. But, if God is calling people to journey with us, we don't want to put stumbling blocks in their way. We want to test if this is just a passing enthusiasm, or people are just passing through, and that's perfectly OK.. erm... and for a number of people, as they explore novitiate, what they realise is, they actually like the idea of being friends of Community. So it's kind of not going the whole hog, but still being part, and we regard friends as being as much a part of Community as Companions. It's... Mike Riddell, he used an expression about the little community he founded, you know, in Dunedin, when he said, 'It's a community that's committed at the core, very loose at the edges,' er... But we are... there's a serious intentionality about companionship, it's committed at the core, otherwise it just becomes a fantasy. Availability and vulnerability sounds a nice ideal. So companionship is very real, and.. there's about 350 people who are companions of community, and the rest, the other, up to three thousand, are.. are friends of Community, Some of whom will journey with us for a while and then come into companionship. Because we relate to a lot of people who are on the fringe, or who are un-churched, their journeying is not a, kind of... a ten week course, it's... it can be years. And for others... are pretty burnt up and disillusioned by church, it can be even longer, `cos they're really wary about... you know, people who've been exhausted by the system of the Institutional church are very wary about signing up for something. They just... there's healing for them in just journeying as a community that, in one sense, doesn't make too many demands upon them. Companionship does, but it's the rule that makes demands rather than the structure of the community. Does that make sense? Erm..

So people would... people go through novitiate process, people got through the materials, and at the end of... it's usually a year, but it could be longer, they would then apply... they would write to the... they would write to the Abbot of the Community, who would.. who would prayerfully consider the application, would talk to their novice-mentor, as we call them, would possibly share it with others on the senior leadership team, they would affirm this person, and then at the next community gathering, or community group... or for some people they like to do it at the Easter worship, erm... they... they're brought in. There's a simple liturgy where their profession is made real: their 'yes' to availability and

vulnerability. And for... for some people we baptise them in the North Sea on Easter Sunday, which is freezing but... it's great, it's great. And for some people who've come back to faith.. you know, I can think of a couple of Catholics... lapsed Catholics, you know. They came into association with the Community, they came into a really deep faith in Christ, and they were baptised, I think it was two years ago now... for them it was the re-appropriation of their baptismal vows, there was no conflict with the church in that sense, and they became companions of community. And er... in a sense it's a ... as another Catholic member of Community has said, for them 'the experience of coming into companionship and actually being baptised, er... got rid of the fear and superstition, and made sense of the awe, mystery and wonder of it all,' which... which for... which for a Northern lorry driver was a really profound statement.

Absolutely... do you... do you... if vulnerability and availability are the things you sign up to, do you need to be a Christian?

Erm... you don't have to be a Christian to sign up to availability and vulnerability, but... in terms of journeying with the [*the Community*], yeah, you'd need to be a disciple of Christ's. Erm... because there is within our... I mean, we don't have a statement of faith in terms of, you know, you must believe in this kind of stuff. But we do... we do have Patrick's statement of faith. We are a Trinitarian, orthodox Christian community in that sense, and in sharing the story we would not true to our story other than reflecting the Christian tradition. And I think there is a call... you know, if new monasticism is about, you know, the renewal of the church and, you know.. that allegiance the Sermon on the Mount, it's Jesus that is calling people on the sermon on the mount to follow him, to live out that life of not killing each other, you know... not committing adultery, not sleeping around, letting your yes be yes, you know, being peacemakers, you know... The guy behind that is Jesus, and it's the call of Jesus, and it's his kingdom that we're called into. So, yeah, in one sense we are... in one sense we're overtly Christian, but you have to see that alongside, the... the kind of...erm... the hospitality that's at the heart of our community. So we would have a lot of people journeying with our community who would not call themselves card-carrying Christians, or Evangelical Christians in particular. And, you know, part of the Community's hospitality is creating the space for people to... to question where they're at in relation to themselves, to God, you know, it's kind of all that. In relation to issues, pertinent, is human sexuality. You know, I was speaking this morning to a companion of our community, whose... whose... whose... whose wife is a... a partner, and she's not sure that she even believes any longer. And he's kind of saying... I mean he should know... he's kind of saying, 'Is it Ok to still be part of [*the Community*],' and it's a non-question, it's a non-question, and I... I related a story to him of a story in a similar situation, of a couple in Cumbria, whose wife, because of miscarriages and then, you know, childlessness, just gave up on God, er... And you know, it was a raw emotional thing. She kept coming to our Community group in Sedburgh for six years, when they met to say the Office, this person, who was a pretty prophetic character, she was a lifeboat... she was part of the Lifeboat crew on the coast. Er... you know... she would get her chair, and face the opposite way, `cos she wasn't gonna address God and pray, and be part of this group... kind of prophetic action. You know, hats of to the Community group, for six years.. they just journeyed with this women. And bless her, you know, last year God just melted her heart, and she's right back... just profound. You know, hadn't been to church for years, but the love, acceptance of

people who weren't offended by her, by what she regarded as offensive actions, and rude, and if anybody kind of got on their... well, nobody did get on their high-horse, do you know what I mean? But it was all stuff and nonsense, but there was a relational piece that was important to her, to have people who were important to her, to put up with her questioning, her doubt, her disbelief, her abandonment of the faith, and yet she's journeyed back. Does that make sense? I... I think that, yeah,, that's the kind of community hat I want to be part of. You know, when the Scriptures say, 'Show mercy to those who doubt,' you know, it's... we often don't do it. At Portrack, my first church, we used to talk about an Agnostics Anonymous group, and a doubter's fellowship, but I don't know that there are many other church that do that kind of stuff.

Of course, in Celtic stuff, it's the Johannine tradition, it's the 'Come and see,' it's more Emmaus Road than Damascus Road, erm... And, yeah we... we... so in answer to your question, companions are Christians. But Christians with a huge breadth of spirituality.

Yeah, absolutely, I can hear that in what you're saying. How... how do you then discern... where do you... you know, you're saying you don't draw lines, which I think is... is great. How do you discern, kind of, whether somebody is a Christian? Is that kind of part of that year long process? Yeah, absolutely, I can hear that in what you're saying. How... how do you then discern... where do you... you know, you're saying you don't draw lines, which I think i.s.. is great. How do you discern, kind of, whether somebody is a Christian? Is that kind of part of that year long process?

Yeah... yeah it would be. There's a hesitancy for anybody to bring judgement to bear. I think that's.. that's.. if I was a psychoanalyst I'd say that was a reaction to the kind of control and power culture that many of us, you know, have been sickened by, really, But yeah, they would journey with people, and if you're journeying with somebody in the heart, then hopefully there's openness, there's transparency, there's honesty, integrity, authenticity, all those things are important. And there is a discerning about whether this person is on a journey, you know, with Christ. And... it may be on occasions, very few occasions, that, er... people have been encouraged to our Mother House and have a talk with... with the Abbot or others, who are quite frankly are gifted people in spiritual discernment, but they're not standing in judgement over people. But, you know, at the end of the day, it's God's call, not our call. But there are certain things, that integrity demands, that you're making a profession of faith, then it can't just be words in order to get in on something, it has to be a deeper reality.

I guess that leads on... and I think I probably know what you're gonna say to this... but... that's good. I'm interested in what kind of qualities and lifestyle people are encouraged to embody.

Erm... well... I'd be interested to know what you think I might say. I think the call of Christ is a costly call, it's radical discipleship, it's a transformation of the heart, it's a different way of living. To live out the gospel is almost... this is where I am a proud Baptist, it's a non-conformist call. Erm... now the vehicle for us in community is... is to live out the rule of life. You know, Christ is our... is our... is our Lord, erm... but the rule is our teacher in that. So... to... to follow Christ, for us in Community, is to live out availability and vulnerability. It means to seek to God, it mean to be hospitable, it means to be a person who listens for the heartbeat of God for his... his world... er... it... it means to be prepared for the love of Christ,

wherever God leads. And then all the other things that are associated with vulnerability, church without walls, relationship mattering more than reputation, seeping ourselves in the Scriptures, you know, prayer which is relationship with God, not just some activity to do. The heretical imperative... it's kind of all there, look for the Kingdom of God in the streets. It's... it's a life, to use a different image, it is a life of holiness and godliness. It's a call to reflect Christ-likeness, and... and that's why the monastic inner-journey, the transformation of the human heart is... is... is integral to our way of life. You know, we're not into behaviourism, that's the death-knell of people's spirituality. You know, if people try to come into [*the Community*] by behaving and saying all the things they think we want them to say, we'll puncture that, because actually, it doesn't impress us, it doesn't impress God. But if people are serious about their intent to follow Jesus: How do I not kill people that I don't like? How do I... live with myself, how do I love God, love my neighbour who, actually, I don't really like? How do I love myself in that process, you know? For me, Christianity is actually simple and profound, and... and the church sometimes complicates it with all kinds of legislative measures, when it's actually about loving God, loving your neighbour, and loving yourself. That is the great commandment. So...

I mean, what we try to do and this is where we've got quite a developed leadership network, but the leadership network doesn't not sit in control of the community, and from there pass judgements on where people are, how they're living. The rule is our teacher, and the youngest, most recent member of the community, can hold up a mirror to my life, as one of the founders, and say, 'hey, come on   , are you living this stuff,' or, 'what areas are you growing in this area, what are you and God working on at the moment, in working out this vocation?'

OK... that's... that... that's fine. I think... I'm more interested in this second question, which is linked. Which is, in what ways are people encouraged to engage win postmodern culture outside of the gatherings, outside of when you meet together?

Well... part of the rule of life is to look for the Kingdom of God on the streets. Now, that's more than a pat phrase. The Kingdom of God is in the world, it's looking for the presence of Christ in the midst of the world. I mean... the last thing we want to do s create a cocoon spirituality that simply takes people out of the world. The whole... the whole new monastic emphasis as I see it, is not only about the renewal of the church, but also engagement with culture, so actually... just give you an example. We've just put together the retreat programme for our Mother House, erm... a provisional programme for the new place we're moving to in the New Year. Once a month we're having a thing... how then shall we live, which is one of our fundamental questions. But... but we're looking at issues. So, how then shall we live: as artists, as medics, as social workers, how then shall we live in the urban environment, how then shall we live in the urban environment. I mean, they're programmes, but essentially what they're doing is trying to encourage people who are trying to live this life out in the world And I think if you actually spoke to the vast majority of companions who are doing this, it's actually the recognition that we live as exiles and... and... and that... that... that the expression of the institution of the church in a Christendom model is like being around don the Titanic. And actually, we need to find new ways of disciples of Christ in a changing world, in a post-Christendom culture, in a postmodern culture, erm.... The paradigm has shifted and the kind of model that is fixed and certain and sure and ordered and controlled and imbibed with power, that's not part of our ethos, it's like... You know, for the vast majority of our companions,

they live in isolation from other companions, and they actually have no... very little means of spiritual sustenance, either from the church, or from fellowship from other people. They've had to live in the world, in this world, and ask the question, 'So who is God in this changing, how do I sing his song in this strange land where the Christian narrative in the main has gone, what, you know, what I said about the Edinburgh, or particularly what I was involved in, the International Dance Festival at St. Andrew's University in Scotland, you know... er. That actually, for me, there are issues in the arts, in theatre, in film, in dance, where you see glimpses, you know... whispers of God in those outside of the church environment, you see something of the Kingdom of God. And... our folk would try to be... it's not a question of, 'We're in the church so let's trying to a mission in the world,' it's actually living in the world, and... and... and asking, like... We've got a.. I'm going to Germany next year, and there's a gathering in Germany, there's a convention In Germany that I've been asked to speak at... and the gathering is for our European companions, Continental Europe, because they're saying, 'Actually, we see, with the changes that are going on in Europe, that the Community... [*the Community*] has a little piece to play in bringing people together to celebrate the diversity, to... to in a sense dismantle tribalism and racism, but to celebrate diversity, Which I think is a great gift... I just think it's gift of God to us... horrifies me when people, kind of, get on their Little Britain soapbox. And I just think this is not Kingdom values.

Can I just... can I just bring you back to a phrase you used about the Christian narrative, `cos you used that phrase a few times last time, and I wondered if you would just unpack what you mean by that, and what you understand the Christian narrative to be.

Erm... I think it... for me, in broad-brush strokes, it's the Judeo-Christian tradition, erm..., in which the law of our Land has in the main, for centuries, been based on the Ten Commandments. And we've moved into more, you know, relativist, and more postmodern... you know, it seems right in our own eyes which is both created and chaotic, and presents huge challenges to a culture which is looking for a story by which to live. Erm... you know, where... where... is there such a thing as absolute authority, where do we get it from; I think the Judeo-Christian tradition has provided a framework for society for years. In the Ten Commandments, respect is written large; respect for God, respect for others, respect for property, respect for the land, respect for relationships. If we use that, for me Judeo-Christian meta-narrative, then, it... it represents a huge challenge to society. Now, I think, that where we as church and Christians have come unstuck is... we've not been able to translate that, for me, life-giving Judeo-Christian tradition in a way that relates to a change in culture, `cos we've imbibed it with so much power and control. And we've also done it... with a lack of humility. It's almost like, 'this is the way it is,' and yet we haven't looked at our own houses, and looked at where we need to address those issues. Not least on justice issues, erm... So I think... that's come across, probably, as very muddled. There is a Judeo-Christian tradition that, in a sense, provides the pectin that holds society together, but I think that... I think that people are removing the pectin and.. and you know, it's no good us as Christians, kind of shouting, you know, 'You need to come back to the tradition,' because we haven't lived it well, and we need to reinterpret it. And for me, the genius of Gospel is that it can be passed on from generation to generation without being stuck in traditionalism. And in a sense, I think the task of the church is how to be gospel people in a post-Christendom, postmodern age. And that's an... that... the jury is out. Because I think the jury is out as to what postmodernism means, the jury is out as to what does post-

Christendom look like, and the jury is out as to what the gospel will look like in this changing context. Erm... but we're on that journey... but to... don't get me onto one of my favourite hobby horses, but I'll just mention it in passing because it's important. Erm.. you know. The notion that... that revival is the thing that is coming round the corner: just get real. You know? I now speak passionately about this because, you know, anybody who stands up and starts hammering on about revival, is as bad as Jeremiah's contemporaries, 'peace, peace, when there is no peace.' Soothing the people, you know. First task of leadership, says Max du Pre, is to define reality. The reality is, church in West is not in revival, it's exactly the opposite. And that's where the Christendom has to change, because with revivalism comes, like, 'if we just... just shout harder, or work harder (which is often the Baptist ethic), or just call people back to the old ways that somehow revival will come,' and I just think, why... why, if God is true to his nature, why would revival come to the west? Issues of injustice, issues where we have been blind to the realities of poverty and need, you know, gospel mandates, Kingdom values we've just violated. And you know, for me the whole economic recession and the crisis that the West is beginning to taste, smacks to me much more of the judgement of God rather than as the fore-runner for revival. So... I could speak for hours about that... we're not gonna be able to engage with postmodernity simply by calling people back to a revival of Modernity's Christendom values.

You... I want to just carry on pulling out this thing... `cos I asked about the narrative and you talked about the Ten Commandments and the Judeo-Christian tradition, erm... in what sense do you think that's a story?

Erm... Well, I... for me it's a... it's a story, it's a narrative that shaped the people of Israel, if you think about the Ten Commandments. They carried that, generationally, through history, in good times and in bad times, it's what shaped them. Erm... Jesus came in a sense to be a fulfilment, and show us the way in which that might be translated and interpreted and lived out, under the new covenant. And for me, that story has continued, that is the Christian tradition. And, you know, obviously in a Christendom conscious culture, of which Britain certainly has been for many centuries, there's almost a bit of a... we can refer back to this tradition... it might not be a verb but it's in the sub-conscious and in the unconscious. But I.. you know, I really think we're coming to the end of that Christendom era, and exile is much more our motif. The story, the narrative still should be shaping us... still should be shaping us. Erm... I mean, you'll know that the monastic tradition draws great inspiration from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-8. For me, that is... is.. is story, is narrative, it's a framework for living, you know. In there Jesus is... is giving us a way to live the Kingdom of God. I think our task is, theologically and ecclesiologically, church-wise, community-wise, whatever, 'so what does that mean in our particular context?' You know, for the first disciples it was not a Christendom context they were operating in. As far as I understand church history, you know, they interpreted the Sermon on the Mount, to represent pacifism, for a whole period. And, you know, I just wonder, has pacifism got something to say in a culture of fragmentation and violence and war and terrorism? But who's gonna have the bottle to be pacifist in practice? When is the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount gonna say, 'We have to love our enemies...' I mean we've done work in Northern Ireland and, thank God, some people have the bottle to say, 'Actually, we have to sit down with our enemies, we have to eat at the same table as our enemies, we have to listen to our enemies, it doesn't mean we have to agree with them, but we have to learn to

love our enemies.' But... and that... where does that policy, where does that way of life come from? It comes from the story, from Jesus' story, rather than the prescriptive... for me the gospel is not a prescriptive set of rules and regulations that are passed on through legislation. Stories give people life; stories connect with the human heart; stories, myths, narratives shape communities and cultures, erm... You know, if you just passed legislation, you wouldn't change community, and you won't change people inwardly, but if you... if you tell a story that is rooted in God, it has the power to transform the human heart.

So that brings me onto my second question that comes out of this, which is how do you visualise people engaging with this story for... from their own lives... from their own contexts?

By... I think By, erm... a number of things, One is, recognising that we all have stories. There's a Talmudic saying, you know, erm... 'God... it's something like.... God loves stories and that's why he created people,' or 'God created stories `cos he loves people.' We're all stories, and I think, erm... taking people's stories seriously is important, erm... seeing how people's stories connect with the big story. `Cos if this big story's true, and it has its roots in God, then it has to connect with peoples' stories out there. And instead of delivering this mandate that, 'You must buy into this story, your story is irrelevant,' I think it is to say, 'Actually, in that story of your life...', like the lass who was at our house, the young woman, you know, who's into Yoga and all kinds of New Age therapies and stuff like that... instead of condemning her, find out why she's into all those things, what those stories mean to her. And you actually discover there's a spirituality in there, there's a search in there, there's a quest in there, and I ... I... it's the Emmaus road. It's not standing in judgement of people, but journeying with people. And if Jesus is who he is, who I passionately believe who he is, then he can be the light of the world to that person, he can illuminate their paths. And he will come not to dismantle their stories, but fill their stories with meaning and light and truth, and... and deliver them from... from any darkness. In the same way that there's a whole range of people in Western consumer culture that need to be delivered from an equally consuming darkness. You know, Christian church gets really het up about people in New Age, but they won't get het up about all the stuff that goes on in the High Street, a consumer culture that blinds us, that anaesthetises us from, from the needs of others. Erm... I also think that, we should be as Christians, erm... I mean, not... not... sounds cultural analyst. When things are happening in the world, we should be seeking to interpret those things through the Christian story. So, you know... the economic crisis, where are the Christian voices saying, 'What's God saying to us?'. It's just like, you know we need to support the people who are struggling, rather than asking the big questions. When the twin towers fell in 2001, absolute tragedy, but there were very few people, outside of Rowan Williams, who were saying, 'What do we need to be?' You know, the shock to the system in the Western world, 'What's God saying to us in that?' And I think we need to be connecting the events, the big stories of the world, as well as the little stories, and helping people to connect that with God's big story. Er... what is terrorism so... so rife? Is it just because there's a bad man called Osama Bin Laden, or are there issues of repression and injustice in the world that... that actually we need to listen. And instead of meeting might with might, you know, Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism, what's... what's Jesus' way? How does the story of Jesus relate to a modern context? Asylum issues, you know... the keeping of children in asylum centres in violation of human rights and everything else, and yet our society says

nothing about it, the church says very little about it. You know... I think... this is in violation of the story that God gave of how we should live.

And do you think that story, when it interacts with somebody else's personal story, is there some assimilation, some change in that story, er... in the way that it's locally expressed, as it were>

Yeah, I would say definitely. You know, before the interview was conducted this morning, we had a little bit of catch-up; I shared something of my story, you shared something of your story, and therefore it changes us. It actually gives us a deeper appreciation of one another, but it changes us. I mean, good stories shared and listened to with a heart actually form communion, which is why I think stories are really, really important. So of course, I will come with my interpretation and perspective, even in the grand, meta-narrative, but as I engage with somebody else who, perhaps, hasn't got that same experience of the meta-narrative, inevitably, the story doesn't change, but the interpretation does, you see it... you see it in a different way. Erm... you know, erm... I remember when, the only other time when I was at the Millmead Centre was back in 1981, and it was really state of the art then, now, I mean it's... it's fantastic, it's retro-church now.. but er.. you know,1981. And I stayed with a lovely couple in Guildford who were gracious, and hospitable, and fed me with lovely food, and it was like staying in.. in a palace. But what I shared with them about what was going in 1980's Portrack, with... with rising... I said by the end of this year we'll have over 50% unemployed, they couldn't understand it. We were Christians, we had the same script, but it just... it was just kind of different. And... you know... so inevitably context change our understanding of the meta-narrative. And for me... for example, I think one of the strengths of the Anglican Communion is the ability (I mean, threatened to be split apart at the moment), the ability to hold in tension the story interpreted in the different cultural contexts, that actually one size doesn't fit al. And that doesn't diminish the one story, it doesn't undermine it, it just says there's a percu... there's a particularity about the context in which we operate that will help... that will inevitably lead to different interpretations. And the communion is holding those things in... in tension. The opposite of communion is conformity, and that's when the control and power piece comes in. And I think... So inevitably it's different. I mean, if I spoke to Miriam who's a companion of our Community who works with Aboriginal people, and lives with them in Australia, she's gonna have a different perspective on the Christian story than... absolutely... than somebody who's, you know... living in Gosforth, in the leafy suburbs of Gosforth. Erm... but it doesn't diminish the story.

So I'm interested.. I'm keeping an eye on the time, and I'll make this my last question. Erm... I wanna keep this discussion of story going, if that's alright. Erm..., have you read much of Tom Wright's stuff on story?

Yeah, about the five acts. Do you find that a restrictive way of reading the Bible, or quite a freeing way?

I find it a very liberating way. I find it a very liberating way, and it's back to that point, I don't think when God gave the story, the framework, that it was like, 'This is the (be careful here), the definitive, legislative bit of paper, this has to be worked out, this has to be applied theology. Here's a life-giving story; here's a way of entering the Kingdom of God; here's a script, but the script has to find its expression in different ways.' And I think, you know, it... you know God hasn't finished... God didn't

finish with his church on the day of Pentecost, and he didn't finish with the church when the Canon of Scripture was put together, and I don't think that... that the unfinished bit will in any way contradict the story that is there. It will be consistent with the story that reflects the nature of God and the values of his Kingdom. But inevitably there are things: look at the issues we're facing in culture today, you're gonna struggle to find a definitive in Scripture on global warming, you know, perhaps less so, human sexuality, nuclear proliferation, you know? It's kind of... you know... I... I, and I think the vast majority in Community would struggle with a literalist, fundamentalist, you know, 'that's all there is.' Now, that is fantastic what there is, but now let's see how it works out, because there is such a thing as the Holy Spirit as well, who actually helps us to interpret the Word of God in contemporary settings.

Hmm... that's a really helpful answer... and I'm gonna stop the tape there.

[*Tape ends*]

Appendix D

Participant D, Interview 1

That's fine... Yeah... this is   for this interview to be used in the research that Graeme is doing.

Great, thank you. Alright, so we're just gonna whizz through the questions, and then just go where you want with them and... I'll try and chip in with some things, maybe push you on some things...

That's fine. I haven't got around to reading them, I'm afraid.

That's alright, they're all questions that you will deal with regularly; that's the purpose of it, and it's... the idea is not to catch anybody out, but to find out what they're doing and what they're thinking. Erm... so... what do you think are the primary callings of the church?

Primary callings of the church.... Erm... gosh that's a hard first question. OK, well, I... I think the... the mission of God, I suppose I'd want to start with, I'd want to say is the healing of creation. So Christ has come to renew all things; we're looking for the day when Christ returns to make all things new: a new heaven and a new earth. So... Christ came to inaugurate the kingdom of God, the first fruits of that, so, erm... but then passed on that task to his body, the church. So, I suppose I think the church is the agent of God's healing in the world, erm.... and that joins in with this mission of God in that way. Er… that would be my... big level answer, I suppose. Erm....

And then, erm... I also think, the... the church shows us who Jesus is. So it's one of those things I like working for CMS is that, erm... I think in the UK we have a particular understanding who Christ is, who Christ is through our theologising and the body of Christ here. But as we've encountered the other faces of Christ throughout the world, and takes on, we get a much fuller picture of who Jesus is. So the global church, in that respect, and the church, you know, down the ages and across the world; the whole thing shows us Christ, I think. So, that'd be the other thing that excites me about the church in that way. Does that make sense?

Yeah, absolutely.

You know, Leslie Newbiggin was in to that idea, and missiologist, Andrew Walls, don't know if you know his stuff, 'the Ephesians moment,' he calls it. That kind of thing. So CMS has, I suppose, helped me grow into that idea. Yeah, so I suppose, that would be answer.

OK, OK. That's great. Erm, I like that, that's good. Was Andrew Walls... did he work for CMS as well did he?

He's... he's at Edinburgh, or somewhere.... No, he's just very influential. The head guy at CMS is a bit of an Andrew Walls fan. I dunno if there's a fan club, but if there was he'd be in it. You know, he's done some teaching things and whatever.

Ok. Erm... OK. How do you define postmodern culture in England?

Well I tend to use postmodern as a cultural descriptor, so I like the phrase, 'postmodern times.' Erm... David Lyon uses it in his books; it's the water we're swimming in, it's the air that we breathe. That tends to be what I mean by postmodern, I suppose. And so... within, I suppose, there'd be some big things. I mean for me, it's what comes after what was before, modernity, Postmodernity. Modernity would be characterised by the myth of progress, so Science, technology, you're gonna make the world a better place, promised land, riches for all, etc, etc. Erm... but I think that for a lot of us, that myth we just don't believe anymore. So it's like the rugs been pulled from under our feet, that worldview, and that collapsed for a lot of people, or the certainties of that have collapsed. So postmodernity what comes after that, and I think it's characterised by suspicion of too much certainty and truth claims in that sort of way. Erm... and... I mean things that characterise it for me; some of the themes would be around truth.... Erm... and I think... I like the postmodern stuff, I have to say, around truth, because truth is embedded or contextual, so what I mean by that is, I can only see or have a take on truth from where I'm standing at a particular time. So I'm what... 43 years old, live in London, Middle-class, whatever... I see the world from where I'm, where I'm standing: objective truth isn't available to me, I haven't got the.... which was the big Modern thing, objective facts or whatever. So, minimally I need to have a humility around my truth claims, and I think that's been backed up by the feeling that... I mean even in terms of Theology, that people have made truth-claims and have, kind of, come undone, I suppose. They've been too arrogant and dominant. So at an extreme level, the colonialism with the Bible in one hand and the gun in another. I dunno, I've been to Palestine for example, where, you know, a reading of Joshua, 'come on into the promised land,' the Palestinians find themselves as the Canaanites in the story, so how do they.. how do they make sense of it. So truth turns out to be much more complex than they way I think things are from my perspective. I like that, it sort of calls for a humility around our truth claims, but we're much more likely to get at the truth if we sit around the table with a range of voices. Erm... I mean that closely relates to that idea, the Ephesians moment, I think, that we only understand who Christ as we see the many faces of Christ around the world. So, I think that will be one of the strong themes in postmodernity: suspicion of truth-claims, but a very different way of, then, wanting to unpack truth. Erm... I don't think it means the truth doesn't exist. You know, some Evangelicals are a bit paranoid, they think this means relativism, which is the big enemy, but I don't think that's the case. I think it's... I like what Walter Brueggemann says, 'There's only a limited number of options around the table still, it's not like we're totally at sea.' So that would be one of the themes from me.

I still think consumerism is one of the big themes for me, it's probably just changed in the postmodern world to the modern world. In that, I... identity under modernity I think would be characterised around production. So what you did as a career, or whatever, was who you are. Whereas I think in a... the consumer environment we're in, I think identity's much more constructed around what we consume than what we produce. So we locate other people, we position people in terms of their taste or whatever. I mean it sounds awful to talk about it, I don't particularly like it, but I think there's been a shift around that. And, you know, consumerism's alive and well. It's one of the more depressing things around postmodern culture, is that it hasn't really shifted, even in spite of challenges of the environment. So they would be two themes. Erm...

Yeah... I mean I'm a little uncertain around this, I suppose, but optimistically I'd say that spirituality's shifted, that there's more interest in spirituality. It just depends who you read and talk to about that, the jury's out on that, I think. But, erm... I think broadly speaking that's still true. I mean we've... I'm involved in [*the Church*] and various things, and we've tried to engage the sort of the quest for spirituality, and mind, body, spirit festivals, and all sorts of things. And I think there's a lot of that... more so than was permissible than was so in the modern environment. But I mean... I'm sure you're aware of the number of research, particularly on teenagers, saying they're not interested in spirituality, which is, kind of, blown that theory a little bit for some people who've tried to discredit the methods of research. I don't know, I wouldn't want to shout to loud about spirituality, but I think it has shifted a bit. So I mean, those would be some themes. Erm.... Does that make any sense?

It does, it makes a lot of sense.

Yeah...

I'd be interested... how do you, erm.... you talked about, at the beginning, about one of the primary purposes of the church, of joining in with God's healing of the world. Erm... how do you separate that from the, kind of, modern progress myth, that you were just saying was very modern rather than postmodern? Do you separate that?

Well... yeas. I think the best attempt at... the defence of a Christian narrative that isn't dominating is Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton's book is *Truth is stranger than it used to be*. I mean, they try to demonstrate that within the... the Christian narrative, there's an anti-totalising (I think that's their term), there's an anti-totalising, sort of spin on the story. So there are texts of terror that, sort of, undo the story, and I... I like that notion, I suppose. And I also think they... they make a genius kind of move when they... they say that postmodernity that claims through Lyotard 'they don't believe in meta-narratives', that in itself is a meta-narrative. You know...`cos that's how you're laying out the rules of the game. So I think that's kind of a smart move on their part as well, so I think every worldview is undergirded by faith, everyone lives by faith. And that postmodern thing is equally a faith as it is a belief in .. that Christ has come to heal and redeem the creation. So... I suppose I don't have a problem with the Christian story, I think it's a very hopeful story, and I don't think it needs to be a dominating story. But we've got blood on our hands, I suppose, is the challenge. Particularly as British Christians, and working for a mission organisation, we've kind of... the Gospel's gone where the Empire's gone. I mean often in places Missionaries have been great resisters of the Empire, but actually, in some ways, they also opened up doorways for trade. So I think... it's highly complicated. So coming back to what I said before, I think we have to have humility around our truth-claims, but... ironically in the postmodern world, stories and story-telling is, seems to be the way to communicate. So telling the Christian story of healing and redemption is fine, you just need to be round the table with other people, and lose the kind of... I dunno how you'd put it, that arrogance of 'we're right, we've got the truth, you've got to get on board with us,' that sort of tone doesn't fit. I think that grates very badly. Yeah, I mean, I don't have any problem at all: I think the Christian story is very hopeful. One of the things that shifted for me, I suppose, in thinking, was that a lot of the way I've been told the Christian story seemed to be a theology of escape, eschatology sort of cuts a corner. So 'come to Christ and he'll rescue you from the world,' or and

extreme case, it's like a ticket to heaven, and the earth's going to be destroyed. So I think, for me, discovering a different story that actually God's, erm... plan and mission is about healing, and the future of creation was to be renewed and healed, gave a very different way of kind of engaging with people. So, I mean working with people, if you work with teenagers, or whatever, if you press them on what their dream is, they want a world without racism, without suffering, without sexism, without inequality, without environmental damage. So like, to be able to say, 'actually, that's the Christian future,' they're like... they think it's the complete opposite. That Christianity and God doesn't like that stuff... SO I mean, I think the Christian story chimes in well with the moment we're in, and can afford hope for people. But there is a lot of undoing for people, for many people. It depends, it's interesting, so there are a lot of people who haven't got any engagement with the Christian story, so they'll almost hear it fresh. Whereas I think our generation have. We have to undo it for our peers.

That's really helpful, thanks. That's a really helpful answer, thanks. Alright, let's move on. What is your aim, erm... maybe as [the Church] would be a good example, in engaging with local, postmodern culture?

OK, yeah. Erm... I think [*the Church*] is an interesting in terms of the journey that we've been on. If you like the starting point for [*the Church*] might be a negative one, in that it was a struggle with the culture of church. So there were a lot of people who were either in danger of leaving church, erm... or, you know some we're kind of doing youth work to avoid church. You know, church culture, particularly the modernising, chorus-singing whatever that was supposed to be radical at the time, just dried up for people I think. It kind of became banal, it just didn't have any depth to it, particularly, you know, you've got a friend who's dying of cancer, and you go to church and sing a bunch of choruses, it just didn't seem to afford depth. And the Anglican liturgy, that has got more depth to it, was also dry for different reasons, I think. So, [*the Church*] was inspired... I mean I wasn't around when it started actually, but it was inspired by the likes of the Late, Late Service at Glasgow, who we'd encounter at things like Greenbelt. SO I think... there was curate at the church, here,   , another guy,   , I think he's still involved now, I think he's the only founder member still around. But, erm... they basically got permission to do something new, and I think the story they told in the service was that, if we can create worship in a way that we relate to, then we'll be able to invite our friends to it, you know, won't be embarrassing or naff. And that was the journey. And in terms of engaging with culture, its instincts we're very different. Rather than celebrating a sort of Christian sub-culture, which is what the Evangelical, Charismatic things tend to do, unwittingly I think. It was to so, let's... let's use the stuff of everyday life and culture as the building blocks for worship. Erm... and I love that instinct, by the way. That does two things: that helps people feel like there isn't a split between their everyday life and the church. So you live your life and plan in church, and then back to the real world. It breaks that split. But it also helps people to relocate God back in their everyday life. So you hear a track.., you know, you're playing a track in worship, and then you're in a club, and the same track's playing, you know it kinds of makes those sorts of connections. So I like that instinct a lot. So that was, sort of, the story what would happen. And I think it was very exciting, at the time, to have a new playground, but it was also a playground in terms of the Christian tradition, to find stuff that connected and resonated. I've been part of this movement that's done that alternative worship, and subsequently emerging church, but... I think

what happened with [*the Church*] was after we'd been going ten years (I mean, it seems perverse to say that it took ten years to realise this), but I think it did, was that, you know.. after a while, it was like, 'are our friends coming, and are they relating to this?' `Cos theoretically we had created something that, culturally, was much closer and, you know, some friends would come, people had joined. But, actually, coming through church doors, and encountering alternative worship is just as weird as singing choruses, it's just a different kind of weird. So I think that was a bit of a wake-up call for us to think, 'well, although we've got theoretically an incarnational theology, you know, difference around mission, actually we're running [*the Church*] along attractional lines, we're still expect them to come to us.' So, what... what shifted was that we've kind of structured [*the Church*] around what we call an ethos, which is like a set of values. And our values: creativity, participation, risk, and engagement. And by engage, we mean the question that you're asking, engagement with the local community, or the local culture, so.... And we scrapped meeting every week to plan worship, it was almost, 'why would anyone want to join [*the Church*] if they didn't want to plan creative worship?' And that was sort of our edge and what we did, and maybe there's more to life that what we did and people... hopefully people who wanted to do different things to that. So now I think, if you're part of [*the Church*] and you... you join [*the Church*], being part of the community will gently encourage you to ask the questions, well in what ways am I engaging in culture, and particularly the local community. So, I mean for me, personally, that's meant, as I've reflected on that, I've shifted in things in my own life. I've joined a local photography group in London, `cos I thought, 'because I work for CMS, and put time into [*the Church*], and my kids have got a bit older, I used to have a network of friends at school,' but now they're at Secondary School it's not cool to be seen around your parents, so you know. So I thought pretty much my whole friendship network are Christians now, so I need to get into another environment. So it made sense to engage with something that I was into, and wanted to learn about, It wasn't like I was trying to find a target mark here. It was genuine thing. I've been a part of that group for over a year now, and it exhibited photos with, erm... published, like this month, I've got a photo in the London Independent Photography magazine with an article, which is gently about spirituality, it's called, 'A gentle quest.' And I've had, you know, conversations with those guys. It's been a very natural thing to do, but it's been the word engage in [*the Church*] ethos that's kind of made me thing... well as part of my discipleship I need to be relating and prioritising relationships in the local community, rather than the church ghetto. And I suppose the other way I've tried to engage personally, as well as with neighbours and stuff, that everybody does, hopefully, was doing stuff with mind, body, spirit fairs. So I think for us, that was, er... a question of 'how do we take some of the creative stuff around spirituality and postmodern culture out of the church base, and do it in the public market place?' And mind, body, spirit festivals are a place that we've ended up doing that for the last few years. And that's been great, and very challenging in some ways, exhausting, very positive... I mean there's a very different kind of engage, `cos people are visitors. You do what you do a s a gift and then at the end of it they're not gonna come and join [*the Church*] `cos it's not that... that local. But you know... it's held near Westminster, and we've done it with Moot, and some people have gone to a, sort of, spirituality at the pub. So there has been that opportunity for it people connecting people. So those are a couple of ways. But I think that journey from wanting to do something that engaged with culture, but our imagination being too... colonised by the church, I suppose. Do you know what I mean? Your instincts tend to think in that way, to try to be more missional, erm.. And it's been quite a gentle journey, it's not been aggressive or anything, but I think the ethos has shaped who

we are. I mean, I think there's a long way to go with it, but erm... I... I feel very positive that that's a good way to structure things.... We sort of stumbled across it at [*the Church*], I think. So that's where we've kind of gone with that engagement locally, I think.

I'm interested, is.. is anybody employed by the local church, or is [the Church] non-paid, volunteers?

Yeah, when [*the Church*] started,   was the curate, so he had time to invest and create something new together, but actually he was only around for two years. So when we moved, [*the Church*] had burned out... after two years. They'd done something every two weeks, as creative as you can, and   was leaving, so it was on a six month break. So since that time, we've never employed anyone, s it's erm... yeah it's a group of volunteers, I suppose, a community. And I actually like it... there are things that we could do if we employed someone, but I like it that we don't employ someone, because it deconstructs the, sort of, what would you call it? The professional-lay thing, or in a consumer culture, one of the problems is that we have a very provider-client relationship to a lot of things, so we pay money, we expect a service. It's one of the challenges for people I know, Christian leaders, is how do you change the culture of your community to one of participation, erm... it's a real challenge. So I like it in [*the Church*] that we don't have any employed leader in that way. And I think if we did employ anyone, we'd employ, like, an artist, or someone to do a bit of administration, or whatever. We've... we have had people who are ordained who have been part of the community, and that's been a great gift, `cos in the Anglican set-up, you know, bread and wine, whatever, before that we'd have to persuade the Vicar to come along. But at the moment there's a guy who's a chaplain   , and a member of [*the Church*], and that's a gift that he can bring, so that's been useful. Erm... but yeah, so it's cheap to run. I don't know how easily replicable it is, that's the only problem with it. There are some very... highly-skilled, creative people in [*the Church*], so it looks like, 'what a great model,' but it takes a while to develop that set of skills I think.

I imagine it's more freeing to not have someone employed by the local church, to give you the freedom for you to do what you feel is right for you?

Yeah, and I mean, the relationship with St Mary's church... [*the Church*] is a congregation of the church. I mean, they have an 8:00, 10:30, a 6:00, we're another one of those in their minds I think. And we prefer to be connected in than separate. The track record of things that go off and o their own thing is a little depressing. So we prefer to be linked into the wider church. Erm... but the relationship with the church has been prickly at times, and very good at others, you know. It's probably somewhere in-between at the moment, it's kind of fine, they just leave us alone really. If that's a relationship, I dunno? Although there's a new curate who's just come in who's very keen, it seems, on [*the Church*], and we'll see what he wants to do, how he connects.

Ok, let's move on. Erm... it's a longer question, so you'll get some time to drink you coffee. Erm, are there any theological motifs or parts of the Bible that you find particularly useful in explaining your beliefs and aims in postmodern culture?

Erm... well, I think what I said before, that the gospel.. the way I would understand the gospel would be about the healing of creation. So that's the big story for me. So I think that affecting all life, culture, and

so... it makes perfect sense to join in the transformation of the local community centre, or get involved as a school governor, or as an artist in the local community, to be bringing a redemptive influence, rather than the opposite. So passages... in terms of passages of the Bible, things like Romans 8, you know, 'the whole of creation's crying out for healing,' or Revelation 21, or Christ, 'I've come to make all things new.' Those sorts of passage are... and I think related to that are the gospels, the life of Christ. I was interested because... I'm sure you've read David Bosch, or quoted David Bosch at the least. His book, 'Transforming Mission,' as you know he has his various epochs of theology from Hans Kung or whatever, and he then does the same thing with mission. One of the things that he does in the book is, sort of tucked in there somewhere, is he says, 'In literature of different eras, certain texts in the, erm, scriptures, are sort of highlighted at the time, and they give you a kind of window into that era.' So, you know, the modern... the modern world: 'go to the end of the world, and that fits so nicely with the Empire and progress.. you know what I mean? You can see how that makes sense. I mean, one of the fascinating ones is that... in medieval literature, he says that... I can't remember where the verse is, Luke 14, or something. There's a text that says, 'Go into the highways and by-ways and make them come in,' and you think, well, I've never even noticed that verse, but clearly the, sort of, Catholic church getting people to come into church, going into pubs and whipping them out, and that was mission. So one of the things I do with students, I teach for Centre for Youth Ministry in Oxford. When talking to them about post-modernity and mission, in 400 years time when people look back at the literature now, what are going to be the key texts what people put down... to articulate what mission is about. So, the kinds of things that they come up with, and I come up with, are like the Romans 8 passage, so redemption of creation, but also Incarnation, so 'the Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood.' (John 1, the Message translation.) That localised, contextualised, incarnational, stuff, I think is the theological motif that... that has certainly changed the thinking around youth ministry over the last tenty years. I think it's actually become foundational for me in my own life, so I actually think about what it means to follow Christ; it's to try and live that out in your locale.

So that would be one. Another one that they come up with... it's not a particular text, but a theme would be Jesus' table fellowship with sinners. So mission around hospitality, and this ties in with what I was saying about truth. Mission is about getting people with, erm... people, and sharing food, but particularly with those who are outsiders, who are poor, and marginalised, or the other, or even demonised in our culture. Erm... So that would be another sort of theme.

Then... the Ephesians things I mentioned before, the Ephesians moment, that would be another. But I think that's a bit more coming out of CMS, that we... we discover who Christ is through that plurality of cultures and peoples around the world. So for me those are some theological themes. And.. I mean... the cross-cultural stuff too. So, Acts 10-15, where the gospel goes from the Jews to the Gentiles, and the tensions in that transition of culture. I.. I've preached off that a lot of times, you know, saying that situations we're in is a cross-cultural one, here, and that's why we've got these challenges, or whatever, is because of cultural change. So those would be some of the... some the things. I don't know whether that makes sense. And that's.... that a very interesting question.

Would you use similar things, would you use anything different, if you were talking to groups who were more resistant to engaging with postmodern culture?

Erm... no, I think, those... those things, particularly the Acts 10-15 thing, those texts can unlock the people. It.. I mean... it's gospel and culture stuff and what... what you're trying to say to people is, 'look, erm... everyone has a take, or a spin on...'I probably wouldn't use the word 'spin', 'on the gospel; it's located, it's historical.' But to help people see that their take is cultural, if you can win that argument, I think people can then understand that, in a different culture, it's going to have to be different. That's why I love missiology, I suppose. So, a book like, 'Christianity Rediscovered,' I don't know whether you've come across that, by Vincent Donovan, you know goes to the Masai. And the encounter between him, the culture, and the gospel is fascinating and how he... how he's undone by the culture, and his own assumptions. And I think that's a brilliant text. But it's helping people to see that, in our own context, that all of us are going to be undone by other cultures and how they read the gospel, and that doesn't need to be a threat. Erm... so yeah, some of those passages, they're, erm... they offer real clues to people. And I think cross-cultural mission is... insights from cross-cultural mission can give people the keys.. I mean, it's why CMS are connecting with mission in postmodern cultures. It's the same challenges, as if you're going to the Congo, erm....

Erm.. you've kind of answered this question already, but it'll be good to give you chance to unpack it a bit. Erm.. do you think that postmodernism has changed your understanding of Christian faith?

Yeah. I'll just rewind to that last question. I'm making it sound easy, this transitional stuff, and it's not. I think, erm... if I give you an example of where I think, a modern take, say, meets a postmodern one, and the instincts, the clash of worldviews. I think the current debate around homosexuality is a classic example of... instinct around mission in different eras, mean that you approach people very different. So in the modern world, you know, it's about objective truth, facts, gospel propositions. So you read the bible as a set of certainties around sexuality, and erm... if you want to become a Christian you need to subscribe to the truth, and your behaviour needs to fit with the truth. Well, erm... in the postmodern world, I think these instincts are not to say there isn't truth, but actually, 'we're not quite... I'm not quite sure from where I'm standing that all the truths I've been told are so certain, as I've thought before.' So there's that, kind of, feeling that comes to the table, and I think mission, if it's much more around hospitality is going to say, well, 'the basic point is we need to sit round the table and provide hospitality and welcome to people who are strangers or outsiders or sinners, erm... and build friendship and relationship with them, and journey together.' So, from the point of view of the modern thing, it looks like, 'why are you sitting down with a bunch of people who are clearly, erm... sinners, or whatever?' Whereas from the postmodern it's like, 'Why are you guys so judgemental?' So you get a clash, you know what I mean? And that's irrespective of when you then, kind of, get to talk and have a read of what you think the scriptures are saying about sexuality. It's almost the environment in which that can take place has changed, I think. Erm... and... you know, as you see when you're looking at a kind of African... and extreme example, an African servant is meeting postmodern ambiguity or whatever, you've got a clash of worldviews going on. But what I think is going on behind it are the totally different instincts around, erm... what mission is and what truth is. So yeah, you get those clashes around a number of issues, I think. In the same way as you did with the Jew-Gentile thing about circumcision and food sacrificed to idols, or whatever. So anyway, I've now forgotten the question....

It's just about whether Postmodernism has changed your faith

Yeah I'm sure it has, you know, I think one of the postmodern things is that it's impossible to live outside of culture, so I must be shaped, probably more that I would know or would like to admit, by the air that I breath that is postmodern London. So, erm... I mean I know, I've been taking the issue of sexuality, there's been a whole range of opinions within CMS for example, but I know... the General Secretary thinks, he feels we have too European a perspective, some of us. But I'd take that as a compliment, because that's the context I'm living in. So he, kind of feels, you know we need to get a bit more of the African perspective... you know that's the kind of learning from one another. I think we're all shaped more than we'd like to admit by culture, and it's part of our... part of our battle. I mean, one of the things.. one of the many things I love and admire about Christ is his ability to be so engaged with the culture that the church call him a glutton and a drunk sinner, you know, because he's too, far too engaged. But he's also able, without seemingly being judgemental, to name the.. what's broken in the culture, or the idols of the culture. And pull the rug... and ultimately get crucified for it. You know to tear down those idols, I suppose. And I think that complexity of resistance and engagement with culture, and working out what to resist and what to engage with is not going to be easy.

Yeah, I'm sure I'm shaped. You know shares like sexuality, and my instincts around that, to sit round the table with people and, erm... be open to hear people trying to sense where God is in that. Erm.... and live with the ambiguities and discomfort of that. I think we have a whole generation who are shaped by environmental concern, and I think that's great. But to my mind, that emphasis upon the healing of creation that we're seeing re-emerge, I mean particularly through people like Tom Wright, and whatever. And that's emerging partly because of our context. So yeah, I think I am shaped by postmodern stuff. Erm, yeah... I think it's inevitable

Yeah... erm... so as one of the leaders in [the Church], what's you greatest hope for [the Church]?

Erm... I think we have quite small ambitions, on one level. It's quite a small community, so I think we hope that we are able to hold true to our ethos, that we feel is who we are. So, I mean, interestingly enough, our understanding of leadership has been quite shaped by some writing on monasticism, not for a moment that I think we're like monks in any way. But they see leadership as about guarding ethos, and I think that notion we've, sort of, taken to heart. This ethos is who we are. I mean, we might debate the ethos, and might be open to other things. This last year we've looked at our hospitality, and whether that should be added in as another word. People have written stuff on it, we read a book on it, and did about three services on that theme, and we've ended up not having it as another word, but it's kind of embodied in the others. So it's not exactly fixed in stone, but I do think that idea of leadership and guarding ethos is the way we think about stuff. So my hopes for [*the Church*] are that we can remain true to that, so that [*the Church*] can be a creative community, erm..., highly (hopefully), highly relational, caring for one another, kind of environment which people can join and feel good about that, but it will be a participative community, so... people have opportunity to use who they are, gifts or whatever, that will take risks, that will engage, outward-focussed. And for me that's more where my hope is at the moment. I feel like I've done the kind of creative worship. I love it, it keeps me alive, I'm very inspired by that. My heart, at the moment, is much more in taking that sort of stuff and trying o engage locally, whether that be... for me how it works out, if I'm faced with a choice between having a meeting with a church PCC because CMS want me to, or going to the photography group, I have to

choose the engage over the church option. Obviously I can't do that in the day time when I'm employed, but you know what I mean? It's shifting you instincts to what you prioritise. So I kind of hope [*the Church*], that engagement erm... will lead us to risky new ventures. I mean, the hospitality, you know, we've talked about stranger and the community in London. You know there's a big Polish community in London, and whatever. And what do we do in terms of hospitality, to engage in those ways. So I hope some things grow out of that as well. We're quite small so it relies on people taking initiative and doing stuff, so.. I hope we do some of that. So yeah... small ambitions really. Just to be faithful to that, erm....

And I think, one of [*the Church*]'s unique things, maybe it's being in London, we do a lot of hospitality for visitors. So we... there's always a few Australians, or Americans, or Kiwis, or South Africans, or whatever, inevitably passing through London. So... one of my other hopes, and I think this has been realised, but I hope it goes on being realised, is that we're able to give away the gifts of what we have to others to, kind of, spark their imagination and encourage them in their journey. That's been part of our... it's a bit of a weird thing. We've and arguments about it within [*the Church*], as to whether we should ban visitors. I mean, just because it totally skews things, sometimes. You know there are 35 of you sat there, and then suddenly a minibus of Danes arrives with cameras arrives, and walks in. I mean, it helps if you know groups are coming, but it does... it can be quite draining, I suppose, so it's been a real tension point for us, but we've definitely erred on the... particularly on hospitality, or whatever, that this is a gift that, part of following Christ is the gift of hospitality. So yeah, I hope we continue to spark people's imagination in that way.

And then, I think that the passing of that onto another generation is the challenge of quite a lot of alternative worship groups are facing. Erm... so we have some teenagers in [*the Church*]. I mean my own lads are 18 and 16 and... and they've been fantastic when they do stuff, very creative. But erm... catalysing something new for another generation is... It might not be that they do that in [*the Church*], but we'd help them do something outside, but I'd certainly hope they'd go onto more things.

Er... what about your most constant frustration?

With [*the Church*]? Erm... well my... my frustration with [*the Church*] in a way has been the result... I've felt it was too internally-focussed, so I was one of the drivers for saying, 'We need to snatch what we hold dear,' which was the kind of meeting together every week and reverent worship. So one of my big frustrations has gone, and that's been great.

But my other frustration, I suppose... erm.... yeah, I don't know, I don't feel too frustrated with it, which is probably a good thing. Erm... One of the challenges is around time, and maybe ever church faces this, particularly in London, I think. You know, we have people in the community who are high up in BT, or Deputy Heads, or TV Producers, erm.. you know, I work for a charity, I'm often working at weekends. People are so busy in life, to get time to dream and be creative, and get involved in the transformation of the local community... people just don't have a lot of spare time. So, I mean, I was talking to my wife, and we were talking about the last year in [*the Church*], and she was saying, 'It feels like, you know, we've done some things that are good, and talking about things like hospitality, but it sort of feels like we're treading water sometimes. There's a lot more you could do, but time is the challenge and

frustration.' But I.. I don't think that's unique for us, that's modern life for a lot of people. But we... with that, we've also tried to say.. part of the reason we changed with the engage stuff would be.. you can't expect people to meet once a week, every week, in a church thing, and then focus on the engage stuff. We've actually got to say, 'we're actually not doing this anymore, so let's try and use the other time, creatively.' Which I think people, you know... church sometimes, I've seen this in youth groups, anyway, you've got people who are keen Christians, and if they're a real disciple, they'll be running a bible study group, they'll be a worship leader in a church... We just take them out of their world, you know. So...

And what about your greatest fear?

Erm... for [*the Church*]? I don't think I feel too fearful... I mean even if [*the Church*] were to end this week, I feel it will have been very valuable and worthwhile. Erm... Yeah, I dunno. I'll have to think about that. Greatest fear?

Yeah, maybe my fear relates to the hope, or whatever. I want to see the children of people in [*the Church*], and we've got the oldest kids at the moment, but there are other children as well. Whether it's through [*the Church*] or something else, my fear would be that, faith wouldn't be passed on to them in a way that is meaningful. I mean, it relates to a hope: I hope there is a freedom for them to follow Christ in ways that they can actually... well, it's gone pretty well with my own kids, in that they're following Christ in their own way. So yeah, that would be my fear, I think.

OK, erm... Have you got a particular story that sums up what you're trying to achieve as [the Church]. Is there a particular story that sums up what kind of... you ethos, your hopes?

Well, I think the engagement in the mind, body, spirit festivals would be one, in that, that would be an environment that... you know, a lot of us from Anglican and Evangelical, Charismatic backgrounds, so, you think about mind, body, spirit fairs as a 20-year old at University, that would be the kind of thing you've prayed against, at an all-night prayer meeting, if not protested outside, do you know what I mean? Erm... so to find yourself on the inside of it, doing mission, building relationships with people, just feels like... Well, the first time we did it, it just felt like, what the.... what the hell are we doing, I mean, is this... are we betraying Christ, or is this exciting? It didn't feel like there was actually much in-between, so... so I feel like that's been a really good story, really good for us.

And another story has been... this women, Lynda, who lives down that road, literally next-door to the church. She moved to London as a very broken person. Culturally she's quite different to some of the people in [*the Church*]. She's got tattoos all over, clearly had a rough and ready life. She's quite depressed when she moved to London to get away from her former life. She's got a dog and, erm... walks round past the church. And she just ended up walking round the church and into [*the Church*] one time and, erm... you know, she's... found Christ, she's become part of the community. I mean some of us have joined in sharing an allotment with her, which has been a great way to do the relational stuff. She just recently came away on the [*the Church*] weekend, camping with us. So that's been great, to have someone very different become a part of the community, become a Christian. And she's brought lots of energy and challenge to us, so yeah, I think that's a hopeful story. And that shows you the value, actually, of having the church doors and having them open. And a lot of challenges with her, with some

of her thinking around theology and God is very confused with some... spirituality stuff that's around. But we're getting our instincts around that; it's highly relational to get her to journey with us.

That's a good story.

Yeah, and I think she's... she's a natural evangelist in that she's one of these people that just talks to people all the time, so I think she is likely to take what she's discovered and share that with others, and they'll get into the [*the Church*] orbit. And that's great.

Ok, last question, an easy one to finish on. Are there any particular authors who've influenced how you view church and mission?

Yeah, I mean.. I read a lot, I suppose. Definitely the missiology stuff. So cross-cultural mission books, like *Christianity Rediscovered*, there's..., I don't know whether you know that one, erm... it was also published as *For this cross I'll kill you*, it's another cross-cultural mission story, erm, Latin America. John Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, so all that missiology area, erm...

Then, stuff that's kind of making that connection with postmodern culture and mission. So things like Walter Brueggemann, *The Postmodern Imagination*, erm..., Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, that definitely gave me a kick up the arse I suppose, in terms of thinking that [*the Church*] and a lot of alternative worship had made some moves that had got stuck in being attractional, because that's one of their critiques. So that was quite a key book, erm.. for me... erm.

You know I actually really like John Caputo's *What would Jesus Deconstruct?* that's one of the most interesting, recent books that I've read on postmodern stuff and faith. I mean, that's a very positive spin on er... Derrida. But yeah, I dunno, I read a lot. There's almost too much around at the moment. I get sent books `cos I write a blog to review, and there's the, you know, there's the Emergent line in the US, which I find very thin after a while, they're all saying the same thing. I tend to find things like *Primal Vision,* or whatever, have a lot more richness to them. I don't want to read another book that says, 'The world has changed, cross cultural mission, we need to engage, here's three stories,' do you know what I mean? A lot of those books around...

I mean on the Spirituality stuff, *The Spirituality Revolution*, by David Tacey, is it, or Tracy? One of them's a Catholic Theologian, and the other's written this book, I think it's Tacey. He's in Melbourne, and that is a fantastic book. I don't think I've worked out the implications of it, yet.

I mean, you mentioned NT Wright, earlier, has been fairly influential through his writing, or not really?

I think for me personally, all that worldview stuff or whatever else, I go into that through Bryan Walsh and Richard Middleton. There's a book called, *Creation Regained* by Al Walters, erm... and I was in a church in Bath, this is quite a long time ago, that introduced me to that theology. So, reading Tom Wright's latest book, erm, on hope, big fat book on hope, erm... for me, there wasn't a lot that was new in it. It was almost like, 'Thank goodness Tom Wright's caught up with this stuff', I mean, I wouldn't say that to him. So it's more that he's bringing that story into a much wider readership. So, I wouldn't say he

hasn't been... I wouldn't want to knock him, but in terms of introducing me to ideas, he's probably been less influential than some other people.

Yeah, in terms.. in terms of some people. There's obviously a whole conversation and load of writing goes on in the blog world, so I've, kind of, participated in that over the past five or six years. And some of that is about reviewing books and too-ing and fro-ing ideas and things. But that's been a fun environment. Yeah.

Then at CMS there's a library. They get a set of mission journals.... it doesn't happen now, but it used to happen that you could sign up to them and they come round your desk and you'd tick your name off. The librarian doesn't trust people now, so it happens in a different way. Certainly some mission journal articles I've read have certainly... sharpened up your thinking. Although they do also irritate they; if they ever write about postmodernity, because they tend to be quite negative, which I think's ironic for the missions community. They can't cope with the culture on their doorstep.

 There you go.

[Tape ends]

Participant D, Interview 2

I give permission for this tape to be used for Graeme's work.

OK, thanks. So, I'm just interested in err.... what happens when you gather together as [the Church], your main gatherings. Obviously it won't be the same every time, nut what are the things that happen, and what do you aim for, what's the structure of the events?

So when you say the main gatherings, the worship?

Yeah...

Erm... well, it's a worship service, so that would be the focus of our gathering... We try and have a welcome and be hospitable to people. So we have a sheet that we give to people, that lets them know what [*the Church*] is about, if they're new. That's partly through experience, because it's a bit different, but everyone... I think that helps set everyone at ease. Then, typically they'll be an hour exploring a theme in terms of worship, that.... that may well chime in with the seasons of the church year. So this Sunday we have a Service called, 'An even greater silence,' and that's basically an Advent thing, picking up the idea of the silence of 400 years waiting for the coming of Christ, is the idea of it. So, I actually have no idea what's going to happen; I assume there's going to be some silence, but the way that we plan is in small teams, creative teams. And it would be pretty typically within, erm... a [*Church*] Service that there would be a flow of it that would start with... I mean this isn't always the case, but we'd start with introductory, chilling, quiet, meditative, slow down, you know... welcoming God into the space... erm. Then there'd probably something the particular theme, it might be a Scripture text, or something like that. Now that might involve... erm... a whole range of ways of doing that. It might be there's some stations of stuff to explore, it might be there's a liturgical led thing, erm... I mean that really varies. I'm

trying to think what services we've done. We did one called 'The Table' and that really, the main event was a meal, but that was, you know... that was exploring community, that was the theme. So that can be done in a range of ways. There'll usually be... there might be some singing, you know things that you normally have in events, like singing, preaching... I say normal, intercessory prayers, or whatever, those don't necessarily feature all the time. I mean there's usually a prayerful space, but we don't necessarily have singing, sometimes do, and we very rarely have preaching. We might have discussion in small groups, so content is dealt with, but often in a different way. Erm... in fact, the last service was on the theme of hospitality, and there were basically four spaces that were led by people, and you only got to visit three, but every fifteen minutes a bell went off, and if you were asked to move on. It was more like a small group thing. And then usually there's some kind of ritual that pulls together the theme being explored that, for me, is often a space where I think things come together in the serv8ice. I mean, it might be something simple like lighting a candle, or placing a broken tile on the table, but it's often a response to what's been talked about, I think, calls people forth to say, 'This is where I'm at with you, God.' And ritual can be a very multivalent, or ambiguous, or can mean different things to different people, that' one of the reasons I like it. I think we've found that ritual's powerful, in our context. So there's often some sort of ritual, and then a sending out, a blessing, again done in a number of ways. So that's the sort of shape of it, you know, there's usually a DJ-ed soundtrack in the background, often pretty quiet, there's usually visual stuff projected into the space. I mean, that might be on either side, projected onto sheets, or the... the church we meet in, St. Mary's is erm... has recently got a projector in, so there's a big screen at the front, so we're sometimes using that. Erm... and then it tends it be set in the round, with bean bags, it's quite an informal, relaxed feel in the space in that way, quite low lit I suppose. And then we always have a cafe that runs afterwards that, probably... well the Service finishes about nine, so people generally start drifting off from the cafe from about half-ten, so people hang around for quite a long time, and that's as important a part of the evening as the worship, the two together. But we only do that Service once a month, so I think if we're doing that every week, we wouldn't do that every week. So, yeah, is that the kind of thing?

Yeah... and so... so you just meet once a month?

Well, yeah we meet twice a month for worship. The thing I've described there, [*the Church*], is once a month, and there's another thing,   because it's like a little version. And that tends to be led by just one person, so we don't put the creative work in... I mean, that one person might, but it tends to be much more of a prayer focussed thing. And usually there'll be a space for people to be asked if... you know, it's more like a community prayer meeting. I mean.. yeah... again there's a pattern, and I guess the pattern is pretty close to Evening Prayer, I mean, I don't think anyone would recognise it as that, but in that it has that kind of introductory stuff, quietening down prayer, and then the Word, and then some sort of prayer response to the Word, and then a sending-out is generally the pattern to it. But often.... a third of it, or half might be focussed on prayer. So yeah, theme there are other community things: small groups, and planning meetings, but it's two worship services.

Right, and what are the most common themes, that kind of, run through the main services that you've got together, are there certain things that, kind of, run through them, or occur again and again?

How do you mean by themes?

Just... just things that you're focussing on, things that you're talking about it...

Well... one thing that we focus on tends to be the rhythm of the church year. So it would be normal that we're visiting Advent, Christmas now, Lent tends to be a focus for us, Easter, Pentecost... I think, yeah, we often do something focussed on Pentecost, sometimes Trinity, it depends slightly in the month these things fall. So we like that rhythm of the church year, it suits us quite well. Then...September generally is, like, New Year for us, and that's a community service. So this year we did that table thing, and that was a community meal, but it's.... that's always a reflection on looking forward for the year, recommitting to God and one another, and we have an ethos we... we, kind of, I suppose shapes our life together, and it's a bit of a reflection on how we're doing in relation to the ethos, and re-committing to that, round some values.

Erm... but then other themes, could be anything. It depends on what people suggest. So... last year, erm... was it last year, I can't even remember? We had a focus on hospitality, erm... and we read a book on that, 'Making Room,' well some people read a book on that called *Making Room* by Christine Pole. But then we probably had three or four services around that, exploring that theme. And that's worked well when we've done that, `cos... you... I dunno you linger with something a lot longer, and when you're planning worship, you're discussing it, exploring it, whatever. I think we've liked that quite a lot, we've done that with a few themes, and sometimes a theme like that, or sometimes it might be something like the parables, or the Prophets, or a biblical theme in that way. Erm... so that, that's worked well for us. But.. yeah.. so it's kind of loosely a blend of those two things: creative ideas or themes that resonate in the community in some way, coupled with the church year, I think.

Right, OK. Erm... I'm interested... you talked about, erm... having a value-led ethos, a value-centred ethos, erm... what's the thinking behind having that? A, behind having an ethos, and B, making sure that it's value-led?

Erm.. well.. after we'd been going ten years, we had a tenth anniversary service, and that was exploring the theme of [*the Church*]. But having been going ten years, I don't think that people that started it expected they'd be doing something that lasted ten years, you just don't think that way, or we didn't. So... we had a weekend away, and we were reflecting on, 'what is [*the Church*], where's it going.er,,, etc, etc,' and people were asked to bring an object to it, and was something they held dear, or something they loved about [*the Church*], something that they thought was a challenge, or they'd like to see some newness or change, I can't remember exactly how it was phrased. So people brought all these objects. But we then got talking about, 'so what are the value words in relation to both of those things,' and they were quite, sort of, words written. In fact, if you look on the website there are two versions of the ethos, one is the long version, that was.. it was distilled down, even that. But in the end we distilled it down to just four words, which are, creativity, participation, risk, and engage. Yeah, I think it's engage or engagement, and engage is kind of that outward-focus word. So it, sort of, kind of happened by accident, that around that time, I read something by... Al Roxborough and Chris Erdman, who'd been to visit [*Participant C*] in [*the Community*]. I mean, what he seemed to be saying to them about

Monasticism, or new monasticism anyway, was that, 'At the heart of community life is an ethos, and the role of the Abbot, or the leadership, is to guard the ethos,' and erm... I think we really liked that understanding of leadership. It seemed a very different way of thinking about it. I think that came at the same time as we did this value thing, so we ended up saying, 'well... look, this is our ethos, these four values,' and it's just shaped us more than we imagined. So something like the word 'risk,' it's not like we sit down and ask, 'so what risks are we going to take this year,' but it's like... If something comes up... So I remember, soon after, somebody challenged us to get involved in the, erm... mind, body, spirit festival, running a stand. So when you mention that at a planning meeting it's an inevitable that somebody says, 'well, one of our value words is risk, isn't it?' And then you've got nowhere to hide, do you know what I mean? So... erm... and I think the word 'engage', if we were honest... if we were honest when we did the value things, was that quite a lot of the energy in the community, was creating brilliant worship on the, sort of, tag-line, 'If we can create worship we like, you know, we can invite our friends, it will be attractive in that way.' But, in practice how many friends were coming, and wasn't worship just as weird as any other kind, just a bit more postmodern, arty weird. So the engage word, when we'd put it down, was very much an outward-focussed word. We thought, 'If we have an ethos that hasn't got something outward focus, we might as well close, or, well, it was not going to last.' But having had that word, that meant for us as individuals and a community, it just raises the question, 'Well, in what ways are we engaging, or are we going to engage in local community and culture, or whatever?' So, I think that's been... again it's a gentle thing, but it's quite powerful question... you know, I guess it's what the monks call... what a rule does... is a measure that calls you to it, and I think that's how that word functions for me. I mean, for example, one of the things I did as the result of that, I joined a local photography group, erm... full of people that aren't Christians, just because in my work it's full of people who are Christians. So how can I, in my work, engage, and not have an even... other than parents that are... if I'm not really meeting... I mean, I also joined because I enjoy... because I like photography, and it's been great from that point of view. But I think everyone in their own way has reflected on that word so... yeah... it's been much more powerful than we thought, though I think it would be fair to say that we stumbled across it. And another thing that [*Participant C*] said at the time about ethos, was that in the community it probably takes you eight or ten years to realise what it is, if you're a new community. So we read that after we'd done this exercise, but it was interesting that that did kind of come out after that length of time. I think it.. if you did it early, it would be perhaps more an aspirational set of values than what was really the life-blood. I mean there'd probably be overlap, erm... But I think it's also....

[Meeting interrupted]

Yeah... I don't think that he knows... `cos partly that piece was on-line, so I don't think he knows that he... the influence... Erm... yeah, so, I think what I've liked about that ethos stuff, in terms of ways of thinking about church, it gets you away from 'churches, we meet on a Monday, we meet on a Wednesday, or whatever,' it's more about the DNA, or the... what's core to the community. And then being part of [*the Church*]... yeah, how do I live that out in, erm... everyday life. And in terms of leadership, how do we nurture a community that holds these things... at the heart, I suppose. I mean... but... as I say it's a gentle thing, rather than a, kind of, 'Right, how are you participating, or whatever?' Erm... does that make sense?

Yeah, absolutely. And to... with the value kind-of... with a value-centred ethos, what... how do people, kind of, officially associate with [the Church]. Is there no way of officially associating with it? I'm trying not to use the word 'membership' because that might not be particularly helpful.

Well... I think the Anglican church generally has an open-door policy, so we have an open-door policy, so that we advertise and whoever comes we have to let in. And that not a problem, we like it, we like them coming. Erm... we find... you know, I think we have a very thick fringe, some of whom might come once a month, some of whom visit from Australia, I dunno, it's a weird thing being in London and having a web presence. It feels that you have quite a lot of tourists around the edge which, again, we've discussed at length. But the hospitality stuff, we feel like..., you know, we're called to offer hospitality to visitors in that way, even if, at times, you get twenty Danes with cameras, it can be a little frustrating. Erm... but then, I think, the... the core thing, we don't have a membership thing that people sign. So we're not, kind of, a vow-taking community, or whatever, but we... we do have an email list, if you wanna get involved... at two levels. One is a flow of information, so there's probably about 200 people on that, at various levels from the centre. But then there is a core group, planning email list, that's probably got about 25 people on it at the moment, and that, probably... if you sign up for that, and commit your email, that's.. that's membership, or as close as we get. I mean in terms of Anglican systems, we're... we're a congregation of St. Mary's Church, so some of the people are on the Electoral Role, some probably don't know what an Electoral role is, that doesn't cross their radar, we don't particularly push that system much. But I think it's... yeah, it's pretty loose, but the membership is... I think this is true of community life generally, it's better if it's invitational, you can't force community. So... erm... but we... as I say, we do have this service, September is a service of re-commitment... it's not like people sign on the dotted line, but there is a public call, if you like, to commit to God and to community and that. I mean that might be expressed by.. I mean last year we wrote out the words of the ethos in... in candles, erm... night lights, and people were invited to come and light those as a sign of commitment, or whatever. So... you know it's embodied in different ways. But I think... I think it's fairly Anglican really.... Do you know what I mean, rather than a sign on the dotted line?

Yeah... yeah, and do you get many... do you get many coming to the recommitment service specifically for that purpose, to say, 'yeah, I want to re-commit, this is important to me,'?

Mmmm, I... erm... I don't know. I have no way of measuring that. I mean, I think it's a service that people like in the community it's... it's often a powerful moment. I mean this year was the table thing, and that was, was really good. It was quite a lot of work, it looked visually stunning in the church base, and so on. The year before was, er... anyway, I won't bore you with the details, but I think they have been services that have been... had a sense of weight about them, I suppose. So I think that's just they're important to people, it feels like that in the community.

And... er... interested in the core group, the organising group. Is that invitation only, or do people just sign up for it if they want to get involved, are any questions asked?

Erm... in terms of communication, we have various flows. One is the website, the services are on and whatever. And that's useful to anybody I think. Erm... then we've taken to doing a printed news, A4

sheet each month, to give people to let them know where things are happening. So the planning meeting for [*the Church*] is on that, so it's an open invitation to anyone who's at the service to come to the monthly planning meeting, and sometimes, on that, depending on how organised we are, it will say, 'January Service is being curated by Gillian, erm... ask if you'd like to.. or her email, or whatever is on there.' `Cos we quite like to draw people to participation `cos we think that's how, you know... that's how they grow and get involved and get to know people. But the actual email planning list itself we don't particularly advertise that on the news sheet, but erm... if people have been coming a while. And I guess I hope this is normal in communities, we'd invite them round for a meal, or hopefully somebody would, and chat to them or whatever, and ask them, 'Do you want to come to the monthly planning meeting, there's an email list if you're interested in that,' and people kind of say, 'fine.' And there are people on the planning list who don't really participate, they're lurkers rather than active. But it's fairly.. it's fairly open invitation, and I don't think we've ever said to someone who's asked, 'Sorry, you can't be involved.' And then we have a small group we call a facilitation group that is at the moment two blokes, two girls, and we've actually just written our first ever governance document, which is a little alarming. But that's about the make-up of that group because, erm... myself, and there's a guy Mike. Mike's a founder-member of [*the Church*], and we've been on that group for probably three years, I mean we haven't had that group[that long. But I mean, I've felt within [*the Church*], that I've seen plenty of communities where you can't get rid of founder-members, or the leadership is stuck, or doesn't change. So I felt we needed to talk about that and enshrine something that meant the community could have change in leadership, so our pattern for that is we try and vote somebody on and somebody off, or it might be two people off, and another person on. But we think that group should be just three or four people, because we're quite a small community. Erm... and people can suggest people, and if it comes to a vote, people can have a vote. But in practice, people are so laid-back in [*the Church*], they're like, 'ooh, you guys are doing fine, just carry on,' but in practice we did have someone step down, and two people come on. And I think Mike and I, we're both still on it, and I think one of us will step down next year, so, you know, that sort of, role-on, role-off thing. Erm... so that's much more... that needs to... people need to be recommended for that, and voted on really. The community..I think the community would be... that's not so an open invite. Although that's not saying.. I mean anyone could put themselves forward. And it's more of a... it's kind of admi... it is a leadership role, but it's not an up-front lead. It's the... the... the facilitators tend to chair the planning meetings and put together the agenda for4 those. But it's more that we're trying to keep... make sure things happen, erm... keep nudging people, who's gonna lead July, or who's gonna plan a weekend away, you know it's that kind of stuff.

And as far as you can tell, what's the kind of.. what's the kind of churchy-make-up of [the Church]? Where are people coming fro.. is it a complete mix of backgrounds, does it tend to fit with Doug Gay's ideas that... that.. a lot of these churches are inhabited by post-Evangelicals, what... what's the kind of make-up of [the Church] from that perspective?

I guess, I suppose it's depends what you mean by post-Evangelical, but erm... I mean, there are quite a lot of people who've grown up in the church, who are a part of... I think, erm... I mean whether they'd describe themselves as post-Evangelicals, I don't know. I mean, the stereotypes of these groups is sometimes that they are people who are jaded and cynical about charismatic church, or whatever.

Perhaps when [*the Church*] started there were people in a bit of recovery from that kind of thing, but... I think [*the Church*] has been going sixteen years, so that isn't really the conversation. People have moved on, and I think this engage stuff that we're focussed positively, that what it is we're doing in germs of following Christ, than it is about what we were once. Do you know what I mean?

Yeah, so quite a lot from church backgrounds. It's a mix of men and women, the age range is.. I mean, there are people with young kids, but the majority of people are probably in their thirties and forties, I would think, there are some twenties. Erm..., a couple of teens. I mean, we do get... the feel of our worship, although people think it's alternative worship and that sounds like dance music or whatever else, it tends to be quite contemplative. So we have some older people that really like it, so it is quite a mixed age-range, balance of gender. Probably more men than your average Anglican church. You know, there's this huge debate that church is for women, or something. We definitely have a lot of women involved, which is great, erm... Ethnicities... I dunno, maybe we've got one Romanian... On Romanian girl, one Hungarian guy, erm..., Asian guy, Black girl, other than that.. So yeah, it's probably ten percent ethnic minority, which is probably, maybe that's a bit low for London, but it's probably not untypical, having said that, erm.... And, we've got... I mean in terms of people with no church background who've come in through [*the Church*], we haven't got many, we've got one women at the moment, Linda, who lives locally and has become a Christian and has joined. And she's... in fact, she's been great for us; she's taught us as much as we've taught her. But she's probably pour only scalp we can claim in that way, and we probably can't even claim her. She just walked in, with her dog, erm... yeah.

Ok, I mean... that's helpful. Maybe I was misquoting Doug Gay a little bit, there. He actually talks about Emerging Groups being... people from lower church backgrounds who are engaging with a wider ecclesiology than they were exposed to in their younger days.

Yeah... that's probably true. Having said that... we've got a girl who's Roman Catholic, and she still goes to the Roman Catholic church. I mean, that's the other odd thing... we have some people that go to another church as well as [*the Church*]. So [*the Church*] is a part of the diet, which I find weird, isn't one church enough to be going on with, but anyway.... I guess you can have some people who like church more than me... I dunno....

Erm... I wanna move on a little bit, erm...I'm interested in what ways... what kind of qualities, what kind of lifestyles people are encouraged to embody at [the Church].

Phew... there's an interesting one. I think there's... it's probably typical of our generation at the moment, that there's a definite environmental concern, although there's also an internal argument about... over carbon footprint for flying and things, `cos they do for business and think there's... the debates around science and things. So we had a discussion evening in a pub recently, which is a bit of a new thing we've started actually, `cos we've figured that there are some themes that don't necessarily work well in a worship context, or you can't explore them in the same way. So we've kind of set up a monthly evening, so if somebody is passionate about something, or wants to get a debate going about something, then they can. So there was a discussion on the Environment in relation to Copenhagen, or whatever. Yeah, quite a lot of people at that, and it was a good debate. But it was also practical, in that

it was suggestions on how you could change your electricity, which we did as a result in our household, and ended up having a family discussion about ways we could reduce our carbon footprint. Erm... so I think that's a lifestyle issue that's probably at least on the table being discussed. Erm...

We've talked about consumerism, done worship services on consumerism: how do you live faithfully in a consumer culture, but without withdrawing. So we did one service, for example, called, 'The herecy of simplicity,' that was exploring the complexity of that challenge. Erm... I think in terms of lifestyle, perhaps the most significant thing about alternative worship is its posture toward culture. You know, I think there's an undergirding, almost Catholic theology that's sacramental, that sees that all of life, God is present in all of life and culture, and is discerning God within all of life and culture. And if you inhabit popular culture then, you know, there'll be whispers of that in film and music, or whatever. And that tends to be the bui8lding-blocks toward worship because we don't tend to see a... we don't want people to live a split life between chu... planet church and the rest of life. So I don't know if that's a lifestyle issue... I dunno, yeah, it depends.... But it is... it's erm... it's certainly a kind of theme that, I think, if you're part of the [*church*] community, the chances are that you will think that your... the culture you live, and your friends live in is to be celebrated and affirmed, whilst it's also to be thought about and reflected on, in terms of consumerism or whatever it is. But that tends to be the posture towards culture, which I think is great in terms of mission. Erm...

So do people... are people encouraged to have a critical reflection on the world they live in? So, live in the world but reflect on it... Yeah, very much so, and you know.... Some of the texts that we might explore, I think... we're exploring the beatitudes in February, for example. Lent's often a time when we focus on discipleship, so we haven't quite decided, but this year we're gonna use a book by Maggie Dawn called, 'Giving it up,' that's a series of reflections. That tends to be a discipleship... more of a discipleship season for us. We've talked about food as a lifestyle issue, which I think is a.... may seem like a funny one, but I think is an issue that some people, erm... so yeah, that will... It tends to be that sort of stuff comes up, because I think are trying to relate faith to life generally. Erm....

Trying to think what else we've done. I think we've probably touched on all our lifestyle stuff....

Fashion we've done. Er... sort of, 'What would Jesus wear,' kind of.... again that was... exploring culture, kind of thing.

Hmm, well you're beginning to draw this next question for me now, which is erm... what... what do you think are the most pressing concerns of post-modern culture that, erm... that [the Church] are being encouraged to engage with, or people are engaging with?

Yeah... erm.... I think, broadly speaking, this may not narrow it down enough, that people sort of have a theological view of Redemption that's cosmic in scope. So Christ has come to renew all things, or... the future heaven and earth is the healing of creation. So our vocation, following in the way of Christ, is to be agents of that healing, reconciliation, transformation, peace-making, erm... I guess that would be my way of saying it. So in terms of... I forget how you put the question, does that make sense? That's... that's the big... the big picture. But that... that might be as much about engaging in the arts, or political life, or being... I mean, hopefully I think this is true, that... that how you are a deputy-head teacher (one

of the guys is a deputy head), or how you are a student, or whatever, that you're... you reflect.... your faith... begin a part of [*the Church*] helps you to think about how your faith impacts what you do with most of your life. I mean... equally as a parent, or whatever else. So I think that's the main... the main sort of thing. But the postmodern culture questions... specific issues: creation, the environment, is definitely being one that keeps coming back. I think how you live in consumer culture is one that keeps coming back, it's not easy to work out. I think technology, erm.... well... we like playing with technology, but we also discuss, erm... you know, the challenges around technology, I suppose. Whether that's being present to the moment, rather than checking everything... You know, I think this is gonna be a growing spiritual discipline that people are gonna have to discuss. You know, somebody told me... I can't remember who I was having this discussion with... and they were saying that they'd heard that Rod Stewart, of all people, that at the meal table they have a basket and everyone puts them mobile devices, gadgets in the basket to kind of say, we're [resent at the meal table. And I think those kinds of things are going to become important.

So yeah, technology stuff.... I mean we do have quite a few people... gender would be another one. We've just had a discussion on... I missed it actually, it was the last planning meeting, on inclusive language. Erm... whilst trying not to be, sort of, too much on the political thought police liturgical thought police... so there's been a whole debate on how we do that, and some disagreement I think, on whether that's a good idea. But it's.... some people are sensitised to that, and some people aren't. And some people feel alienated by that, and there are some people that are not sensitised to it. So I think that's an example of how gender-inclusion is being, erm... part of that. And I think related to that in postmodern culture is... the instinct around mission is... is much more focussed on hospitality. So it's like Jesus' table fellowship among sinners, or the word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood. It's that engagement, welcome, openness, as opposed to modernity that was much more, I dunno, go to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel. Or focussed more on truth and belief... I mean, not that those things aren't important, but somehow the emphasis as shifted. So I think that would be another issue. Probably if you dug below the surface, probably people have an instinct around welcome and hospitality basis, out of which we'll work out what people believe as we're sat around the meal table. And that will probably true around sexuality, for example. Erm... what else might be themes? Postmodern culture.

Let me bounce something back. Something that you were talking about at the beginning of that was about... er... the church being, kind of, agents of God, agents of God's renewing of creation, and that came up last time as well. How do you visualise the church interacting with other communities and people who aren't a part of the church, with the same ends, as it were?

Erm... yeah... yeah, positively I think. I don't think we're any shining lights in that. Within [*the Church*], I think we have people who are involved in chaplaincy at the University, involved in er... my wife's set up a thing called the Sophia Network, which is about women and youth ministers. We've got somebody who's a trustee and very involved in a charity around, erm... kids with cleft palate. Erm.... people that do volunteer stuff with Christian Aid. So I think... people are engaged in... a number... quite a few people have been involved in Greenbelt, and a number of people are involved in arts stuff. Probably if I think about it, Arts is one of our things. So I think people's instincts around that, is that it's good and they

want to work with other people, and they have no problem with that. I mean, we've only ever done one campaign, kind of thing, where we've joined in with another thing, which was a campaign called, 'The truth isn't sexy,' which was a sort of pub crawl raising awareness about human trafficking. Taking beer mats and posters into pubs – I mean, it was working at the demand end of things, sort of provocative beer mats that looked like a call card. And you flipped it over and it was a story of someone being trafficked, so.... erm... yes, I think people are positive about that, they see that... and probably theologically have a... view of the... focussed on the kingdom of God rather than the church. Do you know what I mean, they're slightly different?

Yeah, unpack that a little bit for me, just so that I've got it clear what you mean...

Well, in that... you know Christ has come and has said that the kingdom of God is among you, that it's a kingdom of justice and peace and righteousness, and that we're... agents of that kingdom, and the focus in terms of life isn't to... get people to join the church per se, the focus is transformation of creation, which is the.. you know the coming of the kingdom which will fully come. You know... I dunno if you know Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs' book, but it's interesting `cos... I can hear that I'm describing to you some of their themes, which I've not particularly thought about on relation to [*the Church*]. But you know... they talk about dualism, as one of the themes, they talk about more of a focus on Jesus, they talk about the kingdom of God as a kind of... come to the for in terms of theology. And I think those themes are probably resonant with us. I dunno, I can't remember the rest of their book. Oh... I mean, yeah..other things as well. They have shifting participation in leadership, I think, in leadership. So yeah, there's probably some stuff there.

*Hmm,. OK. Well that's really helpful just for me to understand what you mean by that. I think I wanna skip a question, and skip right to the last question, which is, erm... what theological motifs, erm... what parts of the Bible do you think sum up quite well the beliefs, the aims of [*the Church*]?*

Whooo.... Erm.. I mean I think the Incarnation, you know, the word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood... very much would be a motif in terms of... that being related to the cultural world (I dunno if people call it postmodern), postmodern life in London. Erm.. so yeah, that incarnational stuff definitely, and that stuff around theology and culture. I think probably the beatitudes would probably be something that would be in there somewhere. Hospitality, I think, has become more and more a theme that we've talked about. Erm... erm... and then, I don't think it's a passage we've used as such, but there's something about... yeah, where would it be? Maybe... maybe it's the sort of kingdom values stuff that we very much see the whole... the whole community as involved and participating in, subverting too much of the hierarchical structure, and for that's about the values of the kingdom rather than the world, somehow. I don't know how... what texts that would relate to. Erm...

And the... you know, I think, on the healing of creation stuff, maybe the new heavens, new earth stuff, or perhaps Romans 8, all creation's longing for healing. Erm... that sort of a text would probably be pretty formative. You might get a different answer... it'd be interesting to interview everybody, you probably get totally different answers. But I think those would be some of the ones for me.

And then we've been exploring Jesus meals... so again there's that table fellowship which is probably another, erm... yeah that's probably another set of passages that we've re-visited a number of times, particularly in relation to who's in and who's out, and subverting that, I think. Or... or... making an argument, whether around the communion table, or whether... that Christ invites people round it rather than builds up fences to exclude. Yeah, so I think those would be some of them.

That's really helpful. I'm going to switch the tape off.

[Tape ends]

Appendix E

Structured Interview Questions

Interview 1

1. What, in your opinion, is/are the primary calling/s of the church?

2. How do you define postmodern culture in England?

3. What is your aim in engaging with local postmodern culture?

4. Are there any theological motifs or parts of the Bible that you find particularly useful in explaining your beliefs and aims:
   a. to those of postmodern culture?
   b. to those in churches who are more resistant than you in engaging with postmodern culture?

5. Do you think postmodernism has changed your understanding of Christian faith? Please explain your answer.

6. As leader of this church/group, what is your:
   a. greatest hope?
   b. most constant frustration
   c. greatest fear?

7. Do you have a particular story from this setting that sums up well what you are trying to achieve?

8. Are there any particular authors who have influenced how you view Church and its mission? Who, and in what ways?

Interview 2

1. Please describe what happens at your gatherings. Also,
   a. when and where do they take place?
   b. (how) do you practice Holy Communion?
   c. what are the most common themes running through the teaching and preaching?

2. What is the approach to, and system of, Christian initiation and membership within this church/group? Are there any changes being discussed around this issue?

3. What kinds of qualities and lifestyle are people encouraged to embody? Why those qualities?

4. In what ways are people encouraged to engage with postmodern culture outside of the church/group gatherings?

5. What are the most pressing concerns of postmodern culture with which this church/group engages?

6. In your activities and gatherings together, what would you say
   a. works well? Why?
   b. does not work well? Why?

7. What theological motifs or parts of the Bible do you think sum up well the beliefs and aims of this church/group?

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