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Neve, M. J. (2021). *In Pursuit of Proximity: A missiological study of four 'emerging church' communities in Sweden*.

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In Pursuit of Proximity

A missiological study of four
'emerging church' communities in Sweden

Mattias J. Neve

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

**IN PURSUIT OF PROXIMITY: A MISSIOLOGICAL STUDY OF FOUR
'EMERGING CHURCH' COMMUNITIES IN SWEDEN**

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor of Philosophy aan
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. V. Subramaniam,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de Faculteit Religie en Theologie
op donderdag 11 maart 2021 om 11.45 uur
in de online bijeenkomst van de universiteit,
De Boelelaan 1105

door

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This dissertation research was completed in co-operation with the International Baptist Theological Study Centre Amsterdam, a collaborative partner of the Faculty of Religion and Theology of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

“Map of Model of Contextual Theology”.
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“Dimensions of religiosity in Sweden” [Den svenska religionstrappan].
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*To Aurelie, Elise, Ethan, and Josiah.
May you experience the fullness of God's grace,
and always know that you belong to Him who has
created you wonderfully in His image.*

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross what ... I have called a "divide." Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself - its worldview; basic value; its social and political structures; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born ... We are currently living through such a transformation.

- Peter Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (1993)

Abstract

The dissertation is a theological inquiry within the discipline of contextual missiology. The research is motivated by a desire to address the institutional and numerical decline of the church in Sweden in light of a changing cultural and religious landscape, contributing to the ongoing theological and missiological discourse about the future of the Christian church in Swedish society. The “Emerging Church” is an international grassroots phenomenon within evangelical Protestantism calling the church in the West to embrace innovation and experimentation in light of these challenges, by adopting new ecclesial forms, practices, and theological frameworks. The dissertation explores this phenomenon in Sweden and inquires in what ways these communities may contribute to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society.

The dissertation is divided into three parts. Part A examines the background and characteristics of the wider Emerging Church conversation by examining the developments in three contexts: the United Kingdom, Australia, and the USA. Part B examines examples of emerging churches found in Sweden. Four Christian communities are studied by employing a multiphase mixed method strategy. Part C discusses the shared ecclesiological and missiological themes of these communities. Three missiological themes emerge in the discussion: Mission as a witnessing presence, Mission as innovation, and Mission as the pursuit of cultural proximity. Stephen B. Bevans’ *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002) serve as a primary analytical framework for the discussion of the contextual practices of the four groups.

The case study material establishes that the four communities adopt a particular kind of ecclesiological hermeneutic, informed by a specific set of convictions: Relational ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion, and Innovation and experimentation. These convictions significantly inform the missionary postures of these communities. The research also establishes that the contextual approaches of emerging churches are shaped by a specific hermeneutical process, involving aspects of critical auditing of Christian tradition, exegesis of culture, sampling of elements of Christian tradition and culture, and the remixing of these elements. The dissertation argues that a creative synthesis can be developed when combining the emerging and more traditional evangelical contextualisation models. The model presented, referred to as an “emerging critical approach to contextualisation”, combines Paul G. Hiebert’s Critical contextualisation model with the approach of emerging churches. The research concludes that emerging churches can assist traditional churches in Sweden to reimagine their identity and reconfigure their organisational priorities in order to better align with their calling to be a missionary people in this world, by serving as incubators for innovation and experimentation as well as to critically address inherited ecclesiological, missiological, and theological frameworks.

Samenvatting

Het proefschrift is een theologisch onderzoek binnen de discipline contextuele missiologie. Het onderzoek is ingegeven door de wens om de institutionele en numerieke achteruitgang van de kerk in Zweden aan te pakken in het licht van een veranderend cultureel en religieus landschap en levert een bijdrage aan het lopende theologische en missiologische debat over de toekomst van de christelijke kerk in de Zweedse samenleving. De “emerging church” is een internationaal grassroots-fenomeen binnen het evangelicale protestantisme en roept de kerk in het Westen op om innovatie en experimenten te omarmen in het licht van deze uitdagingen door nieuwe kerkelijke vormen, praktijken en theologische kaders aan te nemen. Het proefschrift onderzoekt dit fenomeen in Zweden en onderzoekt op welke manieren deze gemeenschappen kunnen bijdragen aan het vormgeven van de interculturele roeping, actie en reflectie van de kerk in de hedendaagse Zweedse samenleving.

Het proefschrift is opgedeeld in drie delen. Deel A onderzoekt de achtergrond en kenmerken van de bredere emerging church conversatie door de ontwikkelingen in drie contexten te onderzoeken: het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Australië en de VS. Deel B onderzoekt voorbeelden van emerging church in Zweden. Vier christelijke gemeenschappen worden bestudeerd door een meerfasige gemengde methodestrategie toe te passen. Deel C bespreekt de gedeelde ecclesiologische en missiologische thema's van deze gemeenschappen. Drie missiologische thema's komen naar voren in de discussie: Missie als getuigende aanwezigheid, Missie als innovatie en Missie als streven naar culturele nabijheid. Stephen B. Bevans' *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002) dient als een primair analytisch kader voor de bespreking van de contextuele praktijken van de vier groepen.

Het materiaal uit de case study stelt vast dat de vier gemeenschappen een bepaald soort ecclesiologische hermeneutiek aannemen, gebaseerd op een specifieke reeks overtuigingen: Relationele ecclesiologie, Openheid en inclusie, en Innoveren en experimenteren. Deze overtuigingen liggen ten grondslag aan de missionaire houdingen van deze gemeenschappen. Het onderzoek stelt ook vast dat de contextuele benaderingen van opkomende kerken worden gevormd door een specifiek hermeneutisch proces, waarbij aspecten van kritische evaluatie van de christelijke traditie, exegese van cultuur, het overnemen van elementen van de christelijke traditie en cultuur en het opnieuw mengen van deze elementen betrokken zijn. Het proefschrift stelt dat een creatieve synthese kan worden ontwikkeld door de emerging en meer traditionele evangelicale contextualisatiemodellen te combineren. Het gepresenteerde model, aangeduid als een “emerging kritische benadering van contextualisering”, combineert het kritische contextualisatiemodel van Paul G. Hiebert met de benadering van de emerging churches. Het onderzoek concludeert dat emerging churches traditionele kerken in Zweden kunnen helpen hun identiteit opnieuw uit te vinden en hun organisatorische prioriteiten opnieuw te configureren om beter af te stemmen op hun roeping om een missionair volk in deze wereld te zijn, door te dienen als broedplaatsen voor innovatie en experimenten, en om kritisch in te gaan op geërfde ecclesiologische, missiologische en theologische kaders.

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Foreword

In 2002, after four years of theological studies and ministerial training, I started in my first position as a youth pastor in a Baptist Church. The church, by Swedish standards, was a middle-sized fellowship and located in a town just outside of Stockholm and had a fairly large, although traditional, youth ministry. My role as the youth pastor was to pioneer and develop new ways of working with the young people. I soon understood that the church had had a vibrant and moderately sized youth ministry for quite some time, at least as far back as the 1970's. What struck me was that, with the exception of a handful of teenagers, and a majority of people 40 years of age and older; that there were few members part of the church aged 20-35. This puzzled me as one would assume that having had such a long history of youth work one could imagine that would produce some sort of visible fruit in the church, at least more than what I observed. I was aware that people left the town to study elsewhere at universities and other institutions of higher education, but there were still a significant number of people within that age group living in the area who had participated in the church youth groups. Although this would explain some of the questions I had, it did not explain the whole picture.

My observation raised a number of questions for the ministry I was involved in, and I started to look into the issues of youth culture, youth ministry, church growth and the cultural shifts that were occurring in society. I was aware that there were churches that did not share the experience I had, but as a whole – at least in the tradition I was ministering in at the time – what I observed did not appear to be an exception.

In 2005 I came across an article on the internet that caught my attention regarding an international phenomenon called “The Emerging Church” concerned with how churches may be able to reach people who live in an increasingly postmodern culture.¹ I gathered from the article, that this phenomenon seemed to engage with similar kinds of questions I was interested in and I decided to investigate this further, motivated by a desire to find inspiration for my own ministry among the youth and young adults. This subsequently led me to contact the International Baptist Theological Seminary, at that time located in Prague, to enrol in their PhD programme.

The observations I had in my role as youth pastor, and my inquiry into the Emerging Church phenomenon shaped and set the future direction of my ministry in the church in significant ways. I have subsequently served as a church planter, a pastor, and a teacher (Bible Schools and seminaries). I have also worked in various denominational roles training church planters and church coaches, as well as participating in various national Christian and Evangelical networks in Sweden. All this experience has made me even more convinced that the issues and concerns that

¹ Fredrik Hellström, “Att vara kyrka i ett postmodernt samhälle.” Crossnet, (30 June 2005): accessed 30 June, 2005, <https://www.crossnet.se/content.php?id=483>.

have been raised within the Emerging Church conversation are of relevance as much today, as they were 20 years ago. Society is shifting and church statistics reveal that we, as churches in Sweden, are struggling to respond to these changes in positive and fruitful ways. The church needs, more than ever, pioneers to break new ground and find new paths for the church to explore. The question for this study is in what ways the Emerging Church conversation may contribute to that, and what we may learn from local emerging churches in Sweden that are experimenting with new ways of being Christian community and how they reach their contexts with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It is my humble hope that you as the reader will be just as inspired as I have been when engaging with the stories of the four groups that are part of this study.

Completing this project has been a long and at times arduous journey, and I am indebted to many people who in various capacities and at different times have helped me over the years: My supervisors Prof. Stefan Paas, Dr. Parush Parushev, and Dr. Andrew Kirk, who tirelessly and with enormous patience have supported me, helped to clarify my thinking, and guided me through this process. It has been an honour and a real privilege to have you as part of this journey, and I have greatly appreciated our many meetings and conversations over the years. The faculty and my research colleagues at IBTSC, for your invaluable feedback during the many research colloquia, first in Prague and later in Amsterdam. *Stiftelsen Stockholms Kristliga Ynglingaförenings Stipendiefond* for their generous grants at the beginning of the research project. The four Christian communities which are part of this study - H2O, Tribe, Oikos, and Underground Church - who welcomed me and for a time allowed me to be part of their journeys. Your stories and experiences have deeply inspired me. To my family and friends, and specifically Theresia Olsson Neve and Fredrik Svårdsten for their input into research methodology and their many helpful comments and conversations about doctoral research in general. My mother-in-law, Simone Burrows, for taking the time proofreading the text, correcting and improving my English. My mother and father, Ing-Marie and Jesper, for their generous support and encouragement over the years. And my wife Steph, who has carried the weight of this project more than anyone else. To all of you, from the bottom of my heart and with deep gratitude: Thank you.

Chapter 1. Introduction: The river is not where it used to be

Yesterday's maps are already outdated, and today's soon will be, too. The uncharted world ahead of us is what we will call "the new world on the other side": the other side of two world wars and one cold war, the other side of communism, the other side of theological liberalism, the other side of the second millennium, the other side of modernism. There used to be an Old World, then a New World, then the Third World, but now all three are swept up in a new new world.

- Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on The Other Side* (2003)

In November 1998 a devastating catastrophe struck Honduras. During a few days the country experienced one of the deadliest and most powerful hurricanes ever recorded in the Atlantic basin. Hurricane Mitch, which dropped historic amounts of rainfall in the country, not only caused several billion dollars in material damage in the region, but thousands of people lost their lives or went missing.

Just days after the hurricane, photographer Vince Muci flew over the area taking pictures of the damages caused by the natural catastrophe. One of the pictures taken portrays the New Choluteca Bridge, at the time the most modern bridge in the country. The picture shows the bridge still standing, fairly unharmed by the wind and massive rainfall, but the landscape surrounding it had been brutally reshaped, not only wiping out the road leading to and from the bridge, but also altering the course of the river itself. Where the river had once been now was dry land and instead it ran a few hundred meters from its original path, just next to the bridge. In *USA Today* it could be read: "The graceful arches of the New Choluteca Bridge stand abandoned, a white concrete sculpture far from shore, linking nothing to nowhere."²

The picture gives a dramatic account of the devastation caused by the hurricane. It may also serve as a powerful metaphor for the cultural changes that have occurred in the Western world over a relatively brief time period. Some argue that we live in a paradigm shift that has reshaped our world-views, values, sense of self and identity, how we relate to each other, communicate, view science, truth, religion, spirituality, nature, and society. The effects of these shifts on the Church and the role of the Christian faith in society have been profound. Western culture (The River), as it where, has dramatically altered its course, and the Church in the West (The Bridge) stands abandoned with a sense of disorientation, loss of purpose, and at times, bereavement.

How do Christians and churches in the West respond to these changes? What do we do with this "bridge" that would appear to have lost its purpose and identity, and

² Muello, Peter, "Bridge Damage Hampers Mitch Relief." *AP News*, 16 November 1998, <https://apnews.com/75cbf7e4ea38d19a6e9ff03aa321dbb8>. This metaphor was told to me by Brian D. McLaren during one of his talks at an event in Immanuel Church in Stockholm, 2006.

what do we do about the river? Do we attempt to undo the changes and force the river back to its original path, or do we build a new bridge? Or perhaps we do not need the bridge anymore, and do well in finding alternative means of crossing the waters? I use this metaphor as an introduction to illustrate the discourse within which this dissertation locates itself; the intersection of Church, Gospel and Culture, and how the church in the West, and Sweden in particular, can respond to the missiological challenges that this liminal time of change and transition presents.

1.1 A note on the term “Emerging Church”

The term “emerging church” began to be used in the mid to late 1990’s and quickly became popularised after the turn of the millennium as the conversation spread internationally through online communities and blogs on the internet, conferences, and an increasing number of books published on the subject.³ Although the term itself always has had its share of critics, it quickly became the catch phrase used to explain a phenomenon that had been emerging in the margins of the evangelical Protestant church culture in the Western and English speaking world during the late 1980’s and 1990’s, addressing shifts in culture, ministry to the so called Generation X⁴, and a growing awareness of the challenges posed to the church from post-modern epistemology. Ian Mobsby notes that the phrase was used by Robert Warren in the mid-1990’s,

In his writings, Warren challenges the “emerging church” to explore “being healthy and contextual church”, balancing “worship, mission and community”. He further challenges the church to explore living out this healthy expression of Christian spirituality in the mission field of our current “cultural shifts” into “postmodernity”.⁵

Andrew Jones writes on his influential and widely read blog *TallKinnyKiwi* that “emerging church” was “the replacement term for what we used to call ‘Youth Church’ in the 80’s, ‘GenX Church’ in the early 90’s, and ‘Postmodern Church’ in the late 90’s.”⁶ This is echoed by Dan Kimball, founding pastor of Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, CA. He first heard the term around 1997 when the Leadership Network in the United States used it as their tagline – “advanced scouts for the emerging church”. He also notes a similar transition as Jones:

³ The phrase appears in the title of Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne’s book *The Emerging Church*. (London: Word Books, 1970). The book addresses the role of the church at the end of the twentieth century, and interestingly engages with a number of topics of concern typical for the Emerging Church conversation. Strangely, there is no evidence that the book has played any significant role in the shaping of the Emerging Church conversation today, besides a few references in a limited number of publications. It is possible that their work has inspired those who first coined the phrase in the 1990’s, but no evidence seems to support this.

⁴ Generation X (or Gen X) is a sociological term referring to the age group born roughly between 1965 and 1983.

⁵ Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How are they Authentically Church and Anglican?* (Westminster: Moot Community Publishing, 2007), 21.

⁶ Andrew Jones, “EmergAnt:1 Emergent Vocabulary.” TallSkinnyKiwi, (17 March 2005): accessed 14 November, 2007, http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/03/emergant_1_an_e.html.

When we realized that the "Gen X" thing was not just an age-group but a cultural change, it shifted to "postmodern" which soon became totally misunderstood and equated with a "style" of music or ministry or worship service rather than a philosophical response to modernism - and most of us were not philosophers and realized we were over our heads trying to even explain it. So the word "emerging church" seemed safer and more non-age specific and began being used more and more, not only for churches and ministries focused on younger generations, but for churches focusing on the fact the culture was really changing and shifting. So the term moved past a generational focus to more of a cultural focus.⁷

For almost a decade, until approximately 2009, the term became a household name within the theological discourse around the church's identity, place and future within the rapidly changing cultures of the Western world. Other terminologies are sometimes used as synonyms to the label "emerging church", such as fresh expressions, emerging missional communities, missional church, missional communities, emergent church, simple church, emerging missional church, and organic church. These are all to some extent related to the Emerging Church phenomenon, and in some contexts more or less used interchangeably. Robert Doornenbal writes that these concepts, specifically missional church and emerging church, "can be said to converge in terms of (theological) vision - although the exact terms that are used may differ and some particularities or nuances remain."⁸

Although "emerging church" as a term is less prevalent today compared to recent years, I have chosen to use the term in this thesis for the following reasons: no single terminology has come to completely replace it, and it was the most common label to describe the phenomenon during the most active and prolific period between the late 1990's to the end of the following decade. In this study the terms 'Emerging Church', the 'Emerging Church conversation', the 'Emerging Church discourse', the 'Emerging Church phenomenon', as well 'emerging Christianity' are used interchangeably. For abbreviation, the 'ECC' is used (as in the 'Emerging Church conversation').⁹ Participants in the Emerging Church conversation and members of emerging church congregations and communities are at times referred to as 'emerging Christians'. Communities that associate with the term or express the ethos of emerging Christianity are referred to as 'emerging churches', 'emerging congregations', or 'local expressions of emerging church'.

⁷ Dan Kimball, "Origin of the terms "Emerging" and "Emergent" church - Part 1." Vintage Faith, (20 April 2006): accessed 26 October, 2007, http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origin_of_the_t.html.

⁸ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads - An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and Its Challenges for Theological Education* (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2012), 7.

⁹ In general discourse concerning the Emerging Church, the term *movement* is sometimes used (as in the 'Emerging Church Movement', often abbreviated 'ECM'). In this thesis, however, I argue that the Emerging Church best is understood as a *conversation* that express characteristics of a new social movement (For details, see discussion in Chapter 4). This is why I chose to add the qualifiers 'conversation', 'phenomenon' and 'discourse' throughout the text, rather than 'movement'.

1.2 Sweden as religious landscape and mission context

During the last 60 years Sweden has experienced a number of significant changes in society, such as a transitioning from a Social Democratic welfare state to deregulated market liberalism as well as shifting from a homogenous Lutheran culture to multiculturalism. For example, in 1960 the number of people born outside of Sweden was 300,000, but by the turn of the millennium this number had increased to 1,000,000 people¹⁰. In the 1950's Sweden was one of the least urbanised countries in Western Europe with the majority of the population living in rural areas; today recent surveys show that Sweden since 2005 has had the fastest urban growth rate within the European Union.¹¹ Half of the population in Sweden is concentrated within the three urban regions of Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö - a population that is relatively young, fluid, and multicultural, but also segregated. Sweden has also seen significant changes in religious beliefs and practices during the latter part of the 20th century, which will be addressed in more detail in this chapter.

There are several analytical frameworks we could consider when discussing the cultural shift in Swedish society. We could consider the Emerging Church movement from the perspective of urbanisation, segregation, multiculturalism, gender and equality, generational issues, etc. These would all serve as interesting conversation partners in their own right. What I am interested in doing here, however, is to present some of the broader brushstrokes of the changing religious landscape in Sweden as start to my discussion around the ECC and its missiological relevance in this particular context. For this purpose, I will focus on four concepts: secularisation, post-Christendom, the emergence of a post-Christian society, and post-modernity as socio-cultural phenomenon. Although each term carries its own set of methodological and conceptual issues, they each serve as useful heuristic lenses highlighting different aspects of religiosity and religious change in Sweden.

1.2.1 Religiosity in Sweden

Statistical data concerning organised religion reveal that Sweden has experienced significant religious change in recent decades. From an international perspective Sweden still has a high number of people being members of the Church of Sweden (59% of the population),¹² but surveys indicate that the former Lutheran state church as well as the free churches have experienced decline both in terms of membership and in participation in religious practices. For the Church of Sweden, the number of people participating in a weekly church service decreased by 35,6% between 1990 and 2013. Similar trends apply to the number of baptism (a total of 88,568 in 1970 compared to 55,039 in 2013); the number of people participating in confirmation

¹⁰ Oskar Nordström Skans, and Olof Åslund, *Segregation i storstäderna - SNS Valfördragsrapport 2009* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2009), 7.

¹¹ "Sverige urbaniseras snabbast." *Svenska Dagbladet*, 8 April 2012,

¹² According to statistics provided by The Church of Sweden, see Erika Willander, *Sveriges religiösa landskap - samhörighet, tillhörighet och mångfald under 2000-talet, SST:s Skriftserie Nr. 8* (Bromma: Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund (SST), 2019), 19.

classed (80,820 in 1970 compared to 28,833 in 2013); as well as church weddings (35,543 in 1970 compared to 17,249 in 2013).¹³ Lennart Weibull and Jon Strid write, “the general pattern is therefore that the participation in meetings and services are upheld by the older generations, while at the same time there is very little addition by younger generation.”¹⁴ The prognosis, the authors conclude, is that the pattern will continue when additional surveys will be done in the future.

In their survey, Weibull and Strid looked at a number of factors when mapping religious beliefs and practices in Sweden, providing them with a method to assess variations in the degree of religious life in Sweden (See figure 1). They write:

We can observe that there are considerable differences depending on how we define religiosity. The widest [definition] is membership in some form of religious organisation, where three quarters of the Swedish population are included, mainly because the high number of members in the Church of Sweden. The most narrow [definition] is participation in church meetings and services. In-between we find belief in God, prayer to God and the experience that religion is an important part of life.¹⁵

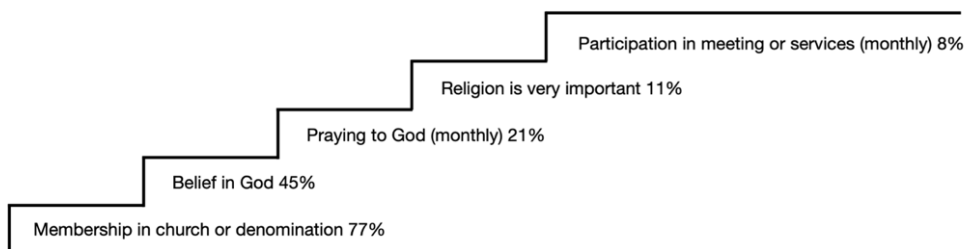


Figure 1. Dimensions of religiosity in Sweden¹⁶

Weibull and Strid highlight that the individual numbers are not the focal point in this figure (for instance, more recent surveys indicate that the overall membership in a church or denomination is less than is stated here), but the general pattern that can be established when presenting the statistics in this way. For instance, we can observe that the number of people who can be regarded as very religious (i.e. who regards religion as very important to their lives, and who frequently participate in meetings and church services) are significantly lower than the number of church members. Similar surveys echo this observation. Hamberg, for instance, writes that “more than 80 percent of those who did not regard themselves as Christian or did not believe in the existence of God or a transcendent power were members of the Church of Sweden.”¹⁷ There are of course a number of possible explanations for why this is the case. In his comprehensive book *Det gudlösa folket* [The godless people] (2015), David

¹³ Jonas Bromander, *Svenska kyrkans medlemmar* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2011)

¹⁴ Lennart Weibull, and Jan Strid, “Fyra perspektiv på religion i Sverige,” in *Lycksalighetens ö*, ed. Lennart Weibull, and Henrik Oscarsson (Gothenburg: SOM-institutet, 2011), 337. *My translation*.

¹⁵ Lennart Weibull, and Jan Strid, “Fyra perspektiv,” 344. *My translation*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 344. *My translation*.

¹⁷ Eva M. Hamberg, “Christendom in Decline - The Swedish case,” in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod, and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50.

Thurfjell writes that “the loyalty towards their state church among the Nordic peoples, ought to be understood as an expression for national identity.”¹⁸ Both Hamberg and Thurfjell argue that the devise “believing but not belonging”, sometimes used to describe modern spirituality in contemporary society, does not necessarily apply to the Swedish context. Rather, “many Swedes might be described as ‘belongers but not believers’, with the important qualification that ‘belongers’ rarely engage in religious activities.”¹⁹ Hamberg also notes that

available evidence indicates that a large share of those who still believe in God do so with a low degree of personal commitment. ... Thus, for many of those Swedes who still believe in God, this belief is more or less unimportant. Moreover, conceptions of divinity seem to be changing, the traditional Christian faith in a personal God being superseded by a more unspecified belief in a transcendent power.²⁰

The Sweden Survey

Sverigeundersökningen [The Sweden Survey] is a survey conducted by Øyvind Tholvsen in collaboration with the Network for Church Development (NCD) and the Church Planting Network in Sweden.²¹ The survey measures change in church statistics for every five year period starting in 2000, and includes data from free church traditions as well as Lutheran denominations that share a similar understanding of membership. From the survey we can deduce that:

- 21,4% of the churches that existed in 2000 had closed down by 2015 (on average one church per week).
- 304 new churches had been planted, predominately by non-denominational or migrant churches.
- Although the latest survey indicated that the decline in membership started to subside between 2010 and 2015, during the whole time period the number of church members had decreased with 7,5%.
- 13,6% of the churches were growing numerically, whilst 41,6% saw a decline in membership and 44,8% of the churches saw no significant change in membership figures during the last five years.
- The survey also established that the church in Sweden was becoming increasingly urban and multicultural.

We can conclude from this brief account that Christianity as a whole in Sweden is experiencing considerable shifts that not only effect the churches from a structural

¹⁸ David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket - De postkristna svenskarna och religionen* (Stockholm: Molin och Sorgenfrei Förlag, 2015), 21. *My translation.*

¹⁹ Eva M. Hamberg, “Christendom,” 50-51.; C.f. Eva M. Hamberg, “Analysing religious decline: A sociological approach,” in *The Decline of Established Christianity in the Western World: Interpretations and Responses*, ed. Paul Silas Peterson (London: Routledge, 2017).; and David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket*, 22, 28.

²⁰ Eva M. Hamberg, “Christendom,” 48.

²¹ Øyvind Tholvsen, *Frikyrkokartan ritas om En rapport om frikyrkornas utveckling i Sverige 2000-2015* (Örebro: Evangeliska Frikyrkan, 2016)

and organisational perspective, but also in terms of peoples' belief systems and spirituality. One prominent explanation for this is that Sweden, together with other parts of Europe, is experiencing a significant process of secularisation, where religion as phenomena is becoming marginalised on multiple levels in society.

1.2.2 Secularisation and religious change in Sweden

Secularisation is a socio-scientific term that seek to define and explain the decline or marginalisation of religion in society. The theory of secularisation states, in brief, that the modernisation of a society inevitably leads to religious decline and, ultimately, the death of religion altogether. Hugh McLeod writes:

it is a theory which, broadly speaking, defines the decline in the social significance of religion as a long-term and inevitable historical process, with short-term accelerants (such as the Reformation, the Enlightenment, industrialisation and urbanisation) and also short-term retardants (generally referred to as 'revivals').²²

The theory of secularisation and the predicted "death of religion" in modern society has been one of the most influential socio-scientific interpretive frameworks for most of the twentieth century. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart write:

indeed it has been regarded as the master model of sociological inquiry, where secularization was ranked with bureaucratization, rationalization, and urbanization as the key historical revolutions transforming medieval agrarian societies into modern industrial nations.²³

In recent years this approach has attracted significant critique, one of the chief arguments being that the world is as religious as it ever was and what we are observing in modern society is not so much religious decline, but in religious *change*.²⁴ Also, the resurgence of religion in public life and discourse in many Western contexts, stimulated for example by immigration and an increasingly multicultural reality, has popularised the term *post-secularism*. Justin Beaumont and Christopher Baker write:

The public resurgence of religion is clearly one of the defining features of this century ... which has not continued the modernist and secularized trajectory during the latter half of the twentieth century. Globalized societies on all continents find themselves caught in a series of contradictory dynamics, including simultaneous and dialectical processes of secularization alongside the growing deprivatization of faith and its re-emergence as a shaper of cultural, political, economic processes ... This globalized dynamic has led in recent times to the idea of the postsecular city.²⁵

Whilst some scholars argue that it is time to abandon the secularisation thesis

²² Hugh McLeod, "Introduction," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Kindle LOC 590-597.

²³ Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide, 2nd edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

²⁴ C.f. David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket.*; Eva M. Hamberg, "Analysing.;" and Lennart Weibull, and Jan Strid, "Fyra perspektiv."

²⁵ Justin Beaumont, and Christopher Baker, *Postsecular Cities: Religious Space, Theory and Practice* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 5.

altogether²⁶, others maintain that the concept is still valid, albeit in need of revision. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart write:

There is no question that the traditional secularization thesis needs updating. It is obvious that religion has not disappeared from the world, nor does it seem likely to do so. Nevertheless, the concept of secularization captures an important part of what is going on.²⁷

"Secularization", they continue, "is a tendency, not an iron law"²⁸ Here we need to bear in mind that secularisation is far from a univocal concept. Stefan Paas writes, "It is rather a collection of theories, operating on different levels of analysis, and using different definitions of 'secularization' on each level."²⁹ Paas presents five categories that are used in contemporary discussion on secularisation:

1. Differentiation (e.g. the separation of church and state)
2. Rationalisation (i.e. the realm of the "secular" expands and institutions develop their own rational ideologies separate from religions norms, and the church becomes one institution alongside others in society specialised in religion)
3. Privatisation (i.e. religion shifts to the "private" realm of subjective spirituality and family life)
4. Pluralisation (i.e. other religions and spiritualities emerge on the religious "market" in society)
5. Individual loss of faith (i.e. people turn away from God, and stop attending church).³⁰

Secularisation as defined in types 1, 2 and 4 are relatively straightforward concepts regarding the Swedish context. Types 3 and 5, on the other hand, are less decisive. For example, although religious beliefs have been consigned to the private sphere in Swedish society (Type 3), it does not automatically imply that those who hold such beliefs understand their religious convictions as a private matter. In fact, Paas writes, "recent research suggests that while declining in numbers, the remaining Christians in Western countries emphasize the public relevance of their faith even more."³¹

Regarding the subject of individual loss of faith (Type 5), some researchers argue that what we are observing in Sweden today is less a loss of religious beliefs per se,

²⁶ See, for example, Peter L. Berger, ed. *The Desecularization of the World* (Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999).; and Rodney Stark, and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) .

²⁷ Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred*, 4. C.f. Hugh McLeod, "Introduction," Kindle Locations 657-658.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁹ Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences," *Mission Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011), 5.

³⁰ Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian," 5-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

but a change in peoples' religious beliefs.³² In her study from 2019, *Sveriges religiösa landskap* [The religious landscape in Sweden] (2019) Erika Willander summarises the research concerning religious beliefs in Sweden in recent decades. Studies reveal that almost 50% of the Swedish population believe in some form of divine or spiritual force (a figure that has remained relatively stable since 1980). At the same time the data show that the number who believe in a personal God is decreasing (from 20% in 1980 to 15% in 2010). Those who say they do not believe at all are the same at 20%, and the remaining numbers hold an agnostic approach to religious beliefs.³³ Willander concludes:

The part of the population that take part in religious services or meetings make up a minority of the population (approximately 5%). The part that holds to beliefs that can be considered religious, but that can also be defined in other ways, varies depending on how we ask the question. A stable and relatively large part of the population seems to believe in 'something'.³⁴

From an international perspective, religious beliefs, practices and affiliation could be said to play a marginal part in Swedish society. A recent study (2019) reveals that alongside the Netherlands and Norway, Sweden has the highest number of people - almost 40% of the population - that say that they do not belong to any religion. The same study also shows that almost half of the Swedish population believe that science make religion redundant. Studies also show that Swedes tend to express a more negative view of religion compared to citizens in other countries, as religion is believed to contribute to intolerance.³⁵ Religious beliefs in Sweden may be changing, as studies indicate, but it does not seem to invalidate the argument that Sweden is a predominantly secular context.

Given the broad and complex nature of the subject, it is beyond the scope of this study to address the theory of secularisation in any greater detail. Secularisation in Sweden has not led to (nor does it seem to lead to) the death of religion altogether. Here I agree with Hugh McLeod's conclusion, that "the theory of secularisation may be a myth, but secularisation is not."³⁶ Looking at the statistical data and research available to us we can conclude at least two things; first, that Sweden is a largely secular context where religious beliefs and practices are a marginal phenomenon, and second, that religious beliefs among Swedes - where they exist and are expressed - have changed during the latter part of the twentieth century. Traditional Christian confession has declined in favour of non-traditional beliefs and worldviews associated with, for example, the New Age and Eastern spiritualities.³⁷ Therefore we need a dynamic understanding of religion in Swedish society that take into account both theories

³² C.f. David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket.*; Eva M. Hamberg, "Analysing.;" and Lennart Weibull, and Jan Strid, "Fyra perspektiv."

³³ Erika Willander, *Sveriges religiösa landskap*, 18.

³⁴ Erika Willander, *Sveriges religiösa landskap*, 19. My translation.

³⁵ Lennart Weibull, "Synen på trosuppfattningar i Sverige," in *Storm och stiltje*, ed. Ulrika Andersson, et al. (Gothenburg: SOM-institutet, 2019), 433.

³⁶ Hugh McLeod, "Introduction," Kindle Locations 657-658.

³⁷ Eva M. Hamberg, "Christendom," 49.; c.f. David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket*.

concerning increased secularisation and religious change. Norris and Inglehart write:

Rather than an inevitable and steady loss of spiritual faith or purpose as societies modernize, critics argue that more complex historical and cross-country patterns are evident, where religion rises and falls in popularity at different periods in different societies, fuelled by specific factors, such as the charisma of particular spiritual leaders, the impact of contingent events, or the mobilization of faith-based movements. ... Hence Andrew Greeley argues that diverse patterns of religiosity exist today, even among affluent European nations, rather than observing any consistent and steady conversion towards atheism or agnosticism, or any loss of faith in God.³⁸

Whilst large parts of Swedish society can be described as secular, other parts - primarily urban multicultural areas - can justifiably be described as post-secular. Beaumont and Baker write that "successive waves of global immigration from the South" bring "new religious dynamics and energies ... to the public and political life of the Western 'secular' city".³⁹ Willander shares their observation,

On the one hand it does appear as if religion becomes less relevant in society. Many people know someone who has left the Church of Sweden. Or they have been told by older generations what it was like in the past, when Christianity was an obligatory subject in school. From this perspective it seems as if the process of secularisation continues. On the other hand, migration to Sweden increased in recent decades. Today almost 20 percent of those who live in Sweden are born overseas. There are therefore more religions in Sweden today, and more and groups are established. Also, these groups are growing numerically.⁴⁰

From this brief account we can surmise that Sweden is a multifaceted context where theories regarding secularisation and both contribute to our understanding. Although Sweden principally is a secularised society, religion is becoming more visible in the media and in public debate, and there are urban multicultural areas that can be described as post-secular. Where religious beliefs have remained, those beliefs are for the most part changing.

1.2.3 Sweden as Post-Christendom society

In recent decades 'post-Christendom' has become a popular and frequently used term in theological as well as sociological discourse when discussing religious change in Western society. The term, Ian M. Randall notes, was first used by Paul Peachey in 1965, who suggested that "it was the correct way to describe the passing of a particular form of Christianity."⁴¹ In brief, Christendom refers to a three things: a geographical area dominated by the Christian church, approximately the size of modern Europe; a socio-political reality, in which "there were close ties between the leaders of the church and those in position of secular power"⁴²; as well as a mind set

³⁸ Pippa Norris, and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred*, 10.

³⁹ Justin Beaumont, and Christopher Baker, *Postsecular*, 33.

⁴⁰ Erika Willander, *Sveriges religiösa landskap*, 8. My translation. C.f. Mattias Martinson, *Katedralen mitt i staden - Om ateism och teologi* (Uppsala: Arcus förlag, 2010), 13 n. 7.

⁴¹ Ian M. Randall, "Mission in post-Christendom: Anabaptist and Free Church perspectives," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2007), 228. C.f. Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 107.

⁴² Hugh McLeod, "Introduction," Kindle Location 57.

that has dominated the church in Europe for almost 1600 years.⁴³ Hugh McLeod writes,

Christendom meant that the church was subjected to state interference, that it was to admit into membership those who were not true Christians, and that it was under pressure to condone contemporary customs and values which were unchristian.⁴⁴

Since the mid-1700's this church-state relationship and the dominance of the church in Europe have gradually eroded, resulting in what scholars refer to as the emergence of a post-Christendom culture. This collapse, Stuart Murray notes, involved institutional as well as philosophical changes.⁴⁵ McLeod writes,

The decline of Christendom has meant that Christianity has been gradually losing its status as a lingua franca, and has tended to become a local language used by those who are professing Christians, but not understood by others.⁴⁶

In some circles, not least within Emerging Church discourse, these changes have been celebrated. Here, Christendom is associated with colonialism, nominal Christianity, the use of coercion in spreading the Christian faith, and ecclesial and political control.⁴⁷ Robert Doornenbal reminds us, however, that during church history there have been different kinds of Christendom, and the word “should not be used as a shorthand for summarizing all that ought to be repudiated in Christian history.” Rather, he concludes, the term is useful if it “refers to fundamental assumptions, attitudes, theological and ecclesiological commitments, and missional priorities and expectations, that *underlie* the diverse institutional forms of Christendom.”⁴⁸ We may also add that post-Christendom does not necessarily imply the end of the Christian faith, as a differentiation can be made between the terms ‘Christendom’ and ‘Christianity’. Christendom was simply an epoch in the history of the church in Europe, and the Christian faith was flourishing in that part of the world for the first the centuries before Christendom became a historical reality.⁴⁹ The Christian faith may very well flourish again in post-Christendom culture, albeit different in organisation and expression.

The position of European Christendom has steadily and irrevocably changed during the last centuries, due to shifts in religious beliefs, altered state-church relations, and as the centre of gravity of the Christian faith has shifted from the West to the global South. Some of these changes become apparent to our Swedish context when looking at recent sociological research and statistical data. How, then, is the idea of a post-Christendom culture used in this text? Paas suggests that the term ‘post-

⁴³ Stefan Paas, “Post-Christian,” 12., and Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 109.

⁴⁴ Hugh McLeod, “Introduction,” Kindle Location 46.

⁴⁵ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and mission in a strange new world* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2004), 19.

⁴⁶ Hugh McLeod, “Introduction,” Kindle Locations 220-221.

⁴⁷ Stefan Paas, “Post-Christian,” 12-13., and Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West - Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016) Kindle edition, 186-87.

⁴⁸ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 109. Emphasis original.

⁴⁹ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 110.; Hugh McLeod, “Introduction,” Kindle Location 57.

Christendom' is more useful "if we limit its use to those aspects of the cultural changes that are directly related to politics and power."⁵⁰ This, I believe, is a helpful approach as it differentiates between other concepts such as secularisation, and post-Christianity (for discussion around post-Christianity, see below). Paas continues,

The term 'post-Christendom' highlights in the first place the collapse of ecclesiastical power in Europe. Following the separation of church and state in many countries a continuing marginalisation of the church has taken place. A post-Christendom Europe is a continent that has left behind more than a millennium of close church-state cooperation, without being able or willing to erase all the vestiges of this history. Subsequently, post-Christendom signals the fragmentation of culture in the West. No longer can single cultural (Christian) narrative be assumed. Instead, the church is forced to find its own place within society, as one of its institutions.⁵¹

When looking at statistical data available to us concerning church decline and religiosity in Sweden, combined with historical developments during the latter part of the 1900's, the emergence of a post-Christendom culture becomes apparent in a number of ways:

- Institutional decline (e.g. decline in church membership, the closing down of local churches, and financial instability).
- Loss of political power as well as a diminishing influence in public discourse concerning matters of ethics, shared values, and morality.
- The emergence of a pluralistic society where the church becomes a sub-culture alongside other religions and faith traditions.

The challenges that these developments pose to the contemporary church in Sweden cannot be overstated, as it puts into question the church's very identity, place and function in society.

1.2.4 The emergence of a Post-Christian culture

Whilst the term 'post-Christendom' tends to address primarily ecclesiological issues, the discussion around the emergence of a 'post-Christian' culture gravitates towards religious beliefs and moral values.⁵² In comparison with theories of secularisation, which focus on religious decline in general, the theory of the emergence of a post-Christian culture addresses the decline of the Christian faith in society in particular. Paas writes:

Post-Christian societies are societies where so many individuals have declined from Christian beliefs and practices that Christians have become (or soon will become) a minority. Also, it could signify the diminishing importance and relevance of Christian beliefs and practices on a motivational level, even if people do not leave the church

⁵⁰ Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian," 15.

⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

⁵² Mattias Martinson, *Postkristen teologi - Experiment och tydningsförsök* (Gothenburg: Glänta Produktion, 2007), 214.

formally. Where many people used to invoke Christian teachings to motivate their own behaviour and decisions, but they do no longer, a post-Christian society is in the making.⁵³

Critics of the idea of a 'post-Christian culture' argue that the term is unhelpful as it postulates a pious past, i.e. that we falsely assume that people in Christendom Europe "were church-going, God-fearing and steeped in Christianity."⁵⁴ It would, of course, be erroneous to assume that everyone who lived in Christendom Europe adhered to traditional Christian beliefs and doctrine. One issue, however, with such critique is that it is impossible to verify, as data concerning peoples' religious beliefs prior to the 20th century is scarce. History tells us, however, that those who did decide to stand outside the influence of the church or adhere to traditional Christian confession did so at great cost. McLeod writes:

It was a society which knew well, from top to bottom, what it *ought* to believe and *ought* to do religiously, and what it was that some were alleging as being 'lost' in the midst of urban-industrial change. When members of society did not do the expected and observable religious things, they were loudly harangued by moral and religious gatekeepers from pulpit, corner gossip shop and Sunday lunch table.⁵⁵

Undoubtedly, what we may describe as a 'Christian society' prior to the 20th century was deeply intertwined with a Christendom system of social control and coercion. This does not, however, refute our observation that Europe is shifting from a context once shaped by the Christian faith to a culture where Christianity no longer is a common language and reference point to the general populace. Paas writes:

Christianity is no longer the moral and spiritual conscience of European societies; increasingly, it has become their repressed memory. Objections against Christianity are carried out by strong institutions, in particular the mass media and the education system. It is generally thought that central Christian doctrines have become implausible in an age of science. Traditional religion is often considered an option for immature, dependent people, who are afraid to face life. Moreover, Europeans also object to traditional Christian ethics, especially in the area of sexuality.⁵⁶

Although some object to the term 'post-Christian'⁵⁷, much of current research in Sweden echoes Paas' observation. In his book *Postkristen teologi* [Post-Christian theology] from 2007, Mattias Martinson writes:

Common to many interpretative theories is that they point toward a situation where the

⁵³ Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian," 11.

⁵⁴ Stuart Murray, "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian ... Does the Label Matter?," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 9, no. 3 (August 2009), 205.; C.f. Eva M. Hamberg: "Even in those European countries where the church had a relatively strong control over their members, as was the case in Sweden from the 17th to the 19th centuries, the population may in fact have been less effectively Christianized than we often assume, and elements of pre-Christian religion or folk religion may have survived for centuries after the country was formally Christianized." Eva M. Hamberg, "Analysing," 76.

⁵⁵ Hugh McLeod, "Introduction," Kindle Locations 562-575. Emphasis original.

⁵⁶ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 189.

⁵⁷ For instance Eva M. Hamberg, "Analysing.", who favours religious market theory and argues for a supply-side explanation of church decline in Sweden. C.f. Rodney Stark, and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, no. 3 (September 1994), 230-52.

Christian faith and Christian morals no longer form a shared cultural language. Thus far we can establish that our day and age - when looking at the European cultural sphere - clearly has moved beyond its Christian cultural heritage.⁵⁸

Public discourse in Sweden concerning religion may have changed in recent years (where the Christian faith has become more visible),⁵⁹ but participation in Christian rituals, membership in the church, and adherence to the Christian faith and doctrines are still considered optional.⁶⁰ A majority of Swedish people express that they do not belong to a religious group, believe in or pray to God. Lack of religious experience is normative, rather than the opposite.⁶¹ In his research of attitudes towards the church and the Christian faith in Sweden, David Thurfjell notes that the Christian faith is seen as boring, irrelevant and irrational. Moreover, many who participated in Thurfjell's study also associated religion, and in particular Christianity, with violence and control.⁶² Thurfjell writes that we need to understand these attitudes from a historical perspective and how Swedes understand themselves as a people,

The post-Christian secular Swedes become the most modern people in the world - best in regard to democracy, best in regard to equality, and best in regard to environmental concern. It is in this narrative that our lack of religion and secularisation is situated. Here, religion becomes a generalised category that bases itself on a type of Christianity that post-Christian secular Swedes are done with. Religion is something that we have freed ourselves from, something that exists in our past and now belong to other people [than ourselves].⁶³

From this brief account, then, we may conclude that alongside interpretive concepts such as 'post-Christendom' and 'secularisation', the idea of Sweden as a post-Christian culture may serve as a useful heuristic lens for our discussion. It does not imply that the Christian faith is completely erased from Swedish society, which evidently is not the case, nor does it suggest that Sweden is an entirely secular context, as discussed above. It does, however, provide a framework for addressing some of the religious change that Sweden has experienced during the latter part of the 20th century. The emergence of a post-Christian culture in Sweden is the result of a number of parallel as well as converging processes: e.g. the collapse of Christendom; secularisation processes; the rise of atheism; religious critique in general, and the critique of Christian faith in particular; anti-clericalism; religious pluralism; and processes such as the cultural revolt in the 1960's⁶⁴. The crisis of faith in Europe poses a serious challenge to the church and its missiological significance ought not to be underestimated, as it calls the church to look beyond simplistic models or strategies of "doing church more relevant" in a culture that expresses a "decreasing demand for

⁵⁸ Mattias Martinson, *Postkristen*, 45. *My translation*.

⁵⁹ C.f. Mattias Martinson, *Katedralen*, 64-65.

⁶⁰ Anders Bäckström, Ninna Edgardh Beckman, and Per Pettersson, *Religiös förändring i norra Europa - En studie av Sverige. Från statskyrka till fri folkkyrka. Slutrapport*. (Uppsala: Diakonivetenskapliga institutet, 2004), 139.

⁶¹ Erika Willander, *Sveriges religiösa landskap*, 82, 84.

⁶² David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket*, 78.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 111. *My translation*.

⁶⁴ For a discussion concerning the cultural revolt in the 1960's and its effects on normative Christian culture, see Hugh McLeod, "Introduction."

serious, world-formative religion".⁶⁵

1.2.5 Sweden as 'post-modern' culture

Lastly, during the latter part of the 20th century Western society experienced an epistemological shift that has come to influence the beliefs, life-styles and world-views of many people in today's culture. Originating in the mid-20th century in academia and disciplines such as architecture, art, literature, philosophy, and sociology, the 'post-modern turn' signified a "cultural revolt against the pretensions of modernist aspirations"⁶⁶. This revolt included, amongst other things, a critique of Cartesian separation of subject from object (where the human self is thought to exist separate from surrounding reality), as well as a doubt in the idea that language accurately can depict an objective reality.⁶⁷ In the words of Ola Sigurdson and Jayne Svenungsson,

The human subject simply is not an isolated mind that observes reality from a distance and from that gain objective and timeless knowledge. We already live 'out there' in reality, which means that the knowledge we acquire in this reality is conditioned by a number of factors, such as culture, class, gender, sexuality, education, past experiences, interests, preconceptions, etc.⁶⁸

The situatedness and limited perspective of human beings make it difficult, some would say impossible, to assume a common human rationality.⁶⁹ According to Jan-Olav Henriksen:

we reconstruct different or plural forms of rationality according to specific interests, needs and concerns. We cannot transcend, in any radical way, the fact that we live in and are conditioned by a certain context that has its special patterns of understanding, rationality and communication.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 189.

⁶⁶ J. Andrew Kirk, "The Post-Modern Condition and the Churches' (Co-)mission," in *Mission and Postmodernities*, ed. Rolv Olsen (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 22.

⁶⁷ Ola Sigurdson, and Jayne Svenungsson, "En gåtfull spegelbild - Introduktion till postmodern teologi," in *Postmodern teologi - En introduktion*, ed. Ola Sigurdson, and Jayne Svenungsson (Stockholm: Verbum Förlag AB, 2006), 9.; and Andrew Kirk (2011), p. 23. John W. Cresswell writes, "Postmodernism might be considered a family of theories and perspectives that have something in common. The basic concept is that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations. These conditions are well articulated by individuals such as Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Giroux, and Freire. These are negative conditions, and they show themselves in the presence of hierarchies, power and control by individuals, and the multiple meanings of language. The conditions include the importance of different discourses, the importance of marginalized people and groups (the "other"), and the presence of "metanarratives" or universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions. Also included is the need to "deconstruct" texts in terms of language, their reading and their writing, and the examining and bringing to the surface of concealed hierarchies as well as dominations, oppositions, inconsistencies, and contradictions." John W. Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design - Choosing Among Five Approaches, 3rd Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013) Kindle edition, Kindle Location 806.

⁶⁸ Ola Sigurdson, and Jayne Svenungsson, "Spegelbild," 11. *My translation*.

⁶⁹ J. Andrew Kirk, "Post-Modern Condition," 24.

⁷⁰ Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Multifaceted Christianity and the Postmodern Condition: Reflections on its Challenges to Churches in the Northern Hemisphere," in *Mission and Postmodernities*, ed. Rolv Olsen (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 9.

Discussing the concept of a 'post-modern culture' and its relevance to contemporary society, however, does not come without caveats. It is a notoriously amorphous subject, and the jury is still out on whether or not post-modernity is something new or merely a continuation of modernity.⁷¹ In many ways it seems pertinent to view Western society as 'hybrid culture' encompassing both elements of modernity as well as post-modernity. Andrew Kirk writes:

Western societies are neither modern nor postmodern in any all-pervasive sense. They show signs of an unstable mixture of elements from both tendencies. In many areas of life, such as science, technology, economics, business, law and education (not least the requirements for higher degrees in the University sector), the rational procedures highlighted by modernity are still taken for granted. At the same time, some of the characteristics of the postmodern condition ... are apparent in some sectors of society.⁷²

With that being said, for the purposes of our discussion the concept may serve as a useful heuristic lens as it captures important aspects of the philosophical and cultural changes that have taken place in Western society in recent decades (whether we label these changes 'post-modern', 'late modern', 'hypermodern', 'advanced modern', or similar is of less importance here). We do, however, need to use the term in a careful way. It does seem helpful to differentiate between post-modernism, as an intellectual and philosophical stream in predominately academic circles, and post-modernity, as a social-cultural phenomenon.⁷³ It is doubtful that ordinary people in Sweden would go about their lives reasoning in academic categories of post-modern theory and epistemology (e.g. deconstructionism, post-structuralism, non-foundationalism, language games, the social construction of knowledge, perspectivism, etc). Nevertheless, from a socio-cultural perspective the 'post-modern turn' has over the decades permeated from academia into wider culture with the result that "we live in an age that celebrates a plurality of views, expressions, customs, traditions and ways of living".⁷⁴ The discussion concerning the characteristics of post-modernity is extensive, and the scope of this study does not allow for a presentation of the subject beyond its rudimentary contours. Briefly, then, post-modernity implies, in the words

⁷¹ Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian," 15.; Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Postmodernitet som kulturfenomen," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 74, no. 3 (1998), 98.; J. Andrew Kirk, *The Future of Reason, Science, and Faith - Following Modernity and Post-modernity* (London: Routledge, 2016), 18. For example, Ola Sigurdson and Jayne Svenungsson write, "post-modernism does not imply a radical break with modern philosophy. It rather involves a critical settlement with aspects of this philosophy that has proven itself untenable, such as the dualism of subject and object, as well as the pretence of a neutral, objective or universal knowledge." Ola Sigurdson, and Jayne Svenungsson, "Spegelbild," 12. On the other hand, Zygmunt Bauman argued that postmodernity is something radically different from modernity: "Postmodernity is not a transitory departure from the 'normal state' of modernity; neither is it a diseased state of modernity, an ailment likely to be rectified, a case of 'modernity in crisis'. It is, instead, a self-reproducing, pragmatically self-sustainable and logically self-contained social condition defined by distinctive features of its own. A theory of postmodernity therefore cannot be a modified theory of modernity, a theory of modernity with a set of negative markers." Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 188. Emphasis original.

⁷² J. Andrew Kirk, "Post-Modern Condition," 23.; c.f. Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian."

⁷³ For a discussion on the differentiation of the terms, see Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 90, 102-103.; see also Daryl Balia, and Kirsteen Kim, eds. *Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 64-65.

⁷⁴ J. Andrew Kirk, "Post-Modern Condition," 24.

of Jean-Francois Lyotard, an “incredulity toward metanarratives”⁷⁵, meaning that no single over-arching theory can assume to account for everything. Kirk writes:

the history of humankind is judged to be a discontinuous succession of fairly random events without any transcendent meaning or purpose. For post-modernity there is no alpha and omega to the human story; indeed, there is no one story, only fragments of many stories (or, perhaps, fables).⁷⁶

Zygmunt Bauman suggested that post-modernity may be understood as a “culture of excess ... characterized by the overabundance of meanings”, resulting in a fragmented society that appears to constantly be moving and changing.⁷⁷ Similarly, Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim write in *Witnessing to Christ Today* (2010), part of the Edinburgh 2010 series, that in post-modern culture

plurality, construction and change are pivotal. A multitude of cultural, linguistic, political, religious and other options exist simultaneously, and the individual may choose the understanding of things and the way of life as preferred at the moment. The world is constantly changing; reality is not so much given as constantly being (re)negotiated. Hence, identity is liquid, not static. Postmodernity is a subjective, relational and dialectical approach to life; rather than seeking objective truth outside of ourselves, emphasis is given to relationships with ‘the other’.⁷⁸

In sum, as a socio-cultural phenomenon post-modernity has been expressed in categories such as consumerism, developments in information technology and the emergence of social media, pluralism, relativism, fast paced change, hyper-individualism, celebration of choice, doubt, ambivalence, a focus on the body and identity, anti-institutionalism and a crisis of authority.⁷⁹ It is a culture in which “every stance can and will be questioned, contested, and attacked from different angles”⁸⁰, with a deep scepticism towards viewpoints, beliefs and convictions that may be interpreted as intolerant, or infringing on peoples’ freedom to live their lives according to their own preferences and choices. The challenges here to the churches in Sweden are manifold. One may disagree with the precepts of post-modern philosophy, but while the emergence of a post-Christian culture in Sweden implies the decline of Christian beliefs and practices in particular, post-modernity as a socio-cultural phenomenon suggests that how we understand knowledge, truth, belonging, community, and the conditions of human existence have fundamentally changed altogether. In what ways the church respond to these changes is a significant missiological question, something which is at the very centre of the Emerging Church discourse and addressed throughout this study.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), xxiv.

⁷⁶ J. Andrew Kirk, *Future of Reason*, 18.

⁷⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, “Sociology and Postmodernity,” *The Sociological Review* 36, no. 4 (1988), 795.

⁷⁸ Daryl Balia, and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing*, 66.

⁷⁹ Daryl Balia, and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing*, 65.; Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 101-03.; Stefan Paas, “Post-Christian,” 15.; Katarina Ek-Nilsson, “Det moderna och det postmoderna - En introduktion,” *Nätverket* 20 (2016), 8-12.; and Zygmunt Bauman (1992), pp. Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations*, 187-88.

⁸⁰ Stefan Paas, “Post-Christian,” 18.

⁸¹ For a discussion regarding post-modernism and post-modernity within ECC discourse, see Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 89ff.

1.3 Concluding remarks

The topics addressed in this section are, evidently, too extensive and voluminous to cover in an exhaustive way here as space simply does not permit it. The purpose of this brief discussion around religiosity in Sweden is to serve as a background to our inquiry into the Emerging Church phenomenon and its relevance to mission today. We can safely conclude that the function and place of the church in Sweden has been fundamentally altered, and religious beliefs and practices among Swedes have significantly changed during the 20th century. Each of the four categories; secularisation, post-Christendom, post-Christianity, and post-modernity, shed light to these changes in different ways, and each pose unique set of challenges to the churches in Sweden. Some argue for the return of religion in Swedish society, and there are indications this is partly true - at least in public discourse and media.⁸² The recent decade in Sweden has seen a number of celebrities and public figures speak openly about their Christian faith. What is notable, however, is that in public discourse today religion often is addressed as a problem that need to be dealt with in one way or the other.⁸³ The term 'post-secular' does not seem to capture the complete narrative regarding religion and religiosity in Sweden, although there are contexts - specifically urban multicultural areas - where it seems appropriate to speak in that category. On the whole Sweden may be understood as a secular society, and religion in general and Christianity in particular has become a marginal phenomenon in peoples' lives. In international comparison many still belong to a religious institution - in particular the Luther Church of Sweden; but belonging does not equal participation, nor does it imply adherence to traditional Christian doctrine and confession. Available data reveals to us a church in decline,⁸⁴ and where people do hold religious beliefs or participate in religious practices they do so outside of traditional Christianity. Religiosity in Sweden is indeed shifting, and it involves changes that challenge the churches in multiple ways. From a missiological perspective, this complex reality seems to demand a thoroughly contextualised approach to church and mission in Sweden today. The main focus for this dissertation is to what extent the Emerging Church phenomenon, in particular as it is expressed in Sweden, may help us to address these changes and shape the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary society?

⁸² C.f. Joel Halldorf, *Gud: Återkomsten* (Stockholm: Libris Förlag, 2018)

⁸³ C.f. Halldorf, Joel, "Vardag i det postsekulära samhället." *Kvartal*, 25 April 2018,

⁸⁴ There are, however, indications that this predominately applies to traditional indigenous churches and denominations in Sweden, as newer immigrant churches (often not included in official church statistics) are increasing numerically.

Chapter 2. Research Question and Philosophical Assumptions

2.1 The relevance of the Emerging Church to missiology

As will be established in this thesis, the Emerging Church phenomenon can be understood as a conversation within predominately evangelical Protestantism in the West - calling the church to renewal in light of the changing cultural landscape in contemporary society. The diverse and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon become apparent when reviewing available academic journals, published books, and online blogs on the subject. For instance, the ways in which emerging Christianity has been expressed in North America are to some extent shaped by reactions to the evangelical conservative church culture relatively unique to this specific context. When examining the Emerging Church, we find that some voices stress renewal of worship (e.g. the Alternative Worship movement in the United Kingdom), others seek to deconstruct traditional forms of church leadership and governance, preaching, community life, membership, or spiritual practices, etc. From this perspective, the ECC may be understood as a renewal movement rather than a missionary movement. This, however, does not imply that the phenomenon has little to contribute to missiological inquiry and discussion. As will be established below, mission is at the very heart of the ECC. Doug Gay writes:

From its beginnings, the alt worship and emerging church conversation have been attentive to and influenced by the literature of missiology. This connection was driven by the recognition that their revisions of worship practice were crossing cultural boundaries within postmodern, media-saturated Western societies. What the alt/emerging practitioners learned from missiology was how to reflect on the ways in which inherited bundles of church practice, while they were defended and serviced by means of supposedly pure theo-logics, were invariably shaped by cultural and contextual factors ... Unbundling, therefore, also calls for an active missiological intelligence to be at work in reflecting on the Church's practice.⁸⁵

The influence of missiologists such as Leslie Newbigin (1909 - 1998) and David Bosch (1929 - 1992) on the Emerging Church discourse should not be underestimated. It is my understanding that they and similar scholars have had a significant impact across the spectrum of the conversation, from the developments in the US (e.g. The Terra Nova Theological Project, and later the Emergent Village), the UK (e.g. The Fresh Expressions movement), as well as Australia (e.g. The Forge Mission Training Network).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Doug Gay, *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2011) , 62-63.

⁸⁶ This has been documented in numerous places; c.f. Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2005) ; Doug Gay, *Remixing.*; Graham Cray, *Mission-shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004) ; Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context - An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012) Kindle edition, ; Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: emergentYS, 2004) ; and Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *The Shaping of the Things to Come* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003) . The influence of the Missional Church movement, and in particular Lesslie Newbigin's missionary

As has been addressed in detail above, contemporary Swedish society is characterised by significant shifts in beliefs and attitudes towards established religions in general, and the Christian faith in particular. Sweden is becoming increasingly pluralistic, multicultural and multi-religious and the need for reflection concerning cross-cultural mission is imperative. Doug Gay writes:

"The emerging church conversation, therefore, to the degree that it has been attentive to such missiological concerns, has been able to develop some acute theological instincts for questioning the cultural bundling of ecclesial practice."⁸⁷

From the perspective of this particular study, then, the ECC may indeed have missiological relevance to the challenges that the churches in Sweden are faced with today. In what ways and to what extent is at the very centre of this inquiry.

2.2 The Rationale behind the Dissertation

2.2.1 The Research Problem and Research Purpose

The dissertation seeks to address the following problem: The church in Sweden is experiencing decline, although exceptions can be found it is an experience shared by the majority of churches and denominations in the country.⁸⁸ Statistics reveal predominately negative figures in terms of membership, number of churches, baptisms, weddings, worship service attendance, etc. Churches in Sweden are not alone in experiencing these developments. For instance, the international Emerging Church conversation has been birthed out of an observation of these changes, as Western cultures have shifted from Christendom societies, where the Christian faith is in majority, to pluralistic and heterogeneous contexts where the church as an institution and the Christian faith has declined in influence and numbers. As will become apparent in this study, the Emerging Church is an international grassroots phenomenon that has come into being as individuals, churches and Christian networks have sought to respond to these changes, challenging the Western church to become a missionary movement again, embracing new ecclesial forms and practices, experimentation and innovation.

Studies have already been made that have sought to determine how these communities take shape in other parts of the world, but the ways that the Emerging Church phenomenon is expressed in Sweden is to a large extent an unexplored area; no similar inquiry has to my knowledge been done to date, in particular with attention to their key missiological contributions to current discourse. It is similarly unexplored as to what extent these communities may or may not assist the church in addressing the missiological challenges posed by the changing cultural landscape in

ecclesiology on the ECC is addressed in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁸⁷ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 66.

⁸⁸ In the dissertation the term "church in Sweden" refers specifically to churches that belong to the Protestant church family (e.g. Lutheran churches and traditional free churches, such as Pentecostal, Baptist, Methodist, the Salvation Army, the Evangelical Free Church, and similar).

Sweden.

The general purpose of this dissertation is therefore to explore and analyse how the Emerging Church phenomenon is expressed in Sweden, and to ascertain in what ways these communities may contribute to shaping the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society.

The relevance of this kind of exercise is threefold:

- It will contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate concerning the international Emerging Church conversation by increasing the understanding as to how this phenomenon is expressed in a Swedish context.
- Through ethnographic study it will bring to light what kind of new forms of Christian communities are emerging in Sweden.
- It will contribute to the ongoing theological and missiological discourse about the future of the Christian church in Sweden.
- It will contribute to the ongoing discourse concerning contextual mission and theology in Sweden today.

2.2.2 Research Question(s)

The dissertation is guided by one main research question: *In what ways are "emerging churches" in Sweden contributing to shaping the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society?*

In order to answer the primary research question, the study is guided by four secondary research questions:

- *What is the background of the wider Emerging Church conversation? (Chapter 4)*
- *What are the main characteristics of the wider Emerging Church conversation? (Chapter 5)*
- *What examples of emerging churches can be found in Sweden, and what can be learned about the groups which are part of this study regarding their backgrounds, community life, missionary practices, and communal worship? (Part B)*
- *What shared ecclesiological and missiological themes may be identified from the emerging churches which are part of this study? (Part C)*

2.2.3 Research Objectives

The Research Purpose and Research Questions lead to a number of objectives:

Objective 1. This thesis seeks to examine the Emerging Church conversation from an international perspective.

The aim of this exercise is to, first, allow the reader to familiarise themselves with the development of emerging Christianity. The examination is done in the light of

changes in evangelical Christianity in the decades preceding the turn of the millennium, which will highlight key themes and concerns within the conversation. Second, the ECC is presented as an intersection of four overlapping streams that both share characteristics as well as bring their own unique flavours and perspectives into the conversation: *The Emergent Theological Stream*, *The Neo-Monastic Stream*, *The Alternative Worship Stream*, and *The Missional Stream*. Third, this exercise will not only add to the ongoing scholarly debate concerning emerging Christianity, but specifically identify criteria for our selection of churches and Christian communities part of the case study research .

Objective 2. Undertake case study research of four emerging churches in Sweden.

The aim for this exercise is through ethnographic study to examine how these groups understand themselves and function from the perspectives of community, mission, and worship. This not only will add to current knowledge about the nature of these kind of communities in Sweden (which, to my knowledge, is an unexplored area), but ethnographic research helps us to avoid a description of these communities that resemble an idealised ecclesiological blueprint.⁸⁹ Pete Ward suggest that a blueprint ecclesiology can be understood as *projections*, “they represent the aspirations of the contemporary Church ... [it] is an attempt to determine how something should be constructed.”⁹⁰ Blueprints are of value, but as we discuss how emerging churches in Sweden are contributing to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society, we need to examine their actual mind sets, practices, and concerns. Data from similar studies of emerging churches in other parts of the world are included in the discussion to add depth to our analysis.

Objective 3. To identify and critically examine the ecclesiological and missiological themes that are observable in the case study material.

The aim here is to identify key ecclesiological characteristics and missiological themes that can be observed in the case study material. These are critically discussed in conversation with ongoing scholarly debate, as well as in the light of the missiological challenges that are posed by current Swedish society. The discussion will also contribute to current academic discussion regarding the future of the church in Sweden, deepen the understanding of emerging Christianity as an international phenomenon, as well as contributing to scholarly debate in the field of contextual theology by presenting a model which draws insights from both emerging Christianity and traditional evangelical theology.

⁸⁹ The idea of *blueprint ecclesiology* was introduced by Nicholas Healy in his book *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), where he is critical of an idealised ecclesiology, which has priority over the lived. For instance, both John Zizioulas and Miroslav Volf use Trinitarian theology as a blueprint for the Church but arrive at very different outcomes. C.f. Pete Ward, “Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived - Normatively as a Perilous Faithfulness,” *Ecclesial Practices 2* (2015), 74-90.

⁹⁰ Pete Ward, “Blueprint Ecclesiology,” 79, 82.

2.3 Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Perspective

This section is concerned with outlining the theoretical perspective underpinning the research project, highlighting the epistemological, ontological, and theological assumptions of the thesis. J. W. Creswell refers to this as the researcher's *worldview*, which is the "general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that the researcher brings to a study."⁹¹ Together with the Research design and Strategy outlined in chapter 3, this constitutes the overall methodology of the thesis.

2.3.1 Interpretive Research and Hermeneutics

The methodology of the dissertation has gradually evolved as I have engaged with the research project, moving from what could resemble a postpositivist approach to adopting an interpretative framework. Although the dissertation is an inquiry concerned with theological and missiological matters, it is also a study of a sociological phenomenon. As such it is a complex subject, as any study of a faith community or religious movement is. As the complexity of studying social phenomena, such as the Emerging Church, became increasingly apparent I became aware of the need for a methodological approach that sufficiently handles this complexity. The Emerging Church is not a phenomenon that can be reduced to easily quantifiable data, but a complex and fluid social phenomenon that exists within and is shaped by human relationships, aspirations, convictions and interpretations of the social world, scripture, and theology. This forced me to challenge my methodological approach. My understanding of my role as researcher developed in a similar way, as I found it problematic to identify with the classical idea of the distant and neutral researcher. Many of those interviewed in this study are friends or acquaintances whose faith communities and ministries I value and am inspired by. I had also myself become increasingly involved with the Emerging Church conversation in Sweden through various networks and conferences. In that sense, I came to study a phenomenon that I myself was part of and to some extent identified with.

Due to the nature of the research subject, and my own understanding of my role as researcher, the decision to adopt an interpretative approach and methodologically placing the dissertation within the hermeneutic tradition seemed appropriate (See discussion below). The research project is concerned with human action, values, and convictions and how these are expressed and understood within the context of social reality. The goal of the interpretative researcher is to analyse and develop understanding of socially meaningful action and discover how people construct meaning and interpret their social world in their natural settings.⁹² W. Lawrence

⁹¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6.

⁹² W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 7th Edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2011), 103-04.

Neuman writes that interpretative researchers

study meaningful social action, not just people's visible, external behavior. Social action is the action to which people attach subjective meaning and is activity with a purpose or intent.⁹³

1. *The hermeneutic and interpretive approach seeks understanding*

This approach is concerned with seeking to understand how people interpret and relate to their given contexts and the social world, rather than attempting to explain human behaviour. The researcher is committed to see the world through the eyes of those being studied and to "discover what actions mean to the people who engage in them."⁹⁴ Alan Bryman writes: "The social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world."⁹⁵ In this endeavour, Bryman explains, that is a *double interpretation* going on, as the researcher is "providing an interpretation of other's interpretations". He continues: "Indeed, there is a third level of interpretation going on, because the researcher's interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline."⁹⁶ In this regard, it is not uncommon for hermeneutical and interpretive works to be rich in descriptive content, as well as emphasising the significance of context. I present the four emerging churches in Part B without any specific commentary or analysis. The rationale behind this is to, at this stage in the dissertation, let the groups speak for themselves as much as possible. I have, of course, in my role as researcher selected what data to be presented and thereby affected the narrative of each group, but it has been my aim to present the data as comprehensively and accurate as possible. Much of the analytical and interpretative work, then, is left for Part C.

2. *Some aspects of subjectivity are unavoidable*

When describing the life-world subjectivity is inevitable. Peter D. Asworth writes,

Despite trying to keep empathically in tune with the life-world of participants, the research necessarily highlights matters of 'relevance' to the interest of the research and de-emphasise links with other aspects of the individual's experience which they themselves might well have retained as being important.⁹⁷

The interpretative approach and the hermeneutic tradition recognise the influence of prejudice, "we engage the traditions made available to us against the background of our lived lives and prejudgements we have made over time."⁹⁸ The hermeneutic

⁹³ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 104.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁵ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods, 4th edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 399.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁷ Peter Ashworth, "Qualitative Research Methods," *Estudios Pedagógicos* 26 (2000), 101.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Hermeneutics and Critical Hermeneutics: Exploring Possibilities Within the Art of Interpretation," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7, no. 3 (May 2006), 6.

tradition argues that all researchers approach the subject at hand with some form of pre-understanding or prejudice; what matters is to what extent we recognise this and are aware of this during the research process. In this regard, Kinsella emphasises the *situated location of interpretation*, i.e. there is no such thing as a "view from nowhere", rather, the interpreter is an active agent with a "view from somewhere".⁹⁹ To some this may be problematic, in particular if the researcher adopts a positivist or postpositivist stance. However, the hermeneutic tradition argues that previous understanding is not only unavoidable but key to generate new knowledge and understanding, something which will be explored next.¹⁰⁰

3. *The Fusion of Horizons*

In order to conceptualise how new knowledge is generated, the hermeneutic tradition relies on Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the *Fusion of Horizons*. The metaphor illustrates "how prejudice merges with information from other perspectives to create new knowledge and understanding."¹⁰¹ Specifically, this implies that new information and knowledge do not emerge within a vacuum, but every interpretation relies on previous interpretations. This process is not static, but dynamic and gradually evolving; Heidegger used the notion the *hermeneutic circle* to describe this process, as the researcher's own horizon is constantly forming and developing as he or she encounters new data and perspectives. Kinsella writes, "For Heidegger and Gadamer the circularity of interpretation is not simply a methodological process or condition but also an essential feature of all knowledge and understanding, therefore every interpretation relies on other interpretations."¹⁰²

4. *Comfortableness with Ambiguity*

The hermeneutic tradition, in this sense, is comfortable with *ambiguity*, i.e. absolute truth, or one single authoritarian reading of a text or interpretation of an event, is unattainable. Instead, it recognises "the complexity of the interpretive endeavour"¹⁰³, and that an interpretation is nothing more than an interpretation, which can either executed well or executed poorly. The quality of the interpretive work relies on the transparency of the researcher (in terms of bias and prejudices), and how well the interpretation is justified in terms of the quality of the data and the reliability of the methodological process. It still remains, however, that an interpretation never can be absolute or final. This study ought to be understood as one contribution to an ongoing discourse concerning the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in Sweden. It is a continually evolving theological discourse, as new interpretations

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Hermeneutics," 5.; Graham McCaffrey, Graham McCaffrey, Shelley Raffin-Bouchal, and Nancy J. Moules, "Hermeneutics as Research Approach: A Reappraisal," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 11, no. 3 (2012), 218.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Ashworth, "Qualitative," 102.

¹⁰¹ Claudia Von Zweck, "The Use of Hermeneutics in Mixed Method Design," *The Qualitative Report* 13, no. 1 (March 2008), 120.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, "Hermeneutics," 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6.

engage with traditional interpretations, and new understanding develop and emerge.

In sum, then, the interpretative and hermeneutic framework corresponds well with my own ontological and epistemological understandings, as well as being a useful and appropriate theoretical approach given the subject at hand, as the dissertation engages with meaningful social action, and how people and faith communities interpret and understand their social reality, convictions, and actions.

2.3.2 Critical theory

Alongside an interpretative and hermeneutic framework, the theoretical approach adopted in this dissertation may also be understood as *critical*. Asking questions is a fundamental aspect of the hermeneutic and interpretive approach; questions emerge, as Marcus Jahnke writes, from “wondering ... from an honest wish to understand in a phenomenological sense.”¹⁰⁴ Asking questions, however, does not automatically imply adopting a critical stance as a researcher, and the hermeneutic tradition has at times been accused of - in particular from scholars belonging to the school of critical theory - being too conservative in its view of tradition and authority.¹⁰⁵ As a response to this critique, and as a way to attempt to find a common ground between hermeneutics and critical theory, Paul Ricoeur developed a *critical hermeneutic*, which “introduces a critical distancing dimension to interpretation that Gadamer could not allow”.¹⁰⁶ According to Jahnke, Ricoeur argued that “critique is fundamental to the goals of keeping communication open and of enhancing the tension needed to generate new meaning.”¹⁰⁷ A critical approach, therefore, does not necessarily stand in opposition of the hermeneutic tradition, but enrich it and is an important partner in interpretative academic inquiry.

In order to keep this critical perspective as a hermeneutical researcher there are at least three interrelated aspects that demand consideration: First, we have to be aware of possible *ideological thinking*, both in terms of our own traditions and prejudices, as well as the context which is to be studied. Second, although “we cannot escape our history”, we need to affirm that “the possibility of *transcending our context* does exist”¹⁰⁸, which is of significance in order to keep a critical perspective of our own tradition as researcher. Third, although as hermeneutical researchers we immerse ourselves in the research context in order to understand, listen, interpret, and see the world through the eyes of those who are to be studied, a *critical distancing* is still needed and possible to attain. These three aspects have all been of concern for me

¹⁰⁴ Marcus Jahnke, “Revisiting Design as a Hermeneutic Practice: An Investigation of Paul Ricoeur’s Critical Hermeneutics,” *DesignIssues* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2012), 38.

¹⁰⁵ It is beyond the scope of this study to develop this further, but this was one of the main issues of debate between Hans-Jonathan Roberge, “What is critical hermeneutics,” *Thesis Eleven* 106, no. 1 (2011), and Marcus Jahnke, “Revisiting Design.” There are however scholars who argue that a critical dimension is implicit in Gadamer’s work; c.f. Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, “Hermeneutics.”

¹⁰⁶ Marcus Jahnke, “Revisiting Design,” 34.

¹⁰⁷ Marcus Jahnke, “Revisiting Design,” 35.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, “Hermeneutics,” 8. Emphasis mine.

during the course of this research project.

The critical aspect of the dissertation may be understood as three-dimensional. First, during the course of the research project I have strived to be *self-critical of my own prejudices and biases*. As the hermeneutic tradition acknowledges, I approach the research project and the data from a specific perspective and specific experiences. For instance, being involved with pioneering ministry in the free church context in Sweden has created some amount of frustration, as I at times have faced institutionalism, control, unwillingness to take risks, and difficulties to think “outside the box”. As I engage in a critical dialogue between emerging churches on the one hand, and the challenges these communities may expose to the traditional free churches in Sweden, the risk is that the critique of the latter will become ideological and tainted with my own bias. There is a real risk that the Emerging Church phenomenon - as a protest movement characterised by the emphasis of creativity, risk taking, and innovation - is viewed as *the* answer to all the problems and challenges that churches in Sweden are faced with today. This uncritical romanticism, if and when it becomes manifest, need to be exposed during the research process. These and similar prejudices need to be *bracketed* according to the hermeneutic tradition, in order to conduct a sound interpretative research. Also, I have had a prior knowledge of some of the communities which are part of this study. In particular Tribe, a Christian community located in the same city as where I live. I also personally know the interview participants from this group, which risks affecting my critical distance. Of the remaining three groups I had very little, if any, prior knowledge. However, during the course of this research project I have become friends with the team leader of H2O in Gothenburg. As in the case of Tribe, this also risks affect my critical perspective. This has been taken into consideration during the analysis and critical discussion of the case study material.

Second, the dissertation is *a critical engagement with the Emerging Church phenomenon*. In order to assess in what ways the emerging churches may contribute to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in Sweden, the study needs to engage in a fair and rigorous critique of their missiological and ecclesiological practices, theological assumptions and convictions. Here, important critical conversation partners are both current sociological research of Sweden as a religious and cultural landscape, as well as academic scholarship in the fields of ecclesiology and missiology.

Third, the dissertation can be understood as *a critical engagement with my own ecclesial tradition*. Quoting Elliot W. Eisner, Kinsella writes that criticism can be viewed as “an art of saying useful things about complex and subtle objects and events so that others ... can see and understand what they did not see and understand before.”¹⁰⁹ I have grown up in the free church context in Sweden,¹¹⁰ and for more than a decade

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, “Hermeneutics,” 8.

¹¹⁰ The term free church, *frikyrka* in Swedish, was originally used to describe those Christian denominations and churches that were not part of the Lutheran State Church, e.g. Baptist, Pentecostal, the Mission Covenant Church, Adventists, the Vineyard Church, and similar. Although there is not State Church in Sweden since year 2000, the term is still used as a loose label to group these ecclesial traditions

ministered as a Baptist pastor in both established churches as well as in church planting contexts. Since 2016 I serve as a pastor in a church part of the Vineyard Association of Churches. As I am particularly concerned with speaking into and challenge my own ecclesial context, all this constitute my vantage point which I bring to this inquiry.

2.3.3 Theological and Missiological Inquiry

The dissertation is a theological inquiry within the discipline of contextual missiology. Although the Emerging Church as a phenomenon may be of discussed from a number of perspectives, such as sociology, anthropology, Christian spirituality, leadership, and philosophy, I am concerned with what *missiological* contributions this movement may present to the church in Sweden. As a theological inquiry, therefore, it is located within the intersection of Church, Gospel and Culture, and how the Christian faith, and the church's ecclesial and missiological practices may be contextualised and expressed in post-Christendom Swedish society. The primary question, then, which I have asked myself as I engaged with the data during the research process, is what *missiological significance* the data may present to us.

Theological inquiry has manifold tasks. According to Andrew Kirk, these include *critical assessment, analysis of reality, empowering the poor, apologetics, relating to the world, and training leaders*.¹¹¹ This inquiry falls within each of these categories, albeit to a varying degree. For instance, the critical dimension of the dissertation is clear (addressed above), as is the “task to help Christians arrive at a ‘Christian mind’ on how to relate their faith to the contemporary world.”¹¹² The thesis also addresses the issues of witness and evangelism in Sweden as a post-Christian and post-modern context, with the aim to hopefully strengthen the church's evangelistic endeavours by contributing to contemporary missiological discourse. Also, I concur with Kirk's assumption that one of the primary tasks of theology is to “empower the poor”, he writes:

Although the phrase may be somewhat ambiguous, the assumption is that theology has the responsibility to help the process of affirming the worth and dignity of those people who are excluded in normal society and to use its resources in aiding their full inclusion.¹¹³

Contextual theology, if done well, has the potential to empower and give voice to the socially excluded, marginalised, and poor in today's society. This is not, however, an explicit theme in this study, although issues of marginalisation and power will at times be addressed as part of larger thematic discussions.

According to David Bosch, missiology has a twofold task: the first being concerned

together.

¹¹¹ J. Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) , 11-13.

¹¹² J. Andrew Kirk, *Mission*, 13.

¹¹³ J. Andrew Kirk, *Mission*, 12. C.f. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011) , 435ff.

with *theology* and the second that of *missionary practice*. First, Bosch wrote, “missiology performs a critical function by continuously challenging theology to be *theologia viatorium*; that is, in its reflecting on the faith theology is to accompany the gospel on its journey through the nations and through the times.”¹¹⁴ In that sense it plays a significant critical part in Christian theological discourse, Bosch continued, acting “as a gadfly in the house of theology, creating unrest and resisting complacency” for the church as a whole, as well as “to accompany the missionary enterprise, to scrutinize its foundations, its aims, attitude, message, and methods - not from the safe distance of the onlooker, but in the spirit of co-responsibility and of service to the church of Christ”.¹¹⁵

Second, missiology has a responsibility of “interacting with the missionary practice”. Bosch explained mission as “an *intersubjective* reality in which missiologists, missionaries, and the people among whom they labor are all partners.”¹¹⁶ In this respect, missiology plays a formative role in standing in the “creative tension” between, on the one hand, the biblical text, and on the other hand, “historical realisation” of missionary practice.

Furthermore, missiology is by its very nature multidisciplinary and may incorporate methodology from a wide range of fields, such as anthropology, theology, history, geography, communication theory, and Christian philosophy. The dissertation utilises a mixed method social scientific research approach for the retrieval of data during the empirical part of the project (For details, see chapter 3). Still, the thesis ought not be read as a social scientific study. Social scientific research methodology is an able partner to missiological inquiry, in particular ethnographic research, as the life and mission practices of churches and Christians are embedded and constructed within the context of social reality. Missiological practices are not formed within a vacuum, they are shaped by, on the one hand, deeply set convictions and beliefs, and, on the other hand, complex processes as followers of Jesus and Christian communities act as social agents engaging with and interpreting the world around them. These practices change and evolve, just as any other social reality does. Utilising interviewing tools, which is the case for this study, is particularly suited for the study of such complex phenomena, and the interview data can be a fruitful partner to missiological and theological inquiry; what makes the work theological and missiological is what kind of questions are asked during the course of the research project, and what analytical framework is applied and what themes are addressed as the data is processed and analysed? In this instance, conducting interviews is simply a tool for studying a current phenomenon observable within Western evangelical Protestant church culture, referred to as the Emerging Church. This material will provide us with valuable data for our missiological discussion regarding contextual mission and theology in Sweden today.

At this stage it may be in order to briefly address my own theological vantage point

¹¹⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming*, 496. Emphasis original.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 496-97.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 497. Emphasis original.

in more detail, as such assumptions effect my interpretative and analytical framework. Addressing what I in previous section refer to as my “ecclesial tradition” is not necessarily a simple task, as denominational and theological boundaries are less differentiated today compared with previous generations. I grew up in a home shaped by the Charismatic ecumenical renewal movement of the 1970’s in Sweden. Rather than drawing up distinct denominational borders, the global Church was presented as a rich source of treasures from which I could draw upon freely with discernment. In that sense I sympathise with the eclectic mindset of the Emerging Church, and it is my conviction that theological inquiry not only ought to be done within the boundaries of one’s own theological and denominational tradition, but in dialogue with the global Church. As stated above, I concur with the interpretive assumption that one authoritative reading of a text or interpretation of an event is unattainable, and a dialogue with perspectives outside ones theological tradition is not only necessary from a critical perspective, it adds to the quality of the academic work. With an open and ecumenical mindset, it is perhaps not strange that different periods of my life have been shaped and influenced by different theological traditions; for instance I spent my undergraduate years in Cardiff, Wales, in a context significantly shaped by the Reformed tradition, and studying for a doctorate at the IBTSC in Prague, and later in Amsterdam, has meant a fruitful encounter with the Radical reformers and the Anabaptist tradition. Ordained as a Baptist minister in 2002, I now serve as a pastor in a church that is part of the Association of Vineyard Churches. I have also been involved in ministry in a house church context. My encounter with and involvement in the New Wine movement, and secondly, my engagement with the Missional Church conversation, has been two significant factors shaping my theological outlook and ecclesiological vision.¹¹⁷ I would describe myself as a Charismatic evangelical with a missional understanding of the nature, function, and direction of the Church as the people of God. Hence, I do not engage in this inquiry concerning the Emerging Church phenomenon and emerging churches from “nowhere”. I write from the perspective of evangelical theological tradition (in the broader sense of the term). When critically addressing the Emerging Church as a phenomenon, then, evangelical theological tradition is both my vantage point and primary discussion partner.

¹¹⁷ *The New Wine Network* (www.new-wine.org) is today an international movement originating in the Anglican Church in England and founded by Bishop David Pytches in the late 1980s. Its teaching and theology are significantly influenced by John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Church. *The Missional Church conversation* maybe understood as a sub-section and later an off-shoot of the ECC, influenced and shaped by authors and activist such as Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, Darrell Guder, Alan J Roxburgh, George R Hunsberger, and Craig Van Gelder, to name but a few.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Strategy

3.1 Limitations to the Research

In order to hone the amount of data to be included in this research project, the study focuses on the following areas:

- Regarding the international Emerging Church conversation, the thesis is primarily concerned with how it came to develop in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia from mid-1980's to the end of 2010. The three contexts provide sufficient breadth and data to illustrate the key features of conversation as well as highlighting its diverse character. The reason is twofold; first, to limit the amount of data, and second, due to the changes that occurred within the Emerging Church conversation by the end of 2010.¹¹⁸
- The case study research of the four emerging churches in Sweden is limited to Stockholm and Gothenburg.
- When discussing the inherited or traditional church, the study is primarily concerned with the evangelical Protestant tradition.

3.2 Research Strategy and Process

The research strategy adopted for this thesis is a *multiphase mixed method strategy*. First, utilising a mixed method strategy allows me to use a combination of deductive and inductive approaches: It is deductive in the sense that I build a hypothesis of the characteristics of emerging churches by studying the wider aspects of the ECC in Part A, which is tested in the preliminary survey (i.e. moving from theory to observations and findings), and it is inductive in the sense that new theory concerning emerging

¹¹⁸ By 2008, many within the international conversation began to move away from the term 'emerging church'. Some experienced the label as too laden with negative connotations and misconceptions due to the increasing criticism from predominately conservative evangelical circles (e.g. Don Carson, John MacArthur, David Wilkerson, Roger Oakland, Albert Mohler, R. Scott Smith, and Millard Erickson). Other emerging Christians had become increasingly frustrated with the term, feeling that it had lost meaning as it became more and more mainstream among Western Protestant churches. Conversations around church, mission and spirituality within post-modern and post-Christendom cultures continued, albeit under different names (such as organic church, missional church, simple church, Fresh Expressions, and similar). These developments are interesting and deserve academic inquiry in their own right, but it is not within the scope of this dissertation to address these developments post-2009 in greater detail. For some of the discussion on this matter, see for example Andrew Jones, "Emerging Church: Does The Hat Still Fit?" TallSkinnyKiwi, (29 November 2007): accessed 20 December, 2007, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2007/11/emerging-chur-1.html>, Andrew Jones, "Emerging Church: Use the Word or Dump it?" TallSkinnyKiwi, (8 August 2008): accessed 2 October, 2008, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2008/08/emerging-church.html>, Andrew Jones, "Emerging Church Movement (1989-2009)?" TallSkinnyKiwi, (30 December 2009): accessed 17 December, 2014, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2009/12/emerging-church-movement-1989---2009.html>, and Dan Kimball, "The Emerging Church: 5 years later - The definition has changed." Vintage Faith, (12 September 2008): accessed 2 October, 2008, http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2008/09/the-emerging-ch.html.

churches in Sweden is generated from the case study material.¹¹⁹ With an inductive research approach, observation and findings comes first, followed by theory that develops subsequently during the process as more data are gathered and interpreted. As the theory develops and new data is generated during the research process, an inductive strategy can resemble an *iterative* process, i.e. “a weaving back and forth between data and theory”.¹²⁰ This can be compared to a linear process moving from A, to B, and to C. John W. Creswell writes that, when adopting an inductive approach, “from the ground up”, sometimes

the research questions change in the middle of the study to reflect better the types of questions needed to understand the research problem. In response, the data collection strategy, planned before the study, needs to be modified to accompany the new questions.¹²¹

Second, a mixed method research “involves combining or integration of qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study.”¹²² Traditionally, researchers have tended to adopt either a quantitative or qualitative research strategy, viewing the two approaches as incompatible or at the very least very difficult to combine. Some argue that the two strategies represent opposing *epistemological* positions, i.e. positivist and interpretative, whilst other conceive the two strategies as two distinct and incompatible *paradigms* “in which epistemological assumptions, values, and methods are inextricably intertwined”.¹²³ Although I acknowledge that there are limitations to a mixed method research strategy, the differences can be exaggerated; in fact, it is a methodological approach that has gained increasing popularity in recent decades in the field of sociological research.¹²⁴ In this research project I adopt a *technical* approach to research strategy, which

gives greater prominence to the strengths of the data-collection and data-analysis techniques with which qualitative and quantitative research are each associated and sees these as capable of being fused. There is a recognition that quantitative and qualitative research are each connected with distinctive epistemological and ontological assumptions, but the connections are not viewed as fixed and ineluctable. Research methods are perceived, unlike in the epistemological version, as autonomous. A research method from one research strategy is viewed as capable of being pressed into the service of another.¹²⁵

Exactly how qualitative and quantitative techniques may serve each other differs from case to case. In one research project, for example, one method may have priority over the other, or they may carry equal weight. In this case, the primary and overarching research strategy is qualitative, and quantitative techniques serve as a secondary supporting role during the sampling phase during the empirical part of

¹¹⁹ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 26.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26, 36.

¹²¹ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, Loc 703.

¹²² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 14. This strategy is sometimes also referred to as “multi-strategy research”.

¹²³ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 629.

¹²⁴ C.f. Alan Bryman, *Methods.*, and John W. Creswell, *Research Design*.

¹²⁵ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 631.

the research work. The implication, then, is that the quantitative method used for the preliminary study (the sampling phase of the research) is not an expression of any epistemological assumptions of me as researcher, but serves from a technical point of view as means to gather data to assist the collection of more in-depth qualitative data later on in the research process. Bryman writes that sampling is “one of the chief ways in which quantitative research can prepare the ground for qualitative research ... [in] the selection of people to be interviewed.”¹²⁶ During analysis and interpretation, the quantitative survey data of potential expressions of emerging church were transformed into a qualitative narrative and used in comparative discussion and engagement with other data.¹²⁷

Although a mixed method is chosen, *the primary and overarching research strategy is qualitative in nature*. The qualitative approach corresponds with my interpretative and hermeneutic epistemological stance as a researcher, as well as being a suitable strategy given the nature of the dissertation itself; e.g. to generate new theory concerning emerging churches in Sweden, rather than to test a hypothesis. The Emerging Church is a complex sociological and religious phenomenon, embedded in the lives of the members of these groups, as well as their narratives, experiences, and convictions. In order to understand this phenomenon and how it can be expressed in a Swedish context, the data had to be rich and deep, and I as researcher had to come close to and become involved with the research subjects. One critique against the qualitative research strategy is that the scope of the findings is restricted, i.e. that it is difficult to make generalisations applicable to other settings. However, as Bryman points out,

a case study is not a sample drawn from a known population [and] the people who are interviewed in qualitative research are not meant to be representative of a population ... Instead, the findings of qualitative research are to generalise to theory rather than to a population.¹²⁸

This dissertation adopts an *analytical* approach to generalisation, where “it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalisations.”¹²⁹ For instance, the strengths of the generalisations made in this study relies on the triangulating of data between, on the one hand, the individual cases studied, and on the other hand by comparing and contrasting the cases with similar studies, as well as the wider international Emerging Church discourse. Issues relating to the analysis of case study data, as well as validity and reliability will be addressed in more detail in section 3.3 *Case Study Method*.

Third, the strategy is a multiphase method in the sense that it involves a number of distinct research phases (illustrated in Figure 2): 1) building a theoretical foundation by studying and defining the international Emerging Church conversation, 2) a structured quantitative survey of emerging churches in Sweden, and 3) a qualitative multiple case study of four emerging churches in Stockholm and Gothenburg, and 4)

¹²⁶ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 644. C.f. Claudia Von Zweck, “Hermeneutics,” 120ff.

¹²⁷ Claudia Von Zweck, “Hermeneutics,” 122.

¹²⁸ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 406.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 406.

a comparative and critical discussion of the case study data which generates new theory regarding emerging churches in Sweden. Following the hermeneutic epistemological framework presented in chapter 2, the research follows circular processes and iterative patterns, as it progresses from phase to phase, and the argument of the thesis unfolds and new understanding emerges. The hermeneutic approach is in that sense committed to *dialogue* between the researcher and the data for gaining understanding of the research subject. According to Von Zweck,

[Gadamer] suggested understanding could emerge only through deep immersion of the text, achieved through repeated readings and a reoccurring process of asking and answering questions of the information that explore new directions and possible answers.¹³⁰

The overall research strategy and process can be illustrating in the following way (figure 2 below):

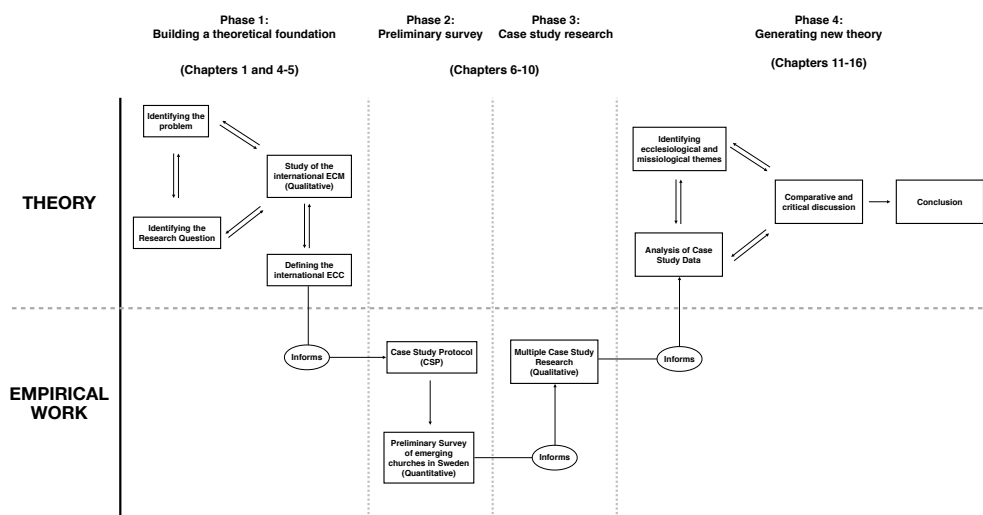


Figure 2. Illustration of the Multiphase Mixed Method Strategy used in the research project¹³¹

3.3 Case Study Method

This research project seeks to answer the question in what ways “emerging churches” in Sweden may contribute to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society. In order to achieve this, a multiple case study was conducted of four emerging churches in Stockholm and Gothenburg. By adopting a case study methodology, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, I was able to acquire the rich and deep data needed to understand how these communities function and understand themselves.

¹³⁰ Claudia Von Zweck, “Hermeneutics,” 119.

¹³¹ Adapted from John W. Creswell, *Research Design*, 221.

In order to identify their key ecclesiological and missiological characteristics I focussed on three specific categories: community, mission, and worship. The rationale behind focusing on these three ecclesiological dimensions of the Christian church are twofold: first, these categories have been used elsewhere when discussing the Emerging Church phenomenon,¹³² and second, together they are central constituent parts that make up the church, in which discipleship and spirituality are expressed¹³³. Together, then, they serve as a useful heuristic instrument that help us frame and understand the groups in a meaningful way. I also examined the background of each group. The data created a basis for further analysis and critical discussion in Part C.

The case studies seek to answer the following secondary research question: *What examples of emerging churches can be found in Sweden, and what can be learned about the groups which are part of this study in terms of ecclesiological and missiological characteristics?*

The case studies are in that sense fundamental for answering the main research question of the dissertation: *In what ways my “emerging churches” in Sweden contribute to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society?*

As addressed above (Section 3.2), the research strategy used here is a mixed methodology. The sampling phase utilises a quantitative strategy, where the data is transformed into qualitative narrative. The second phase, the collection of case study data, which makes up the majority of the Case Study research, utilises a qualitative methodology in order to acquire in-depth understanding and rich data of the emerging churches studied.

¹³² C.f. Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2004); Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging.*; and Robert Warren, *Being Human, Being Church: Spirituality and Mission in the Local Church* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995). See also Henk de Roest, “Ecclesiologies at the margin,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 252.

¹³³ C.f. Graham Hill, *Salt, Light and a City: Introducing Missional Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012); Graham Hill, “Shaping Missional Churches and Associations,” in *Servantship Sixteen Servants on the Four Movements of Radical Servantship*, ed. Graham Hill (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013). Kindle edition.; and Scott W. Sundquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). Some suggest (e.g. Graham Hill), that the church comprises of four dimensions: community, worship, mission, and discipleship. This is viable viewpoint, although I would argue that rather than being a separate category, discipleship (as well as spirituality) is expressed within the community, worship, and mission of the church, and are as such an integral part of and emerged out of the other three dimensions.

3.3.1 Case Study Research Process

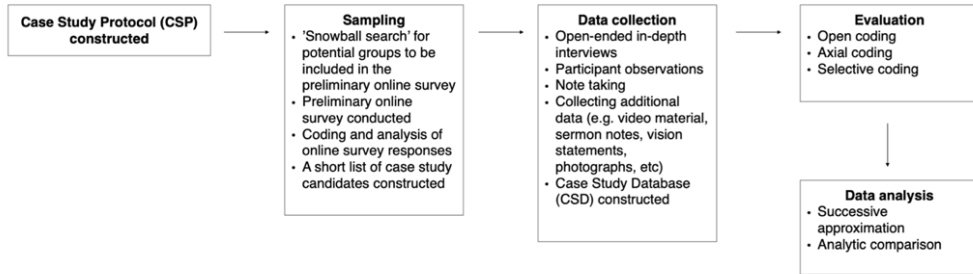


Figure 3. Case Study Research Process

3.3.2 Case Study Protocol (CSP)

As a first step in the gathering of empirical data a *Case Study Protocol (CSP)* was constructed (Figure 3). The CSP covers a number of important functions and it contains the *instruments*, as well as the *procedures* and the *general rules* to be followed when conducting the case study research. The CSP is intended to guide the investigator throughout the research process; ranging from identifying what preparatory work that needs to be done (e.g. contact with study subjects, what information is to be given, etc.), sampling procedures used, through to the collection, coding, and analysis of the data acquired. This is an important document in order to assure reliability and quality of the case study research, in particular when investigating multiple cases.¹³⁴ The CSP should include an overview of the case study project, field procedures, case study questions, as well as procedures for how the data will be coded and analysed.¹³⁵

3.3.3 Sampling

The sampling method chosen for this study is a *purposive sampling process*, which is “a non-probability form of sampling”. This implies specifically that the sampling of potential Christian communities studied is not conducted on a random basis, but in a strategic way “so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed.”¹³⁶ In other words, the purpose of the sampling process is to identify and select *specific kinds* of faith communities, i.e. groups that may be regarded as expressions of the Emerging Church phenomenon. The groups selected were selected precisely because they can be regarded as being *representative* or *exemplifying* cases.

¹³⁴ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 3rd Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 67.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³⁶ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 418.

Criteria

The *criteria* used for the selection of potential expressions of Emerging Church in Sweden were adapted from the criteria used in Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs book *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2006). Criteria added in this study are the four streams of the Emerging Church: Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monastic, and Missional. These four streams, or categories, are the result of the analysis of the international Emerging Church phenomenon in Chapter 5.

The following criteria was used in this study:

1. The group consider themselves Christian or Christ followers.
2. They consider themselves a congregation, church plant or mission (not merely a small group of an existing church).
3. They meet at least monthly (as a larger congregation, small groups, etc).
4. The community is not older than 15 years.
5. They are still meeting.
6. The community is located in Stockholm or Gothenburg.
7. The group is purposefully attempting to respond to the changing cultural context in Sweden, and is in this sense motivated by a fresh vision and a pioneering mind-set.
9. They express characteristics that resonate with one or more of the four streams of the Emerging Church:
 - a) Emergent Theology
 - b) Alternative Worship
 - c) Neo-Monastic
 - d) Missional

‘Snowball search’ for potential case study groups

A “snowball search”¹³⁷ was conducted asking question and gathering information in a number of different forums and contexts, searching for potential groups that could be included in the preliminary online survey; e.g. conducting searches on online

¹³⁷ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 33.

search engines, asking for information on specific online forums (e.g. *The Missional Sweden* Facebook group, my own personal blog¹³⁸, and similar), as well as surveying blogs on the internet that were addressing issues and themes relating to the ECC in a Swedish context. Part of this preliminary survey also included identifying and contacting key church leaders in Sweden who potentially could provide useful information. The question used was; “*Are you aware of any Christian community in Sweden that you would regard as ‘emerging church’?*”, or some slight variation to that phrase, as well as providing the criteria for the case study research (presented above).

Groups that in obvious ways did not fulfil the criteria were removed, and a list of potential cases was subsequently constructed. An introductory letter was written, which was used as a template for all initial contacts with potential groups. Contacts were made either via e-mail or telephone. Groups that were not interested, or that I was unable to get in contact with, were removed and a short list of potential cases was constructed.

Preliminary online survey

The next step was to construct an online questionnaire.¹³⁹ The recipient of the questionnaire was ideally the pastor, minister, or leader of the group. Some groups had no clear leadership structure; in those cases a person with sufficient knowledge of the group was asked to answer the questions (normally someone who had been part of the group for a long time, or had been one of the founders of the group).

Prior to conducting the online survey, a pilot survey was sent out where a pastor was asked to answer the questions and comment on the structure of the questionnaire, wording, grammar, and similar. The questionnaire was then revised, questions were edited for clarity, or removed if deemed superfluous.

Two additional churches were selected as control units; churches that could be regarded as representatives of the more traditional forms of church life and structure. These were selected in order to test the survey responses and improve the reliability of the data.

The preliminary online survey included 53 questions, relating to the four streams of the Emerging Church conversation examined in chapter 5: *Emergent Theology*, *Alternative Worship*, *Neo-Monastic*, and *Missional*. The questions ranged from practical considerations, such as how long the group had existed, and if they wished to be included in the case study research, to questions relating to community life, convictions, mission practices, worship, view of leadership, spirituality, etc. The questions were predominantly scaled questions (Ranging from Agree, Agree in part, Don't agree, Completely disagree), with the possibility to expand the answer in free form if need be. A few open-ended questions were also included in the survey.

Nine communities in total completed the survey; four groups located in Stockholm,

¹³⁸ <http://www.mattiasneve.wordpress.com>

¹³⁹ The website www.freeonlinesurveys.com was used for this purpose.

and five groups in Gothenburg.

Coding and Analysis of the survey responses

After closing the questionnaire, the data was then coded and analysed. For coding purposes each answer was given a value; 0 if the person disagreed or completely disagreed, 0,5 if the person agreed in part, and 1 if the person agreed. The person was also asked to briefly expand on the answer, e.g. provide examples as to how a certain value or conviction was expressed in the community. In some instances the clarifying answer could also affect the value given to the question; for instance, the respondent might have answered that they agreed or agreed in part to a specific question, but gave very little, or even contradicting, evidence as to how the practice, value, or conviction was expressed in the group when asked to expand on the answer. In such cases, the answer was designated a lower value (0,5 or 0). In some instances the clarifying answer might have revealed that the practice, value, or conviction indeed was clearly expressed in the group, although the respondent had answered that they disagreed or agreed in part to the question. In such cases the specific question was designated a higher value (0,5 or 1). During the analysis of the questionnaire data it became evident that the clarifying answers were significant in interpreting and understanding how the respondent had understood the questions and the survey as a whole.

The data was subsequently entered into an Excel sheet, and graphs were produced for each group. The graphs showed that there were clear differences as to how the potential case study units had answered (i.e. groups that potentially could be defined as 'emerging churches'), compared to the control churches (i.e. traditional forms of church).

Figure 4 shows the mean average of survey responses from control units (traditional forms of church):

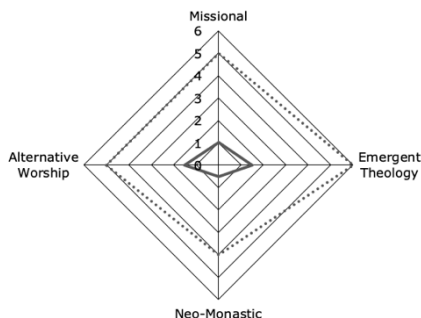


Figure 4. Visual presentation of the mean average of survey responses from the control churches (Dotted line indicates maximum)

Figure 5 shows mean average of survey responses from potential case study

candidates (i.e. groups that potentially could be defined as emerging churches):

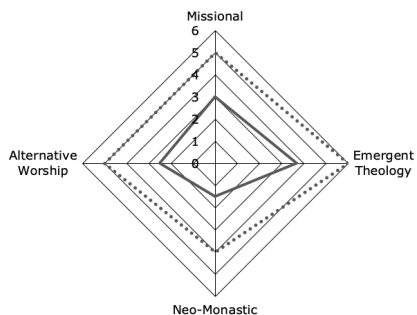


Figure 5. Visual presentation of the mean average of survey responses from potential case study candidates (Dotted line indicates maximum)

Figure 6 (below) shows the visual presentation of survey responses from selected groups to participate in the study:

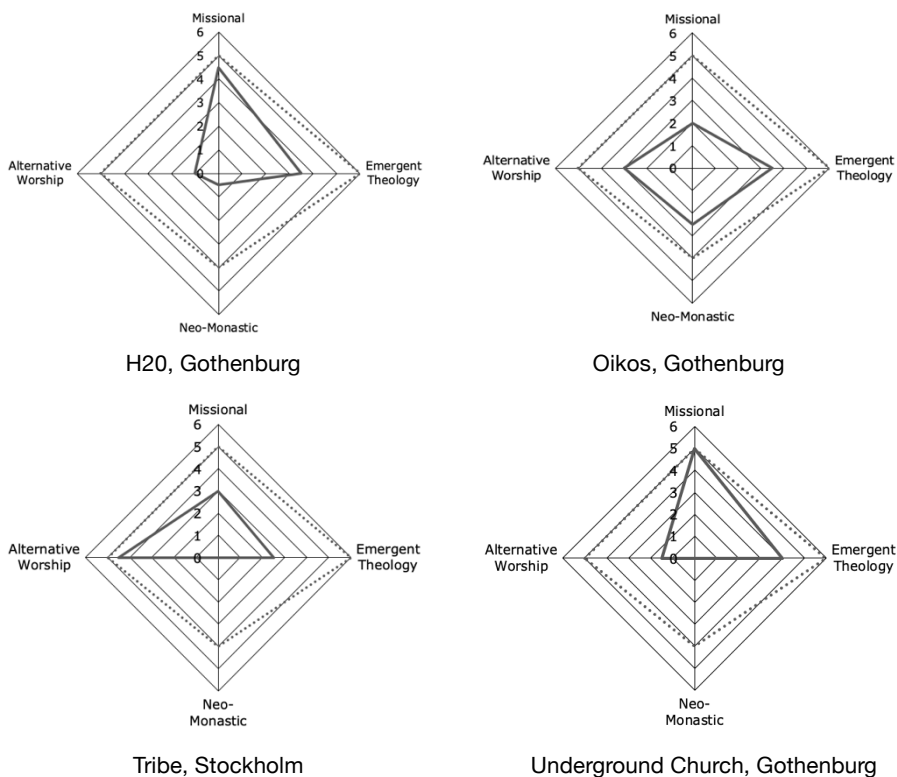


Figure 6. Visual presentation of the survey responses from the groups selected for this study: H2O, Oikos, Tribe, and Underground Church (Dotted line indicates maximum)

Although it is not possible to draw any definite conclusions from this exercise, it provided me with a solution to translate quantitative and qualitative data into visual representations of the survey results. By doing this I was able to compare and contrast each group visually, as well as establish where each group was leaning in terms of the four streams of Emerging Church (i.e. the Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monastic, and Missional streams, for in-depth discussion regarding these themes, see chapter 5). The initial analysis indicated that there were noticeable differences between how the control units answered the survey (representing more traditional forms of church), compared with the groups that were short listed as potential case study candidates (representing churches that potentially could be defined as emerging churches).

A summary was compiled of the results for each group, including general information about geographical location, demographic context, contact information, when and how the group was gathering, as well as notes specifically relating to the four streams Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monastic, and Missional.

Four groups were selected to be part of the study: Tribe (Stockholm), and 3 groups based in and around Gothenburg: Oikos, H2O, and Underground Church. The groups were chosen because they fulfilled the criteria of the study and expressed different aspects of the ECC: H2O and Underground Church indicated a strong missional emphasis, Tribe expressed characteristics that resonated with the Alternative Worship stream of emerging Christianity, and Oikos was a self-identified neo-monastic community. At this stage all four groups expressed to a varying degree viewpoints that resonated with the Emergent Theological stream.¹⁴⁰ Each group was then contacted and arrangements were made to conduct interviews and collect data.

3.3.4 Data Collection

An element of flexibility in the case study design has to be maintained as far as data collection procedures are concerned, as qualitative researchers remain open to the unexpected.¹⁴¹ In that sense, the investigator ought to strive to follow the procedures detailed in the CSP as far as possible, but the qualitative researcher is also open to investigate new leads and possibilities to acquire new data on the field that was not anticipated when the case study design originally was crafted. Also, procedures might also need to be adjusted during the data collection phase, as some of the methods may prove less useful in one case, and more useful in other cases. For instance, as the data collection work began, I found that there were few documents (e.g. vision statements, minutes from meetings, sermons scripts, etc) available. On the other hand, some of the groups had produced video material presenting aspects of their work and community life, which provided valuable data. Similarly, the nature

¹⁴⁰ The analysis of the interview material and case study data did, however, reveal that this stream was not as clearly expressed in Tribe as the preliminary indicated. See discussion in chapter 15 for more details.

¹⁴¹ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 173, 177 and 481.

of the gatherings and communal activities differed somewhat between the groups; some groups provided useful and rich data through participant observation, whilst this was not the case for other groups. The main volume of data gathered in this study was collected through open-ended in-depth interviews.

Consent for the collection of data

At the time the case studies were conducted all interview participants were asked to give verbal consent to be included in the case study data for this research project. All participants gave verbal consent for the interviews to be recorded, transcribed and referred to in the thesis. Participants gave verbal consent to the data being stored for the purposes of the thesis, also for their names to be used. However, I determined to use unidentifiable data to reduce unnecessary use of personal information in the text.

Subsequent to the completion of data collection, laws regarding the collection and storage of personal data have become significantly more restrictive and documentation requirements of consent have also been implemented. These requirements were not in place at the time of the case study research and data collection. For details regarding how the data was stored, see “Case Study Database” below.

Case study questions

Before the collection of data began, a list of case study questions was compiled and categorised thematically: General and background questions, Community, Mission, and Worship.¹⁴² The case study questions serve as a reminder to the researcher as to what information needs to be collected and why. These questions are posed to the investigator, not to the people participating in the case studies. For a complete list of case study questions, see Appendix B: Case Study Questions.

Interviews

Interviews are, alongside observations, one of the most important methods for collecting data when conducting case studies. Due to the nature of case study research the interviews usually appear to be guided conversation rather than structured queries; “In other words, although you will be pursuing a consistent line of inquiry, your actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid.”¹⁴³ The primary interview method for this study were in-depth interviews (one focused interview was conducted with the team leader of H2O for clarifying purposes).¹⁴⁴ The interviews were recorded and digitally stored in mp3-format for future transcription, coding and analysis. Nine in-depth interviews in total were

¹⁴² For the rationale behind these categories, see the introduction to Section 3.3.

¹⁴³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 89.

¹⁴⁴ At one point in the research it came to my attention that H2O had made some changes in their way of working and function as a group, which warranted an additional interview to clarify questions regarding these changes.

conducted between September 2010 and May 2011.

a) Open-ended in-depth interview

For each group I conducted two open-ended in-depth interviews: one interview with the leader / pastor / minister of the group (or a person who had an informal leadership role in the group). In addition, a group interview was also conducted, ranging from two to six people. In one instance a follow up focused interview was warranted.

The contact person for each group was involved in the selection process of interview participants. The following criteria were used:

- *Length of participation in the group:* preferably the person had been part of the community from the start or from an early onset.
- *Function:* The respondent did not necessarily need to be the main leader, pastor or minister of the group, but needed to have a function in the group that ensured in-depth knowledge of its history, formative values and practices.
- *Availability:* The person had to be able to set aside a sufficient amount of time for the interview. If not, a focused interview may be more appropriate, and a different respondent should be selected for the in-depth interview.

The nature of the open-ended interview reflects what Neuman refers to as a “typical field interview”:

1. The interview may be picked up at a later point.
2. The questions and the order in which they are asked are tailored to specific people and situations.
3. The interviewer shows interest in responses and encourages elaboration.
4. It is like a friendly conversational exchange, but with more interviewer questions.
5. It is interspersed with jokes, asides, stories, diversions, and anecdotes, which are recorded.
6. Open ended questions are common, and probes are frequent.
7. The interviewer and participant both set the pace and affect the direction of the interview.
8. The social context of the interview is noted and is important for interpreting the

meaning of responses.

9. The interviewer adjusts to the member's norms and language usage.¹⁴⁵

b) Focused interview

In one case (H2O, Gothenburg), a focused interview was warranted, in addition to the in-depth interviews. A focused interview implies that the respondent is interviewed for a short period of time – in this case approximately one hour. “The interview may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol.”¹⁴⁶ The main purpose of a focused interviews is to corroborate data that has emerged through the in-depth interview, focused group interviews, document collection, or participant observation.

The person interviewed ought to be in such a position within the community that they are able to provide in-depth knowledge into the group's history, formative values, and its practice.

Participant observation

Alongside the interview, observation is at the heart of field research, with the purpose “to probe deeply and analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establish generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belong.”¹⁴⁷ Participant observation implies a special mode of observation in which the researcher is not merely a passive observer, instead “you may assume a variety of roles within a case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied.”¹⁴⁸

There are several possible situations in which participant observation may be suitable, depending on what will be studied. For the purpose of this study, I visited worship services, community meals, discussion groups, and similar meeting events and activities. Besides the general advantages of observation in field research, such as being able to collect data of non-verbal behaviour, there are several benefits to conducting participant observatory field research, for example:

- One may be able to gain access to events or groups that are otherwise inaccessible to scientific investigation.
- One is able to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone from the “inside” of the context that is studied, rather than external to it.
- There are, however, potential problems with this method of acquiring data in

¹⁴⁵ Adapted from W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 463.

¹⁴⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 90.

¹⁴⁷ Louis Cohen, and Lawrence Manion, *Research Methods in Education, 4th Edition* (London: Routledge, 1998), 106.

¹⁴⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 93-94.

field research, relating to potential bias of the researcher:

- Due to the decreased ability to work as an external observer the researcher may at times assume positions or advocacy roles contrary to the interests of good scientific practice.
- It is common that the researcher becomes overly supportive of the group or organisation being studied.
- The participant role may require too my much attention relative to the observer role, resulting in the researcher not having enough time to take notes or raise questions about the event from different perspectives.
- The social group or organisation may be physically dispersed and the researcher may find it difficult to be at the right place at the right time.¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the problems aside, there are significant benefits in conducting participant observation, as the method is likely to produce rich empirical data. The opportunity to conduct observational studies varied depending on the group. There were also variations in the quality of the data acquired. For instance, one issue was geographical distance; three of the four groups were located in Gothenburg, and as I lived in Stockholm, it was not always possible to attend all gatherings that could have provided valuable data. Some events and gatherings were also so infrequent that they did not coincide with the time period the case studies were conducted. It also became clear that the nature of the gatherings and events varied considerably for each group; e.g. some groups met primarily ad hoc and in informal settings, whilst for other groups the meetings were more organised (e.g. weekly worship gatherings, discussions groups, and similar). With that being said, the observational studies did generate valuable *complementary* data to the interviews, and it proved beneficial to spend time in each context and meet the people who were part of the communities. There are experiential aspects that are difficult to communicate via interviews, e.g. atmosphere, behaviour, the feel of the geographical setting, etc.

Additional data

Some E-mail correspondence was done in order to clarify issues or corroborate data, which was stored in the case study database. Additional data also included photographs taken on location, as well as video film material (in the case of H2O, as well as Underground Church).

Notes

Taking notes is an important part of the case study process, and the researcher ought to make this a frequent and regular habit, as “full field notes are the brick and mortar of field research.”¹⁵⁰ The notes taken for this study ranged from jotted notes (short

¹⁴⁹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 94, 96.

¹⁵⁰ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 4th Edition* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 363.

and temporary notes written in the field), direct observational notes (basic form of notes written immediately after leaving the field), analytical notes (notes of ideas, hypotheses, conjecture, and possible new concepts that should be explored furthered), and interview notes (notes taken during the interviews).¹⁵¹

Case Study Database

A Case Study Database (CSD) was constructed, which included both electronic and physical data. As far as possible, all documents and notes acquired during the case studies were scanned and stored digitally. The case study data was at first stored on a password protected computer in password protected folders for easy access during evaluation and analysis of the data. Once the case study material had been analysed, personal information that could be erased was deleted and the data was stored in a password protected cloud storage.¹⁵² The CSD serves a twofold purpose: to structure the data acquired in the field in such a way that aids the coding and analysis process, and to store the raw data in such a way that it is available for independent investigation. The second purpose is of importance as the CSD “increases markedly the reliability of the entire case study.”¹⁵³ For each group the following data were stored digitally in separate folders:

- Notes
- Machine recordings of interviews
- Transcription of interviews
- Documents
- Copies of email correspondence
- Photographs
- Video films

3.3.5 Evaluation

Data Coding

After collecting the data, the interviews were transcribed and translated (when needed) from Swedish to English. The data was then coded in preparation for analysis. For this purpose the computer software *NVivo* was used. In qualitative research the meaning and role of data coding implies organising “the raw data into conceptual categories and [creating] themes or concepts” which the researcher then uses during the analysis stage.¹⁵⁴ The aim is to avoid entanglement in the details of the raw data, encourage higher thinking and move towards theory and generalisation. Coding in this sense involves two simultaneous processes: mechanical

¹⁵¹ C.f. W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 457, 459.

¹⁵² Not all personal data was erased; for instance, personal data from websites, newspapers, photos, and similar were kept, and the interview recordings contained some personal data.

¹⁵³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 102.

¹⁵⁴ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 480.

data reduction, and analytic categorisation of the data into themes. The purpose is to impose order on the data.

Three methods of coding were used:

a) Open coding

A list of themes was constructed based on key themes that had emerged in the study of the wider ECC (presented in chapters 4 and 5). The list was subsequently expended as new themes emerged during the Open Coding process. In this initial phase it is usual the researcher “locate themes and assign initial codes in your first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories.”¹⁵⁵ It involves slowly reading field notes, or other data, looking for key terms, central people, significant events, or themes. These themes may be inferred from the list of case study questions (See Appendix B: Case Study Questions), or new themes that emerge during the coding process. Newman writes that open coding brings

themes to the surface from deep inside the data. The themes are a low level of abstraction and come from the researcher’s initial research question, concepts in the literature, terms used by members in the social setting, or new thoughts stimulated by immersion in the data.¹⁵⁶

b) Axial Coding

In the second phase of the coding process the researcher starts with an organised set of initial codes and themes (compiled during the Open coding phase). At this stage the focus is on the list of themes, rather than on the data itself. Neuman writes,

Additional codes or new ideas may emerge during this pass, and the researcher notes them; but his or her primary task is to review and examine initial codes. He or she moves toward organising ideas or themes and identifies the axis of key concepts in the analysis.¹⁵⁷

The researcher asks questions of the data concerning causes and consequences, conditions, patterns, strategies and processes, and looks for categories that cluster together. It is also of interest to assess whether or not particular categories may be divided into sub-dimensions or subcategories, or merge together into more general ones. Neuman continues,

Axial coding not only stimulates thinking about linkages between concepts or themes, but it also raises new questions. It can suggest dropping some themes or examine others in more depth. In addition, it reinforces the connection between evidence and concepts.¹⁵⁸

c) Selective Coding

¹⁵⁵ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 481.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 481.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 483.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 484.

At this stage the researcher has identified the major themes found in the material and is now ready to selectively scan data and previous codes with the intention to “look selectively for cases that illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts after most or all data collection is complete.”¹⁵⁹ During this process the major themes and concepts are guiding the researcher’s queries and specific themes identified in the earlier coding process are reorganised.

3.3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of data is divided into three steps:

1. Analysis of each case separately.
2. Comparative analysis between the cases.
3. Comparative analysis between the cases and the wider Emerging Church conversation.

Successive Approximation

The overall analytical process may be described as ‘successive approximation’, which implies “repeated iterations or cycling through steps, moving toward a final analysis.”¹⁶⁰ The process is similar to the coding process described above, as “over time, or after several iterations, a researcher moves from vague ideas and concrete details in the data toward a comprehensive analysis with generalisations.”¹⁶¹ The process is referred to as successive approximation “because the modified concepts and the model approximate the full evidence and are modified over and over to become successively more accurate.”¹⁶²

Analytic Comparison

This method refers to stages 2 and 3 in the analytical process, and may be divided into two subcategories:

a) Method of Agreement

Here the researcher focuses on what is common across cases, as well as what is different across the cases and the ECC.

b) Method of Difference

Here the researcher aims to identify differences between the cases, as well as what is common across the cases and the ECC.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Research Methods* (2011), 489.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

3.3.7 Quality Considerations

This section seeks to address the quality considerations of concern for the case studies that were part of this research project. Although the dissertation is not a social scientific treatise, but a theological and missional inquiry, it still relies on social scientific research methodology for the gathering and analysis of data. Social scientific quality considerations are, therefore, of interest here.

There are, generally, certain practices that ensures the quality of the research process: Documentation, the use of a research database (thematic cataloguing and storage of data; e.g. all data concerned with the ECC in the United Kingdom were stored in a separate folder, with subfolders structured according to specific themes, kind of data, etc). The ability to provide a detailed research process is an additional factor that ensures quality of the research (See Section 3.2 for details).

Robert K. Yin presents four tests that are common to all social scientific methods:¹⁶³ Construct validity (also referred to as measurement validity), i.e. does the measure that is devised really reflect the concept it is supposed to be denoting?;¹⁶⁴ Internal validity, i.e. establishing causal relationships where certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions (only applies to explanatory studies); External validity, i.e. can a study can be generalised beyond the specific research context?; and Reliability, i.e. can the study be repeated, such as the data collection procedures, with the same results? The quality considerations of this thesis are illustrated in Figure 7:

| TYPE OF TEST | METHOD USED | PHASE OF RESEARCH |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Construct validity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple sources of evidence were used, i.e. interviews, participant observation, document analysis, e-mail correspondence, and video materials. Control units were used The key informants were asked to review the draft case study report. A chain of evidence was established (See figure below). | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection Data collection Composition Data collection |
| External validity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple cases were used in the study, applying replication logic. Comparative discussion between the cases was conducted. Comparative discussion with the wider ECM phenomenon was conducted. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Research design Data analysis Data analysis |
| Reliability | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A Case Study Protocol was used for the collection of data. A case study database was created for the storage of data. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection Data collection |

Figure 7. Test of validity and reliability of the Case Study Design¹⁶⁵

The “chain of evidence” for the case study research can be illustrated in following

¹⁶³ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 34.

¹⁶⁴ C.f. Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 47.

¹⁶⁵ Adapted from Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 34. (Internal validity has been omitted as it only applies to explanatory studies.)

way (Figure 8):

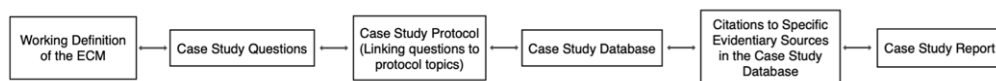


Figure 8. Illustration of the chain of evidence for the case study research conducted in this dissertation¹⁶⁶

3.4 Sources

There are primarily two categories of sources used in this thesis for the study of the wider ECC: first, primary sources in the form of books, blogs, journals, and articles written by participants in the Emerging Church discourse, or people closely related to the conversation with an in-depth knowledge about emerging Christianity; and second, ethnographic and sociological studies, as well as academic treatises that explore emerging churches from the perspectives of theology, ecclesiology, and missiology.

Online forums and communities on the internet played a significant role for the Emerging Church discourse and its development as an international grassroots phenomenon. In particular blogging, as it provided a free, decentralised, and interactive communication medium that anyone could use, outside or not depending on existing ecclesial structures and hierarchies.¹⁶⁷ Some of the more influential blogs that can be mentioned here which have provided valuable data for this research include *TallSkinnyKiwi*¹⁶⁸ (by Andrew Jones, one of the most widely read blogs within the ECC), *Vintage Faith*¹⁶⁹ (by Dan Kimball, pastor and founder of Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, California), and *Jesus Creed*¹⁷⁰ (by Scot McKnight, currently Professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, with an in-depth knowledge and experience of the ECC in North America). Other online forums that have provided valuable primary data include *emergingchurch.info*¹⁷¹, and *The Next Wave Magazine*¹⁷². Also, the period between 1998 and 2008 was a particular prolific time for the ECC in terms of publication of books that managed to articulate the vision and theological concerns of emerging Christianity. Here authors and activists such as Brian D. McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Mark Driscoll, and Dan Kimball can be mentioned from a North American context. Significant contributions from the United Kingdom include authors such as Doug Gay, Pete Rollins, Dave Tomlinson, Michael Moynagh, Kester Brewing, Jonny Baker, and Ian Mobsby, and from Australia, Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost.

The secondary category includes research into emerging Christianity by James S. Bielo (Professor at Miami University, Ohio, who specialises in the anthropology of

¹⁶⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 106.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 24.

¹⁶⁸ <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com>

¹⁶⁹ <http://www.dankimball.com>

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.jesuscreed.org>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.emergingchurch.info>

¹⁷² <http://the-next-wave.org>

Christianity and American religion), Gerardo Marti (Professor at Davidson College, North Carolina, who specialises in religious innovation, identity, and change), Gladys Ganiel (Sociologist at Queen's University Belfast, whose research include evangelicalism and the emerging church), Darren Cronshaw (Professor at Sydney College of Divinity, who has researched emerging churches in Australia), and Robert Doornenbal (whose doctoral dissertation on the ECC, missional leadership, and its relevance to theological education has proven informative to this research project). A third, less defined category, may be mentioned as well, which include e-mail correspondence, MP3's and similar audio files (e.g. podcasts, sermons, conference talks, etc), as well as video material available online. The data has been stored digitally in the research data base.

3.5 Content of Chapters

The dissertation is divided into three parts and consists of sixteen chapters: one introductory chapter, two chapters that address methodological questions, twelve chapters that make up the main body of the thesis - Part A (chapters 4-5), Part B (chapters 6-10), and Part C (chapters 11-15) - and a concluding and final chapter that provides a summary of the dissertation as well as outlining the main observations and conclusions from the study.

Part A - Theoretical perspective: Mapping the Emerging Church Conversation, introduces the reader to the Emerging Church discourse and provides a theoretical foundation to the empirical study of emerging churches in Sweden. The chapters seek to answer two of the secondary research questions: *What is the background of the wider Emerging Church conversation?* (Chapter 4), and, *What are the main characteristics of the wider Emerging Church conversation?* (Chapter 5).

Chapter 4 explores the ECC in the light of some of the wider developments within evangelical Protestant church tradition in the latter part of the 20th century and around the turn of the millennium, by examining three specific contexts: the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. The chapter outlines some of the main concerns of emerging Christianity and introduces the reader to key concepts that inform the conversation.

Chapter 5 introduces the idea that the Emerging Church phenomenon can be understood as an intersection of four overlapping streams that both share characteristics as well as bring their own unique flavours and perspectives into the conversation: *The Emergent Theological Stream*, *The Neo-Monastic Stream*, *The Alternative Worship Stream*, and *The Missional Stream*. From the discussion in this chapter we can deduce that any of the emerging churches that will be selected for this study express the concerns and characteristics of one or several of the streams presented here. The four themes, then, are of methodological importance, as they serve as criterion for the selection of which groups were to be included in this study.

Part B - Empirical Work: An exploration of emerging churches in Sweden, presents the findings of the case study research and seeks to answer the third of the secondary research questions: *What examples of emerging churches can be found in Sweden, and what can be learned about the groups which are part of this study regarding their backgrounds, community life, missionary practices, and communal worship?* The material presented in this part serve as basis for the critical discussion in Part C.

Chapter 6 serves as an introductory chapter to Part B and briefly explores some of the developments in the church in Sweden since the 1990's that resonate with the Emerging Church ethos: *Brommadiologen* [The Bromma Dialogue], which has provided creative meeting spaces for the New Age, the church, and the Twelve Step movement; neo-monastic communities; simple churches; and *Nya sätt att vara kyrka* [New ways of being church], a movement within the Church of Sweden influenced by the Fresh Expressions of Church network in the United Kingdom.

Chapters 7 to 10 presents the findings of the case study research of the four emerging churches which are part of this study: Oikos, H2O and Underground Church (all three groups are located in Gothenburg), and Tribe (Stockholm). Each group is introduced by examining four areas: background, community, mission, and worship.

Part C - Critical discussion: Ecclesiological and Missiological Considerations, critical analyses of the case study material from the perspectives of ecclesiology and missiology. The discussion presented in this part seeks to answer the fourth of the secondary research questions: *What shared ecclesiological and missiological themes may be identified from the emerging churches which are part of this study?*

Chapter 11 explores different typologies of emerging churches, and presents a synthesis of the *Stetzer-McKnight Typology* - which focuses on the emerging churches' engagement with post-modern culture and their relationship to evangelical Protestant tradition - and the four streams of the Emerging Church, discussed in chapter 5.

Chapter 12 examines the case study material from the perspective of key ecclesiological characteristics. In the chapter I argue that, differences aside, the groups seem to share a number of convictions that shape their ecclesial hermeneutic: *Relational ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion*, as well as *Innovation and deconstruction*. I also argue that Wittgenstein's concept of *family resemblance* can provide us with an analytical framework to better understand the diverse nature of emerging churches. The chapter also addresses four issues of particular concern in the case study material: *Blurring of boundaries, Organisational weaknesses, Sustainability and longevity*, as well as a *Lack of diversity*.

In this study I surmise that the ecclesiological convictions of emerging churches inform their missionary posture in important ways. The subsequent three chapters, therefore, examines three missiological themes that arise from the case study material: Mission as a witnessing presence (Chapter 13), Mission as innovation (Chapter 14), and Mission as the pursuit of proximity (Chapter 15).

Chapter 13 explores the issues of witnessing and evangelism in contemporary society and examines in what ways we may learn from emerging churches in these

areas. The chapter also introduces the idea of evangelism as ‘midwifery’, where the Christian serve a maieutic function in the lives of non-Christians; listening and asking questions, rather than primarily communicating knowledge or providing ready answers.

Chapter 14 discusses Sweden as a ‘mission field’ and the need for innovation and pioneering mission. From the case study material I conclude that contextualisation seems to be one of the most significant ways that emerging churches innovate and deconstruct traditional forms and practices. I also discuss the function that emerging churches may serve as incubators for innovation and experimentation to traditional churches and established denominations, and how this calls the church to examine its scorecard for what constitutes as success in mission in contemporary society.

In this study I come to the conclusion that emerging churches, rather than establishing absolute boundaries between the church and society, value authenticity, presence and a *pursuit of proximity* that can be expressed in a number of ways: by emphasising the need for genuine and authentic everyday relationships (relational proximity), by valuing local presence (geographical proximity), as well as contextually appropriate forms of church and mission (cultural proximity). From this observation chapter 15 explores the pursuit of cultural proximity and the contextual methods practiced by the emerging churches which are part of this study. I also critically discuss the theoretical framework that Stephen Bevans introduces in *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002). A model for contextual mission is presented: A critical emerging approach to contextualisation. This model is a synthesis of Paul G. Hiebert’s critical contextualisation, and the hermeneutical approach of emerging churches.

Chapter 16 concludes the dissertation by providing a summary of the observations, arguments, and findings of this study, and suggestions for future research.

PART A. Theoretical perspective: Mapping the Emerging Church conversation

It is time to listen carefully. Can you hear the grind and groan as the tectonic plates of our culture shift? We live on the fault lines of a widespread cultural change. Institutions are in decline. Ancient spiritualities have re-emerged. World music has collided with pop music. The center looks out to the edge. In the midst of all this change, innovative expressions of church and worship are emerging across the globe.
- Steve Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church?* (2005)

So, the emerging church is about a re-imagining; re-imagining our preaching, our evangelism, and our worship services. A re-imagining of new types of churches and an opportunity to be rethinking all we do because we recognize that the next generation is at stake if we don't.
- Dan Kimball, Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz

Introduction to Part A

The purpose of the following two chapters (chapters 4 and 5) is to place our study of emerging churches in Sweden within an international perspective and identify some of the main characteristics of the ECC. These chapters, then, seek to answer two of the secondary research questions: *What is the background of the wider Emerging Church conversation?*, and *What are the main characteristics of the wider Emerging Church conversation?*

It is my understanding that what we can observe in Sweden in terms of new and emerging expressions of church has not appeared in a vacuum but are to some extent connected to and either directly or indirectly influenced by the developments in evangelical Protestant church culture that have occurred in recent decades in the West. Understanding the wider occurrences within emerging Christianity help us to better grasp and analyse the local expressions of emerging churches that we can observe in the Swedish context. Chapter 4 will introduce the ECC by outlining some of the developments in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States from the mid-1980's onwards. In chapter 5 I will present a working definition of the phenomenon, where I argue that the ECC may be understood as a discourse within primarily Western evangelical Protestantism stimulated by the intersection of four distinctive 'streams': Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monasticism, and the Missional movement. The presentation of the ECC in this chapter is instrumental to this thesis as it provides criteria for the selection of Christian communities part of the case study research presented in Part B (For details, see discussion on methodology in Section 3.3).

Robert Doornenbal notes that the grassroots character of the ECC makes it difficult to define the boundaries of the phenomenon.¹⁷³ Researching an amorphous phenomenon such as the Emerging Church movement, then, does not come without its share of challenges. For instance, in their sociological study Geraldo Marti and Gladys Ganiel note a number of issues when defining the movement: First, the people and groups associated with Emerging Church resist definition; second, it constantly evolves and develops; third, the groups that claim the label are diverse; and fourth, Emerging Christians prefer to call it a conversation that embraces irony and contradictions.¹⁷⁴ James Bielo similarly writes,

It is a Christian movement of cultural critique defined by multiple points of dialogue ... Ultimately, Emerging Christianity is about the creation of a new Christian identity ... One whose precise contours and boundaries has yet to be finalized, and whose appeal has yet to be measured."¹⁷⁵

With no clear centre and porous edges any definition of the ECC evidently carries some tentative characteristics. My aim here is to present a definition that is both dynamic enough to mirror the complex nature of the movement *and* specific enough to say something meaningful on the subject. In 2004 Stuart Murray aptly wrote,

Attempting to categorise the emerging church at this stage is like trying to nail jelly on a wall. The categories keep shifting as stories change, groups begin and evolve, and as our interpretation develops. But some attempt to describe and reflect is vital if we are to learn from what is happening.¹⁷⁶

Murray's observation was written more than a decade ago, and despite the apparent difficulties we may now very well be in a position to have sufficient perspective to define the Emerging Church in more definite categories. For this purpose I rely for these two chapters on a number of different sources: Insider accounts on blogs and other online forums have provided valuable material,¹⁷⁷ together with books written by authors and activists that in one way or another have been involved in the ECC to such an extent that they have gained in-depth understanding of the subject at hand.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church - Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) Kindle edition, 5; C.f. Tony Jones, *The Church is Flat: The relational ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis: The JoPa Group, 2011), 4.

¹⁷⁵ James S. Bielo, "'Emerging Church' in America: Notes on the interaction of Christianities," *Religion* 39 (2009), 229.

¹⁷⁶ Stuart Murray, quoted in Michael Moynagh, *emergingchurch.intro* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2004), 14.

¹⁷⁷ This includes blogs such as *TallSkinnyKiwi* (By Andrew Jones, one of the most influential and widely read bloggers within the Emerging Church conversation; <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com>), *Vintage Faith* (<http://www.dankimball.com>), *Jesus Creed* (<http://www.jesuscreed.org>), *Backyard Missionary* (<http://www.backyardmissionary.com>), *Emergent Kiwi* (<http://www.emergentkiwi.org.nz>), Jonny Baker's blog (<http://jonnybaker.blogspot.com>, and later <https://jonnybaker.blogs.com>), *Subversive influence* (<http://subversiveinfluence.com>), *The Blind Beggar* (<http://blindbeggar.org>), and *Out of Ur* (<http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur>), *The Bolg Blog* (<http://thebolgblog.typepad.com>), as well as online forums such as *emergingchurch.info* (<http://www.emergingchurch.info>), *The Ooze* (<http://www.theooze.com>), *Small fire* (<http://www.smallfire.org>), and *The Next Wave Magazine* (<http://the-next-wave.org>).

¹⁷⁸ Authors such as Brian D. McLaren (US), Doug Pagitt (US), Tony Jones (US), Mark Driscoll (US), Dan Kimball (US), Tom Sine (US), Pete Rollins (UK), Dave Tomlinson (UK), Michael Moynagh (UK), Kester Brewing (UK), Jonny Baker (UK), Ian Mobsby (UK), Alan Hirsch (AU), Michael Frost (AU), Mike Riddell

Alongside contributions from insider voices, there are a number of studies and academic sources that have provided rich and valuable material; e.g. Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs' widely read book *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005), Doug Gay's account of the emerging churches and alternative worship communities in the United Kingdom in *Remixing the Church - Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology* (2011), Robert Doornenbal's discussion of the ECC and leadership formation in *Crossroads* (2012), James Bielo's writings on Emerging Christianity from a North American perspective, Darren Cronshaw's study *The Shaping of Things Now: Mission and Innovation in Four Emerging Churches in Melbourne* (2008), as well as Geraldo Marti and Gladys Ganiel sociological research presented in *The Deconstructed Church - Understanding Emerging Christianity* (2014).¹⁷⁹

(NZ), and Steve Taylor (NZ) can be mentioned here.

¹⁷⁹ For a more detailed discussion on sources, see Section 3.4.

Chapter 4. Introducing the Emerging Church

If we indeed are in the midst of experiencing a cultural earthquake in Western societies that has given rise to a movement of new and innovative expressions of Christian communities during the last decades, then perhaps the autumn of 1985 in Sheffield, England, can be viewed as the epicentre. At that time St. Thomas Crookes Anglican Church had invited John Wimber, the late leader of the Vineyard movement, to hold a series of renewal and healing meetings. In the aftermath of these meetings St Thomas Crookes invited a group of young Christians to create a church service at 9.00 pm on Sunday nights, with the mission to connect with those the church struggled to reach, the 18-30 year-olds. The service was named *The Nine O'clock Service* (NOS), and Gibbs and Bolger write:

They combined the feel of a nightclub with the charismatic theology they had learned from Wimber. They conducted worship and teaching and then invited the Holy Spirit to fall. However, the Sheffield team's style of music was more harshly urban than the suburban soft rock typical of the Vineyard at the time.¹⁸⁰

Gibbs and Bolger states that although NOS may not be viewed as stemming from the Vineyard movement, "the Wimber mission did ... help them realize that they could continue to work in an existing church setting and be authentic to the culture in which they were working and living."¹⁸¹

They developed a Eucharistic worship service using forms indigenous to club culture, and by the end of 1986 the group had grown to around 150 participants, including people from both unchurched backgrounds as well as evangelical Christians disillusioned with traditional forms of church. Over the next two years NOS created two kinds of spaces for worship; one that was centred around the Eucharist, incorporating symbols and multimedia, while the second focused on teaching utilising elements from dance culture with dance music and high tech sound and video technology.¹⁸²

NOS stressed a deep commitment to both discipleship and to the current dance culture, as

any clubber was welcome; however, non-clubbers were visited by a pastor who determined if they were right for NOS. The pastor explained the high cost of joining in terms of a commitment to community, simplicity, and financial giving. In addition, each member needed to listen to dance music, go clubbing, and read club-culture magazines. A NOS stylist helped them buy clothes and adopt hairstyles that were indigenous to club culture.¹⁸³

Although the project tragically shipwrecked in 1995 due to a scandal that made the

¹⁸⁰ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 82-83.

¹⁸¹ Paul Roberts (Resonance, Bristol, UK), quoted in Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

¹⁸² Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

¹⁸³ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

headlines in the UK media,¹⁸⁴ the significance of NOS to what later was to become known as the Emerging Church Movement, and in particular Christian communities affiliated to the alternative worship stream of that movement, cannot be overestimated.¹⁸⁵ Doug Gay writes,

NOS evolved a new 'hybrid' style of worship, which drew together an unexpected mix of traditions, forms and media. Their services combined elements of Anglo-Catholic and Eastern Orthodox liturgical traditions with influences from the charismatic-evangelical spirituality, and set these within a musical-visual medium of communal celebration, which drew heavily of the electronic dance/house music and the dance forms of (then) contemporary club culture.¹⁸⁶

Through their services in Sheffield and at venues such as the Greenbelt Festival,¹⁸⁷ NOS inspired, challenged and encouraged young Christians in what church, worship and Christian faith could look like. Their influence also went beyond the Christian church, NOS came to impact the wider club culture in England and the music industry with their cutting-edge dance music and video imagery. The words of Barry Taylor may serve as an illustration as to what role NOS came to mean for a large number of Christians at that time:

NOS was like a breath of fresh air. I hadn't seen or experienced anything like it at the time. It was visually stimulating. The energy of the space – the idea permeating the air that there could be a collaborative expression of worship – was heady stuff given the time period. It was a challenge in that it was definitely pushing some theological horizons. For the most part, I found it immensely liberating because it allowed me the personal space to begin my own process of reflection and recontextualization.¹⁸⁸

NOS was by no means the only experimentative and innovative Christian community that emerged during the mid to late 1980s. In the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, communities that expressed a similar ethos to NOS saw the light of day. The influential blogger Andrew Jones (aka *TallSkinnyKiwi*)¹⁸⁹ notes that in 1985 pastor Bob Beeman launched *Sanctuary* in California, USA, a Christian movement with the metal and punk music cultures, and the year after in 1986 *Matthew's Party* started as a church in a pub (also in California). A few years later, in 1989 in New Zealand, Mark

¹⁸⁴ NOS had adopted a deviating form of charismatic leadership structure in which the top leader could not be questioned. This had crushed the identities of all those in leadership, and from his position of authority, the leader had also made inappropriate advances to females within the leadership team. NOS was at this point shut down by its own members, and a remnant of the community continued to meet under a different leadership for some years afterwards in Sheffield. For further reading see for instance Roland Howard, *The Rise and Fall of the Nine O'clock Service: A Cult Within the Church?* (London: 1996).

¹⁸⁵ C.f. Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches.*, Doug Gay, *Remixing.*, and Robert

¹⁸⁶ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 7.

¹⁸⁷ The Greenbelt festival, held yearly since 1974, is an annual Christian festival of music, art and faith taking place on the August Bank Holiday weekend in England. The festival has become a showcase for people, Christians and non-Christians, involved in performing and visual arts, as well as a meeting place for experimentation in worship and spirituality. As a creative meeting place around issues such as holistic Christian faith, justice, arts, music and worship Greenbelt became, and still is, an important gathering place for people within the ECC. For the UK context, the importance of Greenbelt as a catalyst and one of the nodes within Emerging Church can not to be underestimated. For more information, see <http://greenbelt.org.uk>.

¹⁸⁸ Barry Taylor (Sanctuary, Santa Monica, CA), quoted in Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 85.

¹⁸⁹ <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com>

Pierson and Mike Riddell launched *Parallel Universe* as a place for experimentation with alternative forms of worship.¹⁹⁰ Motivated by a growing frustration with the gap between church and the surrounding society, these Christian groups and churches sought to engage the changing Western culture in new and innovative ways. During the 1990s more groups appeared, and individuals and Christian faith communities were brought together and connected via loosely formed networks, conferences and festivals, and blogs and forums on the internet. By the turn of the millennium it had grown to the global grassroots phenomenon now known as the Emerging Church conversation.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring to attention some of the developments that occurred at the time within evangelical Protestant church culture in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. It serves both to introduce the Emerging Church phenomenon to the reader, as well as locating our discussion concerning emerging churches in Sweden within a wider international setting. For each context specific themes will be introduced, themes that each illustrate some of the core concerns of Emerging Church discourse. Although specific themes are presented for each country, they should not be read as exclusive for any specific context (e.g. post-evangelicalism in the United Kingdom, or engagement with post-modern epistemology in the United States). While contextual differences are apparent (e.g. the strong emphasis on missional church theology in Australia, the prominent role of the Anglican church for Emerging Christianity in the United Kingdom, and the reaction to conservative evangelical church culture in the United States), the themes presented in this chapter are to a greater or lesser extent present within Emerging Church discourse as a whole.

4.1 Changes in Evangelical Church culture (UK)

The developments of the ECC in the United Kingdom may in part be traced back to the increased church planting activity in the 1990's. At the beginning of the decade - declared as the "Decade of Evangelism" at the Lambeth Conference in 1988 - there were high expectations for significant numerical growth and a sense of hope for the future, and church planting had become a generally accepted strategy for evangelism by many mainstream denominations, independent churches and para-church organisations. At *Challenge 2000* - a large conference in Birmingham in 1992 - the goal was set to plant 20,000 new churches by the end of the millennium.¹⁹¹ A significant number of new churches were planted, but the movement gradually lost its momentum and by the mid-1990's it became evident that the expectations would not be achieved. Stuart Murray writes in *Post-Christendom* (2004) that this led to a "necessary pause for reflection which allowed discussion of missiological and

¹⁹⁰ Andrew Jones, "Emerging Church Movement."

¹⁹¹ For a more detailed account of the developments leading up to *Challenge 2000*, see Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 44.

ecclesiological issues side lined in the frenetic activity of the first half of the decade.”¹⁹² Paas likewise notes that following this experience “many leaders of the movement admitted that they had been focused too much on the ‘how’ part of church planting but very little on the ‘what’ and ‘why’ issues.”¹⁹³ It is the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ issues that came to set the agenda for much of the Emerging Church discourse, as leaders and churches engaged with what church, mission, worship and faith could look like in a post-modern and post-Christendom culture. Overlapping the church planting movement, then, an apparently spontaneous wave of new and innovative churches began to emerge, made up of loose networks and to a large extent connected by communities on the internet and blogs.¹⁹⁴

In their study of emerging churches in the United Kingdom and the United States, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger write that some of the new and innovative Christian communities emerged from the youth congregations which began in the early 1990’s; for example *New Generation Ministries* (NGM) in Bristol who sent out teams planting churches among teenagers, and Mark Meardon’s *Eternity* part of St Michaels in Bracknell. Conferences such as Cutting Edge and Remix, networks like the *Cultural Shift network* and the *World Wide Message Tribe* (a dance music act who sent out teams of young Christians to economically and socially deprived areas of Manchester, a ministry that later became the *Eden Project*) spurred this development further, planting churches within youth cultures and empowering teenagers for ministry and leadership.¹⁹⁵ This new wave of churches were diverse, some distrusting the terminology and agenda of church planting altogether, while others were stated as responses to ecclesiological and missiological issues and questions that arose in the 1990’s.¹⁹⁶

4.1.1 Post-Evangelicals

There were, however, more than mere pragmatic concerns regarding the ineffectiveness of traditional church planting models that influenced the ECC in the United Kingdom at the time. In his book *Remixing the Church* (2011), Doug Gay details how deeper and underlying changes in evangelical church culture gave rise to alternative and emerging forms of church from the late 1980s and onwards. In his book he argues that there are predominantly three “major contextual shifts” that “were crucial factors in creating a new climate of freedom and permission to audit and question church traditions” for people who were part of the Emerging Church discourse and the many alternative Christian communises that started in the end of the 1980’s and during the 1990’s:¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Stuart Murray, *After Christendom*, 69.

¹⁹³ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 45.

¹⁹⁴ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 69.

¹⁹⁵ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 70.

¹⁹⁷ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 17.

1. The influence of *the ecumenical movement* and the successive World Council of Church conferences centred around ecumenical studies, mission and worship.
2. The effects of *the Second Vatican Council*, which produced a climate in which the liturgical traditions of the Roman Catholic Church were perceived by a new generation of evangelical Protestant Christians as less threatening and more accessible than they had appeared to previous generations.¹⁹⁸
3. *The new wave of missiological thinking* that emerged from the post-Second World War experience of decolonisation, which produced new ways of thinking about the relationship between theology and culture.¹⁹⁹

In light of these influential factors, it is not surprising that Doug Gay defines the ECC as “new wave of grassroots ecumenism, propelled from within low church Protestantism by a mix of longing, curiosity and discontent.”²⁰⁰ The ECC, Gay writes, “has appropriated a broad and multifaceted critique of reformed/low church Protestant practice.”²⁰¹

For the purpose of our discussion, Dave Tomlinson’s book *The Post Evangelical* (2005) may serve as a representative for some of the conversations that were occurring at the time in the United Kingdom within parts of the evangelical church. In the book Tomlinson, then pastor of the pub church *Holy Joe’s* in London, covers a wide range of issues, such as a critique of an evangelical church culture co-opted by middle class values, a critique of revivalism, the meaning of truth, and biblical inerrancy. At the heart of the discussion, however, was the desire to give voice to Christians who had experienced evangelical churches and groups as limiting, controlling or hindering a deeper and more mature Christian faith. This may, for example, be due to believing the wrong things, asking the wrong kind of questions, or wishing to interact in a more positive way with Christian traditions and theologies other than evangelical faith. ‘Post-evangelical’, to Tomlinson, is a term that serves as a hopeful rallying point for those who find it difficult to reconcile “what they see and experience in evangelicalism with their personal values, instinctive reactions and theological reflections.”²⁰² Through a number of conversations with people who have either left the evangelical tradition or feel trapped within it, Tomlinson sums it up as “the feeling that evangelicalism is supremely good at introducing people to faith in Christ, but distinctly unhelpful when it comes to the matter of progressing into a more ‘grown up’ experience of faith.”²⁰³ Tomlinson writes:

¹⁹⁸ For instance, Doug Gay suggests that in particular *The Iona Community* in Scotland, UK, and *The Taizé Community* in France have played an instrumental role for people part of the ECC for experiencing and accessing Roman Catholic liturgical tradition. Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 35f.

¹⁹⁹ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 16.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰² Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1995), 2.

²⁰³ Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, 3.

The point is that these people are tired of listening only to the evangelical networks. Indeed, they have already tuned in to other stations and have found that initial confusion has soon given way to great exhilaration, as they realized the diversity of possible interpretations of the Christian faith. A more 'grown up' environment, in their view, would be one in which there are fewer predigested opinions and fewer categorical conclusions, and where there was a lot more space to explore alternative ideas. They would also like room to express doubt, without having someone rush around in mad panic trying to 'deliver' them from unbelief.²⁰⁴

Tomlinson disagrees with any simplistic attempts in equating post-evangelical as simply a new way of saying 'liberal'. On the contrary, he argues, the church needs to move beyond the evangelical-liberal divide in order to appreciate and benefit from that which is good in both traditions. Clarifying his understanding of the term 'post-evangelical' Tomlinson writes:

Several people have suggested to me that 'post-evangelical' is really just a fashionable way of saying 'ex-evangelical', but this is not necessarily the case; properly used, 'post' means something quite different from 'ex'. 'Post', which means 'after', has connotations of 'following on from', whereas 'ex' implies 'ceasing to be'. *To be post-evangelical is to take as given many of the assumptions of evangelical faith, while at the same time moving beyond its perceived limitations.*²⁰⁵

Tomlinson managed to verbalise what some within the evangelical tradition were either experiencing themselves or observed from a distance.²⁰⁶ At a time when evangelical churches experienced a renaissance, there were also people who moved away or distanced themselves from evangelical culture as their questions and experiences were not perceived as welcome or helpful, or even viewed as threatening. Experiences like these have continued to influence the tone of the Emerging Church conversation.²⁰⁷

4.1.2 Post-Charismatics

Alongside a critical engagement with conservative evangelical theology and church culture, much of what came to emerge in form of new ways of church and worship during the late 1980s and 1990's in the United Kingdom can be viewed as a reaction against worship practices that had come to characterise charismatic and Pentecostal churches in the 1980's and 1990's. Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton suggest that "there is an obvious direct linkage in that key figures related to the emerging church either still identify with the Pentecostal/charismatic movement or come from and are

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 9. Emphasis original.

²⁰⁶ Paul Roberts, *Alternative Worship in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 1999), 12. C.f. John Drane, and Olive Fleming Drane, *Reformed, Reforming, Emerging, and Experimenting: A study in contextual theology reflecting the experiences of initiatives in emerging ministry being funded by the Church of Scotland* (Church of Scotland, 2010).

²⁰⁷ Philip Harrold notes that the "experience of turning away from a particular religious identity or way of life – deconversion – is frequently noted in Emerging Church discourse." Philip Harrold, "Deconversion in the Emerging Church," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian faith* 6, no. 1 (March 2006).

in reaction to this movement.”²⁰⁸ Gay addresses this in *Remixing the Church* (2011), that “there was a rather strong and swift reaction against much of the repertoire of ‘worship songs’ in circulation and against the medium of the ‘worship band’.” He continues,

It was a protest about the words that were in our own mouths and the tunes to which we knew all the guitar chords. We had become banal to ourselves and felt complicit with a culture of banality in worship. It was a protest against the sing-along ‘concert’ model of worship, in which a new breed of ‘worship leaders’ had become the new ‘performing clergy’ and we their audience-congregation. It was also a protest against the MOR light country/soft rock style that had mainstreamed ‘praise and worship music’ and deprived it of any musical or lyrical edge.²⁰⁹

This post-charismatic shift became particularly visible in the Alternative Worship movement that came to influence many emerging churches in the 1990s, in particular in the United Kingdom, but also in places such as New Zealand, and later in the United States. On a superficial level, these shifts seem to be concerned with aesthetics and style in worship, but they also opened up deeper ecclesiological and theological questions about leadership, discipleship, community, and spirituality. The influence of the Alternative Worship movement on Emerging Church discourse will be explored in greater detail below in Chapter 5.

4.1.3 Fresh Expressions of Church

In 1994 the Church of England published the report *Breaking New Ground: church planting in the Church of England*. It was the first formal document in which the Church of England owned “church planting” as a missionary strategy, and it challenged the traditional separation between “being church” and “doing mission” (which primarily had been understood in terms of overseas missions). The report set out to recommend good practices for church planting, as well as addressing the issues and difficulties that had been raised by a small number of unauthorised church plants. Acknowledging what was happening on grass root levels in the parishes and dioceses, the report also promoted the need to experiment with alternative forms of church and argued that the “one-size-fits-all” was insufficient in meeting the increasing cultural changes that were occurring in society.²¹⁰ The report suggested that the normal territorial parochial system was no longer sufficient, a controversial issue for the Church of England. The authors recognised that society was increasingly shifting into a network society (e.g. networks based on interests and hobbies, work, studies, ethnicity, lifestyles etc); “human life is lived in a complex array of networks” and “the neighbourhoods where people reside may hold only a very minor loyalty.”²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Andrew Walker, and Luke Bretherton, eds. *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 37.

²⁰⁹ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 10.

²¹⁰ Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*.

²¹¹ *Breaking New Ground* (London: Church House Publishing, 1994) , 3., cited in Graham

Nearly a decade late, in 2002 the Board of Missions set up a new working group, chaired by Bishop Graham Cray, with the task to assess the developments in terms of church planting efforts and new forms of church that had emerged since the last report, as well as considering new potential ways ahead. As a result, ten years after the 1994 publication, a second report was published, *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004). The report studied and evaluated a wide variety of “fresh expressions of church” that had emerged during the 1990’s; e.g. Alternative Worship communities, café churches, multiple and midweek congregations, traditional church plants, churches connecting with specific networks, cell churches, and Youth congregations²¹². As the first report saw church planting as “a supplementary strategy that enhances the essential thrust of the parish system”, the 2004 publication argued that this was no longer adequate. Cray writes that the

nature of community has so changed (and was changing long before 1994) that no one strategy will be adequate to fulfil the Anglican incarnational principle in Britain today. ...

It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church’s strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose. We need to recognise that a variety of integrated missionary approaches are required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery.²¹³

The 2004 report echoed two themes in particular; first, that the Church is the fruit of God’s mission, and second, it therefore exists to participate and serve in the on-going mission. Church planting is understood as “creating new communities of Christian faith as part of the mission of God to express God’s kingdom in every geographic and cultural context.”²¹⁴ The 2004 report made a significant impact within the Church of England and beyond. As a result of the publication, the Church of England together with the Methodist Church launched the Fresh Expressions network in September 2004 led Steven Croft as the Archbishop’s Missioner and Team Leader.²¹⁵ The initiative was set to encourage and support innovation and fresh expressions of church in the United Kingdom. In 2006 the Fresh Expressions team offered the following definition of what constitutes a ‘fresh expression of church’:

- A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.
- It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.
- It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church for its cultural context.²¹⁶

²¹² Graham Cray, *Mission-shaped*, 44.

²¹³ Graham Cray, *Mission-shaped*, xi.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

²¹⁵ For a more detailed account of the developments of the Fresh Expression initiative, see Michael Moynagh, *Every Context*.

²¹⁶ Steven Croft, “What counts as fresh expression of church and who decides?” in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions - Explorations in emerging church*, ed. Louise Nelstrop, and Martyn Percy (London: Canterbury Press, 2008), 10.

Although the terms 'fresh expressions of church' and 'emerging church' are not necessarily are synonymous (some fresh expression initiatives may very well be understood as more traditional church plants), the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.²¹⁷ The 2004 report managed to both describe much of the innovation that had been going at the periphery of the established church in the 1990's in the United Kingdom, as well as capture the imagination of the institutional church, resulting in a burst of pioneering initiatives and experimentation within the Church of England and beyond.

4.2 A shift in perception: Western Culture as a mission field (Australia)

4.2.1 The haemorrhaging of the church

Australia has a long history of mission and ministry among subcultures, such as bikers and surfers.²¹⁸ The more immediate origin of the Emerging Church phenomenon in this part of the world, however, can be traced back to the experiences in the early 1990's when the departure of large numbers of young adults from established churches began to be noticed.²¹⁹ Although there were successful experiments with youth and young adult's ministries, the general experience was that it became increasingly difficult to both keep the Christian youth and attract young people to the established congregations. Steve Said, an emerging church practitioner in Melbourne and member of the Forge National Team, writes:

The problems were twofold. Firstly, Gen Xers, suspicious of institutions, coming from increasingly fragmented homes, and beginning to experience the symptoms of living in a globalised society, found our experiments with forming communities of faith to be warm and inviting environments. However the established churches' expectation of youth ministries was that eventually the participants in such ministries would grow up, and become real members in adult church. The culture shock was too much to bear and was a significant factor in the exodus that occurred in later years.²²⁰

The second problem, Said continues, were the sociological and epistemological changes that were taking place in Australian society, as "we were moving from the

²¹⁷ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 34. For a discussion on the difference between emerging churches and traditional church planting, see Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*.

²¹⁸ Birthed out of the Jesus movement, God's Squad was established in the late 1960's in Sydney, existing to minister among the "outlaw biker fraternity" and associated groups, with the vision of being a relevant expression of the Christian church. Since then, the ministry has expanded all over Australia and internationally, in New Zealand, Europe, Ukraine, and the United States. For more information on God's Squad see <http://godssquad.org.au>.

Christian Surfers was started in the late 1970's by a group of Australian teenage surfers who had a vision for reaching other surfers with the gospel. As with God's Squad, Christian Surfers soon grew to become a global movement; today ministries among surfers can be found in Asia, Europe, the Pacific, Africa as well as North and South America. For more information on Christian Surfers see <http://www.christiansurfers.net>.

²¹⁹ Steve Said, "The emerging church," *Zadok Perspectives* 89 (Summer 2005), 3.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

modern to the postmodern landscape.”²²¹ Michael Frost, one the key figures within the ECC in Australia, similarly notes that although the Charismatic/Third Wave movement had given birth to a number of denominations and contemporary expressions of church in the 1980’s, in the 1990’s “a generation of young mainstream leaders emerged with great dissatisfaction with their churches and with little hope that a new style of worship could bring anyone back to church.”²²² Similar to the developments in the United Kingdom, these experiences led to an increase in ecclesial experimentation and innovation in Australia in the 1990’s and the 2000’s, motivated by the desire to engage with a changing culture in innovative ways and counter the haemorrhaging of the church. Darren Cronshaw, in his study of local emerging churches in Melbourne,²²³ identifies four shared practices of these kind of communities: alternative forms of worship, inclusive community and hospitality, incarnational mission, as well as empowering and shared leadership.²²⁴ Cronshaw writes:

Around Australia I have seen a groundswell of café churches, missionary networks, house churches, pub churches, soup kitchens, and thrift stores, seeker studies, alternative spirituality groups, ancient worship gatherings, grassroots community development, and missional churches starting in schools, workplaces, and shopping centers. These experiments are representative of EMCs in Australia whose imagination is captured by mission and cultural engagement.²²⁵

4.2.2 Training Christians to think and act like missionaries in their own contexts

Central to the discourse in Australia around culture shifts and the church’s response to these changes has been the need to recover the sending - or missional - nature and identity of the church.²²⁶ In Australia, more so than other places, the term *Emerging Missional Church* has often been used by those involved in the conversation. According to Andrew Hamilton (aka *Backyard Missionary*; missional practitioner in Perth and part of the Forge National Team), the term was added to the conversation in order

to emphasise the focus of our attention ... The discussion in Australia has rarely turned to re-theologising, (at a foundational level) but has revolved around shaping a missional ecclesiology, rediscovering what it means to be church in what is now undeniably a missionary context. ... We are simply seeking to recover the same classical missionary

²²¹ Ibid,

²²² Michael Frost. Email communication to author, (10 February 2008).

²²³ Eastern Hills Community Church, Urban Life, and Solace.

²²⁴ Darren Cronshaw, “Emerging Missional Churches in Australia,” in *The Gospel after Christendom - New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions*, ed. Ryan K. Bolger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). Kindle edition, Kindle LOC 1425-1557.

²²⁵ Darren Cronshaw, “Emerging,” Kindle LOC 1364. A number of expressions of emerging church could be mentioned here, such as Breathing Space (Melbourne), Living Room (Melbourne), Connection (Melbourne), Eastern Hills Community Church (Melbourne), Urban Neighbours of Hope (Melbourne and Sydney), Urban Life (Melbourne), Solace (Melbourne), South Melbourne Restoration Community (Melbourne), The Junction (Melbourne), Misseo dei (Melbourne), Soul Revival (Sydney), Glebe Café Church (Sydney), Small Boat Big Sea (Sydney), Proximity Space (Sydney), and re(verb) (Hobart).

²²⁶ The influence of the Missional Church movement on the ECC is addressed in more detail Chapter 5.

principles that have guided our overseas missionaries for years now and apply them to the western context.²²⁷

Cronshaw similarly writes that

To include 'missional' in the centre of the term emphasises its importance; new and emerging forms of church best develop from being missional, not the other way around. More churches should contextualise their worship ... but not at the expense of the Church's primary focus, which must be the mission of God. 'Emerging missional church' is a term which reminds churches that emerging is happening for the sake of mission and that mission is at the centre.²²⁸

The missional emphasis is to a large part explained by the influential role that Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch has played in shaping the ECC in Australia through establishing the *Forge Mission Training Network*²²⁹ and the publication of a number of widely read and influential books.²³⁰ Launched with the aim to "help birth and nurture the missional church in Australia and beyond",²³¹ Forge was started in the mid-1990's by Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, together with Debra Hirsch, Mark Sayers and Tim Corney, and harnessed much of the missiological and ecclesiological innovation that had been developed over the past years. Frost writes, "Not every emerging church is linked to Forge, but through its internships, state-based intensives and national convention, Forge has really put the conversation on the agenda."²³² Linking colleges, churches, and leaders Forge developed a year-long program through which they have trained hundreds of participants in ecclesial innovation and missionary practices for a Western context. Valuing a holistic approach to mission, an action-learning approach to leadership development, and experimentation, Hirsch and Frost explain that the course was designed to "assist young leaders to stop thinking conventionally about how to do church and to start thinking like missionaries in their own context."²³³ Influenced by missiologists such as Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, Darrell L. Guder, Craig Van Gelder²³⁴, Hirsch and Frost argue that it is essential

²²⁷ Andrew Hamilton, "The Carson Conversation II.", (8 September 2006): accessed 5 December, 2007, <http://www.backyardmissionary.com/2006/09/the-carson-conversation-ii.html>. C.f. Peter Downes, and Darren Cronshaw, "Vineyard Meets Emerging Missional Churches," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 16 (2014).; Darren Cronshaw, "Emerging," LOC 1480.; and Alan Hirsch, "Missional the new emergent?", (23 June 2008): accessed 6 August, 2008, <http://www.theforgottenways.org/blog/2008/06/23/missional-the-new-emergent-not-on-my-shift>.

²²⁸ Darren Cronshaw, "The Shaping of Things Now: Mission and Innovation in Four Emerging Churches in Melbourne," (DTh diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, November 2008), 10.

²²⁹ <http://forge.org.au> and <http://forgeinternational.com>

²³⁰ E.g. Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *Shaping*.; Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways - Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009) ; and Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living missionally in a post-Christian culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006) . For Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost's pioneering role for the ECC in Australia, see for example. Kevin R. Ward, *Losing Our Religion?: Changing Patterns of Believing and Belonging in Secular Western Societies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013) , 161.; and Peter Downes, and Darren Cronshaw, "Vineyard."

²³¹ Alan Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 166.

²³² Michael Frost, 10 February 2008. For Forge's influence on the ECC in Australia, see Darren Cronshaw, "Shaping," 37-38, 290.; and Darren Cronshaw, "Emerging," Kindle LOC 1364.

²³³ Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *Shaping*, 81. C.f. Alan Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 124.

²³⁴ Peter Roennfeldt, "Reshaping the Australian Church Experience: The Impact of Church Growth and Emerging Missional Church on Evangelical Ecclesiology in Australia," (DMin diss., Melbourne School of Theology, 2013), 89, 93.

for the gospel to be incarnated into the thousands of subcultures that now exist in our complex, postmodern, tribalized, Western context. It is vital that these multiform people and subcultures encounter Jesus from *within* their own culture and from *within* their own community, for only then can they truly comprehend him. It is now critical for the sake of the gospel itself that these people experience salvation in a way that does not dislocate them from their organic groups but rather allows them to encounter Jesus in a way that is seamlessly connected with life as they have come to understand it through their own histories and experiences.²³⁵

Today Forge in Australia exists alongside similar initiatives such as the *Oikos house church network* and the Anglican *Fresh Expression* programs,²³⁶ but its seminal role in shaping the agenda in the early days of the ECC in this part of the world cannot be underestimated. Through the Forge training program, Christian communities and churches have emerged in “proximity spaces” (such as cafés, art galleries, and pubs), local neighbourhoods, as well as leading to the revitalisation of existing congregations.²³⁷ It has also contributed to introduce a missional language to established denominations such as the Churches of Christ and the Uniting Church, and its course material continues to be influential in leadership development and seminary training in Australia.²³⁸

4.3 Adjusting the focus: From generational issues to wider changes in culture (USA)

The development of the ECC in the United States is relatively well-documented when compared to United Kingdom and Australia. This section relies both on insider accounts from those part of the conversation, such as blogs or books authored by Andrew Jones, Ryan Bolger, Tony Jones, Mark Oestericher, Mark Driscoll, and Dan Kimball, as well as academic studies of the phenomenon.²³⁹

Until the end of the 1990’s the ECC in the United States had little significant contact or engagement with what was emerging in the British and Australian contexts.²⁴⁰ In the United States the Emerging Church may be traced back to churches that were started in the mid-1980’s with the vision to reach young people part of the so-called “Generation X”. Dieter Zander started *NewSong* in Pomona, California, which in its earlier years was made up primarily of college students and singles. Over the years, more churches were started, such as *University Baptist* by Chris Seay in Waco, Texas, *Mars Hill* by Mark Driscoll in Seattle, *Mosaic* led by Erwin McManus in Los Angeles. The Gen-X churches were characterised by, in the words of Bolger and Gibbs,

²³⁵ Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *Shaping*, 40.

²³⁶ Darren Cronshaw (2012), Darren Cronshaw, “Emerging,” Kindle LOC 1383.

²³⁷ “By proximity space”, Hirsch and Frost write, “we mean places or events where Christians and non-Christian can interact meaningfully with each other.” Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *Shaping*, 24.

²³⁸ Wayne Brighton, “Innovation in mission: a comparative study of fresh expressions of church in the life of three Australian denominations,” (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2013).

²³⁹ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches.*; and Randall W. Reed, and G. Michael Zbaraschuk, eds. *The Emerging Church, Millennials and Religion Volume 1: Prospects and Problems* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

²⁴⁰ Ryan Bolger, “On Emergent.”, accessed 7 December, 2007,

http://thebolgblog.typepad.com/thebolgblog/2005/06/on_emergent.html.

loud, passionate worship music directed towards God and the believer (not the seeker); David Letterman-style, irreverent banter; raw, narrative preaching; Friends (the popular TV series) type relationships; and later, candles and the arts.²⁴¹

In short, the main part of church practice remained the same as their conservative evangelical predecessors, whilst the surface techniques changed in order to appeal to a younger demographic.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the idea of Gen-X church had evolved and in 1993 the “church-within-a-church” concept entered the scene. A “church-within-a-church” is exactly what the name implies, a distinct worship community or congregation that is still part of the wider organisation of the older church. The style of worship was similar to Gen-X churches, but they were financially supported by and under the oversight of the senior leadership of a megachurch. Among these churches the following may be mentioned; *Tuesday Night Live* (later the Next Level), in Denver, with Trevor Bron; *Axis* in Barrington, Illinois, with Dieter Zander; and Dan Kimball’s *Graceland* in Santa Cruz, California. According to Bolger and Gibbs, the “church-within-a-church” concept soon outnumbered the stand-alone Gen-x churches.²⁴²

4.3.1 Engaging with the Challenges of Postmodernity

In 1996 the Leadership Network²⁴³ formed the Young Leaders Network (YLN) with the vision to help the church in North America connect with Generation X and bring them back to church, “looking for techniques to reach out and become relevant.”²⁴⁴ Doug Pagitt, who left his job as youth minister at Wooddale Church, Minnesota, was hired the following year by the Leadership Network to develop YLN. Pagitt came to host a series of retreats called “Gen X 1.0”, gathering small groups of ministers across the United States.²⁴⁵ His task was to build a network of youth pastors and young adult pastors, but according to Tony Jones, “being the radical subversive as he is, Doug quickly attracted some revolutionaries who thought the whole way church is done in the U.S. needed to be overthrown.”²⁴⁶ One of those gatherings, held in Glen Eyrie, Colorado, came to play a pivotal role for the future development of the ECC in North America. Mark Driscoll, one of the speakers at the event, writes:

The conference shifted in focus from reaching a generation to larger issues related to being the Church in an emerging postmodern culture. The general consensus among us was that a transition within the Church was taking place.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 30.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 30-31.

²⁴³ <http://www.leadnet.org>

²⁴⁴ Ryan Bolger, “Emergent.”

²⁴⁵ Adam Sweatman, “A Generous Heterodoxy - Emergent Village and the Emerging Milieu,” in *The Emerging Church, Millennials and Religion Volume 1: Prospects and Problems*, ed. Randall W. Reed, and G. Michael Zbaraschuk (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018). Kindle edition, Kindle LOC 1145.

²⁴⁶ Tony Jones, “Looking back... And ahead.”, (31 January 31 2005): accessed 7 December, 2007, http://emergent-us.typepad.com/emergentus/2005/01/looking_backand.html.

²⁴⁷ Mark Driscoll, “A pastoral perspective on the Emergent Church,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 2 (2006), 87.

As a result of the conference, a small team was formed to continue the conversation around postmodern epistemology and cultural shifts, and the implication for mission, theology and ecclesiology in the United States. The group began to engage with the works of missiologists such as David Bosch, Lesslie Newbigin, and Roland Allen. Driscoll writes, they also

began travelling the country speaking to various groups of Christian leaders about what it would mean if Americans actually functioned as missionaries in their own culture. We also had many informal conversations with Christian leaders who were asking the same sorts of questions regarding the content of the gospel and the context of church ministry.²⁴⁸

The following year a second conference called “Gen-X 2.0” was held at which the conversation grew around the topic of postmodernity. Bolger and Gibbs write, “Although the conference touted the Gen-X theme, the buzz was moving beyond generational ministry techniques.”²⁴⁹ In 1998 Pagitt put together the third annual conference hosted by the Young Leaders Network in Glorieta, New Mexico. Postmodernity²⁵⁰ Bolger and Gibbs write:

The consensus was that the evangelistic challenge for the church was not generational angst but a philosophical disconnect with the wider culture. Thus, attendees questioned many of the assumptions they had previously held about ministry.²⁵¹

At this point Brian McLaren and Tony Jones also joined the team, and the 1998 event was followed by several regional conferences and momentum was increasing. A year later YLN changed its name to the *Terra Nova Theological Project* (TNTP).

The group continued their work and Ryan Bolger writes that there was “a budding sense that the cultural changes required new theologies.” The influence grew with contributions by writers such as N. T. Wright and Dallas Willard, and “not only was there a new culture, but a new understanding of gospel, kingdom, and atonement emerged.”²⁵² Terra Nova, later *Emergent Village*, came to play a significant role in the developments of the ECC, not only in the United States but also internationally through conferences, blogging, speaking engagements, and publications of books.

4.3.2 Emergent Village

The Terra Nova Theological Project continued their work under the oversight of the Leadership Network until the group was disbanded in 2001. There are a number of reasons why this happened. According to Driscoll, this was partly due to the fact that most of the members of the team were busy planting young churches and struggling to find time to meet up as a group and handle the amount of travelling which the

²⁴⁸ Mark Driscoll, “Pastoral perspective,” 88-89.

²⁴⁹ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 32.

²⁵⁰ Adam Sweatman (2018), Adam Sweatman, “Generous Heterodoxy,” Kindle LOC 1186.

²⁵¹ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 32.

²⁵² Ryan Bolger, “Emergent.”

work involved.²⁵³ But there were also tensions due to theological differences, both within the team and with the Leadership Network. Tony Jones comments, "Ultimately, we wanted to talk about changes in theology, and Leadership Network avoided theological conversation in an attempt to maintain a 'big tent.'"²⁵⁴ Adam Sweatman adds:

Despite supporting much of their early activity, Leadership Network's executive level staff had grown increasingly uncomfortable with the distance some YLN participants were putting between themselves and orthodox evangelicalism. Of particular concern to many involved with YLN were ecclesial structures. ... This questioning of method from a theological perspective put the leadership of Leadership Network ill at ease because of their stated goal of focusing pragmatically on church practice.²⁵⁵

By 2001, Driscoll had left the group (due to both lack of time and theological differences), but others such as Doug Pagitt, Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Chris Seay, Dan Kimball, and Andrew Jones continued speaking and writing together as friends. Several attempts were made to salvage the relationship with the Leadership Network, but these were given up and the same year a new network was formed named Emergent Village, first with Brian McLaren as team leader and later with Tony Jones as National Coordinator.²⁵⁶ The network's website stated,

We began meeting because many of us were disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conventional ecclesial institutions of the late 20th century. The more we met, the more we discovered that we held many of the same dreams for our lives, and for how our lives intersected with our growing understandings of the Kingdom of God.²⁵⁷

According to Mark Oestericher the term 'emergent' was

chosen as a metaphor, from its botanical usage ... It's referring to the new growth that occurs in an old forest, the hyper-green and extra-fragile stuff that grows down near the forest floor, well below the towering trees around and over it.²⁵⁸

Initially, Brian McLaren tells us, they had no idea how fitting the name was or how helpful it would turn out to be for their ongoing work. In his book *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004), McLaren outlines how terms such as emergent theory and emergence on a significant level explains the way of thinking within Emergent Village.²⁵⁹ The term came to capture the ecclesial vision of the network, by articulating their understanding of the nature of theological discourse and reflection, and by illustrating the organic and fluid nature of the church as an emergent system. On his

²⁵³ Mark Driscoll, "Pastoral perspective," 89.

²⁵⁴ Tony Jones, "Looking back... And ahead."

²⁵⁵ Adam Sweatman, "Generous Heterodoxy," Kindle LOC 1205.

²⁵⁶ Dan Kimball, "Origin of the terms "Emerging" and "Emergent" church - Part 2." Vintage Faith, (21 April 2006): accessed 26 October, 2007, http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origins_of_the_t.html.l.c.f. Brian D. McLaren, *Generous*, 275.; and Adam Sweatman, "Generous Heterodoxy," Kindle LOC 1205.

²⁵⁷ "About Emergent Village." Emergent Village, accessed 16 November, 2007, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/about>.

²⁵⁸ Mark Oestericher, "This is emergent.", accessed 13 December, 2007, <http://www.ysmarko.com/?p=510>.

²⁵⁹ Brian D. McLaren, *Generous*, 275-88.

influential blog *TallSkinnyKiwi*, Andrew Jones explains emergent as

a name given to the phenomena of how new organizational structures progress from low-level chaos to higher level sophistication without a hierarchical command structure. Emergent theory explains how birds change direction, how slime mould moves, how ant colonies are built and how Amazon.com knows so much about us. The process involves constant communication and feedback among the lowest level of organization, pattern recognition, local action affecting global behavior, and takes into consideration the element of unpredictability in a chaotic system.²⁶⁰

Youth Specialities came to replace the platform that the Leadership Network once had provided, by facilitating the publication of books and arranging conferences across the United States. By this time 'emerging church' has become a buzz word in evangelical circles and Emergent Village began to attract attention within the mainstream church. In 2003 Emergent Village, in collaboration with Youth Specialities, hosted an Emergent Conference in San Diego in conjunction with the National Pastor's Conference. They hoped for 300 participants, with little money spent on advertising besides word of mouth and blog sites. In reality, the conference attracted a large number of young believers engaged with alternative ministries with over 1,100 people attending the event. The Emergent Conference was divided between San Diego and Nashville the following year. Following the forming of Emergent Village a number of other ECC networks, initiatives, conferences, and churches saw the light of day. Sweatman writes that "growth in the ECM has been difficult to measure formally, but one data set, collected in 2005 by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, identified about 200 networks that could be labelled emerging."²⁶¹

With its strong emphasis on postmodern epistemology, theological questioning, spiritual and ecclesial experimentation Emergent Village continued to set the agenda for and influence the ECC through the publication of books, hosting conferences, and supplying churches with speakers until 2010.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Andrew Jones, "EmergAnt:1."

²⁶¹ Adam Sweatman (2018), Adam Sweatman, "Generous Heterodoxy," Kindle LOC 1225. C.f. Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*.

²⁶² Adam Sweatman addresses some of the reasons for the collapse of Emergent Village, which formally closed down in 2014. Internal disagreements with Tony Jones' leadership were one factor, combined with accusations towards Jones of having an affair during his first marriage. Criticism was also pointed towards the leadership of Emergent Village in how they handled the situation. Sweatman writes, "Though these allegations remain unverified and highly contested by all involved parties, the effect they had on the ECM as a whole was profoundly negative." Adam Sweatman, "Generous Heterodoxy," Kindle LOC 1243. In 2013 the organisation sold its website <http://www.emergentvillage.com> and moved the online conversation to a blog channel on Patheos (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/>). None of the former Board of Directors are involved in its management.

4.4 Understanding Emerging Church as an international grassroots phenomenon

4.4.1 Emerging Church as a movement?

When examining the developments of the Emerging Church phenomenon in the three contexts presented above, the question remains whether we can approach these as expressions as a singular global movement or merely parallel processes within evangelical Protestantism in the West that express shared traits, concerns and characteristics. The term Emerging Church *movement* may give the impression that it is similar in nature when compared with other modern church movements, such as Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement. There are, however, several reasons for why viewing the Emerging Church in this manner would be misconstrued.

- *No singular starting point.* As I have shown in this chapter, the ECC as an international phenomenon has developed more or less as a parallel process in different parts of the world. As we study the developments of the Emerging Church we understand that there have been shared theological concerns and observations of culture. The task, however, of defining the phenomenon as a movement in a strictest sense would be less problematic if there had been an “Azusa Street”, or a “John Wesley” of the Emerging Church from where we could trace its developments. That is, however, not the case and it is only later - around the turn of the millennium - that it becomes appropriate to speak of a discernible *global* grassroots phenomenon which rallied around the umbrella term “emerging church”. The advent of online communities and blogs on the internet served as an important catalyst for this to happen. What seems to be the case, however, is that the developments in the contexts presented in this chapter seem to be galvanised and driven by similar concerns, experiences and observations: e.g. the emergence of post-evangelical thought, the discovery of liturgy and spirituality outside of low church Protestantism, an engagement with the works of missiologists such as Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch, and experience of the difficulty of both reaching and keeping the younger generation in the church.
- *Geographical differences.* Although we can identify shared concerns within Emerging Church discourse from an international perspective, it is also possible to observe contextual differences. For instance, the emerging Christianity in the United States has from early on had a strong emphasis on theological inquiry (in particular engaging with the implications of postmodern epistemology). It would also be difficult to understand emerging Christianity in North America without taking into account its protest against and rejection of conservative evangelical church culture. Although these features are observable in other contexts, they are less

dominant and not as prominent. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, the earlier expressions of the ECC came to focus on alternative forms of worship. Again, experimentation in liturgy and worship can be observed in other contexts as well, but not as distinguishable a feature when compared to the British context. As already noted above, the conversation around missional ecclesiology and practices has been dominating the conversation in Australia. Although all of these characteristics (theological inquiry, experimentation in worship, and missional ecclesiology and practice) can be observed in all three contexts, the difference in emphasis and prominence has reinforced the multi-faceted - and sometimes confusing - nature of the ECC.

- *Difference in vocabulary.* The term 'emerging church' was introduced around the turn of the millennium and it quickly became the catch phrase associated with the (by then) international discourse centred on the church's response to the changing postmodern cultural landscape of Western society. However, although the term was used internationally, the association with North American Christianity has been strong - in particular with the Emergent Village network. Other terminology has at times been favoured in other parts of the world, for instance *fresh expressions of church* in the UK, and *emerging missional church* in Australia. We need to be mindful of these contextual differences when engaging with the emerging church subject.
- *No central authority or boundaries of belonging.* Although local leaders of churches, networks and similar groups exist that associate with the movement, the Emerging Church conversation per se has never had a central organisation or leadership, nor creeds or statements of faith. This has implications when studying the phenomenon. From a research perspective it can therefore be problematic to assess the authority of a particular source as well as assessing "who speaks for whom"? For instance, to what extent does Brian McLaren, as a leading figure within the Emergent Village network and writing from a North American context be regarded as representative of the wider and global Emerging Church conversation? McLaren has been an influential voice within the ECC and widely read beyond Emerging Church circles, as well as frequently invited to speak at conferences, events, and local congregations. It would, however, be inaccurate to speak of McLaren as a *leader* of the Emerging Church or assume that he would be speaking or writing on behalf of anything other than his immediate context (i.e. Emergent Village). Something similar can be said of any Christian leader, writer, blogger, or activist associated with ECC. No single person, network or organisation can be said to speak on behalf of the Emerging Church conversation. The key, then, is to look for *influential voices*, rather than traditional places of authority in the sense of ecclesial hierarchy, academic credentials, or denominational structures.
- Lastly, Tony Jones states in his book *The New Christians: Dispatches from the*

Emergent Frontier (2008) that what makes emerging church difficult to define is *the relational nature of the movement*.²⁶³ He suggests that, more than anything else, it is friendship that is the glue that holds the movement together. Here, Jones is primarily writing about his own particular brand of emerging Christianity, Emergent Village, but it does highlight the networked nature of the ECC. Since the phenomenon lacks the traditional organisational structures that we normally associate with a Christian movement or denomination, relationships and “who knows whom” become significant factors in how the ECC has developed and taken shape.

4.4.2 Emerging Church as a conversation?

The evidence for understanding the Emerging Church as a ‘conversation’ are numerous: Robert Doornenbal notes in his doctoral dissertation that it is a familiar metaphor for Emerging Christians, as they embark on a journey of a “collaborative conversation”.²⁶⁴ Lloyd Chia notes similarly in his study of emerging churches, describing the ECC as an “encounter space”, which “facilitates boundary-crossings”, and a “borderland”, where people regardless of their denominational affiliation or theological orientation feel safe to engage in discussion, theological inquiry, and the exchange of ideas and experiences.²⁶⁵ Perhaps the strongest case for using the term conversation when referring to the ECC, is that it serves as a self-identifying marker to those associating with movement.²⁶⁶ Answering the question why Emerging Christians identifies with the concept of conversation, rather than movement, Lloyd Chia writes that “the idea of ‘conversation’ focuses more on interaction and communication, instead of clearly bounded identities and political positionalities.”²⁶⁷ James Bielo came to similar conclusions that for emerging Christians “dialogue about faith is more crucial than agendas and conclusions.”²⁶⁸ Speaking of the Emerging Church as conversation, then, signifies more than merely resisting definitions and rigid labels, but is, as Geraldo Martin and Gladys Ganiel observe, “in itself a mechanism or a strategy to maintain plurality of identities and positions within emerging congregations.”²⁶⁹

²⁶³ Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 56.

²⁶⁴ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 8.

²⁶⁵ Lloyd Chia, “Emerging Faith Boundaries: Bridge-building, inclusion, and the Emerging Church Movement in America,” (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, December 2010), 128, 171.

²⁶⁶ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 78.; Lloyd Chia, “Emerging,” 61, 190.; James S. Bielo, “Emerging Church,” 220.; and Scott Bader-Saye, “Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian faith* 6, no. 1 (March 2006), 12.

²⁶⁷ Lloyd Chia, “Emerging,” 190.

²⁶⁸ James S. Bielo, “Emerging Church,” 220.

²⁶⁹ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 79.; C.f. James S. Bielo, “Emerging Church,” 220.

4.4.3 Emerging Church as a ‘New Social Movement’?

Given the reasons presented above we recognise that viewing the Emerging Church as a movement could be considered problematic. There are, however, alternative terminology worth considering. Lloyd Chia (2010), Tony Jones (2011), as well as Geraldo Martin and Gladys Ganiel (2014) suggest that the Emerging Church as an international phenomenon within Western Protestantism resemble dynamics associated with *new social movements*.

What, then, is a ‘new social movement’? Nelson A. Pichardo writes that, traditional social movements

are seen as being shaped and largely determined by social structure. In the industrial era, following a Marxist logic, social movements were believed to be centered in the working class. Working class movements were seen as instrumentally based actions concerned with matters of economic redistribution.²⁷⁰

There is an ongoing debate whether or not there actually is something *new* in new social movements (NSM), but the proponents of the theory argue that they constitute a specific ‘movement industry’ or a specific ‘movement family’ and are as such distinct from traditional social movements in history.²⁷¹ In contrast with traditional social movements the term new social movement is generally associated with ‘middle-class radicalism’ and seen as a product of the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. In that sense NSM’s are not concerned with the struggle for economic gain by the working class, but rather the demands of such movements “are believed to have moved away from the instrumental issues of industrialism to the quality of life issues of postmaterialism”.²⁷² Tony Jones writes that a NSM functions as a “source of cultural reform and a place of belonging”²⁷³ and “tend to focus on the most intimate aspects of human life: sexuality, habits of consumption, and careers.”²⁷⁴ According to Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, NSM’s seek recognition for “new identities and lifestyles.”²⁷⁵ During the latter half of the 20th century a number of such movements have emerged, such as the environmental movement, the peace movement, the solidarity movement (solidarity with the Third world), the women’s rights movement, and similar movements invested in the rights of discriminated minorities (such as the LGBTQ movement).²⁷⁶ Characteristic of NSM is that they adopt anti-institutional tactics, operate outside of political channels, and tend to be both

²⁷⁰ Nelson A. Pichardo, “New Social Movements: A Critical Review,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997), 412.

²⁷¹ Hanspeter Kriesi, et al., *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2015) Kindle edition, Kindle LOC 255. For a critique of the concept ‘New Social Movements’ see for example Nelson A. Pichardo, “New Social Movements.”

²⁷² Nelson A. Pichardo, “New Social Movements,” 412. C.f. John A. Hannigan, “New Social Movement Theory and the Sociology of Religion,” in *A Future of Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis*, ed. William H. Swatos Jr. (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1993), 1.; and Francesca Polletta, and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001), 286.

²⁷³ Tony Jones, *Church is Flat*, 12.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷⁵ Francesca Polletta, and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity,” 286.

²⁷⁶ Hanspeter Kriesi, et al., *New Social Movements*, Kindle LOC 255.

decentralised and non-hierarchical in organisational terms.²⁷⁷ Here we can see similarities with the Emerging Church phenomenon, albeit within an ecclesiological milieu rather than a secular political one.

According to Alberto Melucci, a new social movement can be understood as an action system where *collective identity* is formed. Collective identity, Melucci writes,

is an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the *orientations* of their action and the *field* of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place.²⁷⁸

This self-reflexive process of identity formation is typical to NSM²⁷⁹, and we can observe similar dynamics within the ECC in the negotiation of what actually is emerging with the “emerging church” in terms of ecclesiology, spirituality, and theology, what it means to be an “emerging church” or “emerging Christian”, and the demarcation against conservative evangelical Protestant church culture.²⁸⁰

The process of collective identity formation, according to Melucci, involves three interwoven dimensions: *Cognitive definitions* concerning the ends, means, and field of action; *Active relationships* between actors who communicate, interact, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions; and *Emotional investment*, which enable the actors to feel themselves part of a common unity.²⁸¹ These three dimensions can be observed when studying the developments of the ECC. For instance, the cognitive dimensions expressed in the shared experiences and observations of a changing cultural landscape in Western society as well as the expressed conviction that the church is in need of radical reformation in order to respond to these changes. Active relationships enabled and maintained by the emergence of online communities and blogs on the internet, and the establishment of relational networks, the hosting conferences and festivals centred around emerging church spirituality, theology, and ecclesiology. The emotional dimension might perhaps be exemplified by the

²⁷⁷ Nelson A. Pichardo, “New Social Movements,” 415-16.

²⁷⁸ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging codes: collective action in the information age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 70. Emphasis original.

²⁷⁹ C.f. Nelson A. Pichardo, “New Social Movements.”; and Francesca Polletta, and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity.”

²⁸⁰ Numerous blogs and articles were produced around this topic during the peak of the ECC. For a small selection, see for example: George Lings, “What is ‘Emerging Church?’” Emerging Church Info Reflection, (October 2003): accessed 26 November, 2007, <http://www.emergingchurch.info/reflection/georgelings/index.htm>; Andrew Jones, “Emerging Church definition 1.0.” TallSkinnyKiwi, (2 February 2004): accessed 19 December, 2007, http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2004/02/emerging_church.html; Steve Taylor, “A to Z of the Emerging Church.” Emerging Church Info Reflection, (2004): accessed 21 March, 2007, <http://emergingchurch.info/reflection/stevetaylor/index.htm>; Mark Oestericher, “This is emergent.”; Andrew Jones, “What I mean when I say ‘Emerging-Missional’ Church.” TallSkinnyKiwi, (1 February 2006): accessed 21 March, 2007, http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/02/what_i_mean_whe.html; Stephen Shields, “Is the Distinction between ‘Emerging Church’ and ‘Emergent’ Obscurantist?” Emergesque, (22 September 2006): accessed 1 May, 2007, <http://faithmaps.blogspot.com/2006/09/is-distinction-between-emerging-church.html>; Dary Zustiak, “Emerging, Emergent, Missional: What’s the difference?” Christian Standard, (2007): accessed 13 December, 2007, <http://www.christianstandard.com/articledisplay.asp?id=702>; and Stephen Shields, “Wrapping the brain around the emerging church.” The Next Wave, (December 2007): accessed 19 December, 2007, [http://www.the-next-wave.org/stories/storyReader\\$337](http://www.the-next-wave.org/stories/storyReader$337).

²⁸¹ Alberto Melucci, *Challenging codes*, 70-71.

emotionally charged rhetoric and use of metaphors among Emerging Christians²⁸², and the strong emphasis on the relational nature of the conversation.²⁸³ From the perspective of NSM theory the ‘emerging church’, then, seem to serve as a *rallying point* for those who engage with similar kind of questions, as well as serving as an *identity marker* for those involved in the conversation (in particular over against conservative evangelical Protestant church culture).

Since NSM’s are not necessarily are homogenous in character,²⁸⁴ approaching the emerging Christianity in this manner gives us an interpretative framework to understand the diverse nature of the phenomenon. It is also consistent with an understanding of the Emerging Church as a ‘conversation’, given the relational and dialogical nature of NSM’s (See discussion above). As Lloyd Chia argues, “conversation is the organizing metaphor by which the movement [i.e. the ECC] envisions itself.”²⁸⁵ This means that it would not be wrong per se to refer to the subject at hand as the Emerging Church *movement*, albeit not a movement in a traditional sense but a phenomenon akin to what sociologists would understand as new social movements within a political or secular cultural milieu.

4.5 Summary and conclusion of Chapter 4

In this descriptive chapter I have presented some of the broader influences that have shaped the ECC as an international discourse, by describing a number of key shifts that have occurred within evangelical Protestant church culture in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States in the decades before and after the turn of the millennium. By examining these developments, we have familiarised ourselves with the agenda and ethos of the ECC, and issues of particular concern for those who have identified with and participated in the conversation in recent decades.

In this introductory presentation of the Emerging Church, we observe the following:

- The ECC is a multifaceted international phenomenon that has developed in a number of Western contexts parallel to each other at the end of the 1980’s and beginning of the 1990’s. It is not until around the turn of the millennium that we really can begin to speak of an international conversation, as individuals, churches and networks started to interact in an intentional way by building relationships and exchanging ideas through communities on the internet, conferences, festivals, publication of books, and other printed resources.

²⁸² Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 139.

²⁸³ For instance, Emergent Village defined itself as a “generative friendship among missional Christians”, “About Emergent Village.”

²⁸⁴ For example Alberto Melucci writes that the cognitive definitions of new social movements “does not necessarily imply unified and coherent frameworks ... rather, it is constructed through interaction and comprises different and sometimes contradictory definitions” Alberto Melucci, *Challenging codes*, 71.

²⁸⁵ Lloyd Chia, “Emerging,” 190.

- Each context presented in this chapter carries its own particular and distinct flavour of emerging Christianity: alternative forms of worship in the United Kingdom, an emphasis on missional theology in Australia, and an engagement with postmodern epistemology and theology in the United States. These are not to be understood as exclusive for each context, but they seem to have been particularly influential factors compared to other parts of the world where the ECC has been expressed and taken shape.
- This chapter also presents a number of shifts within evangelical Protestantism that have taken place in the latter part of the 20th century. The presentation is by no means exhaustive, but highlights some of the most significant influencing factors that created the conditions out of which the ECC as an international phenomenon has emerged out from:
- The Ecumenical Movement and the developments within the World Council of Churches, as well as the Second Vatican Council provided a seedbed of permission and freedom to listen to traditions outside of Protestantism. It is difficult to perceive the ECC, with its emphasis on openness, dialogue and generosity towards other Christian traditions, without these developments in the second part of the 20th century.
- The frustration with the evangelical Protestant tradition - with its perceived narrow theological perspective, as well as ineffective practices in light of the challenges of post-Christendom society and a burgeoning postmodern culture - gave rise to what popularly has been referred to as *post-Evangelicals* and *post-Charismatics*, important identity markers to many people part of the Emerging Church discourse as they have attempted to deconstruct evangelical Protestant theology, mission practice and ecclesial forms and structures.
- The experience of the haemorrhaging of young people from the church (both in terms of attracting young people to the church's programs and events, and in keeping the younger generations that already have grown up in a church context). Central to the developments of the ECC phenomenon in the late 1980's and the 1990's was the experience and observation of the chasm that existed between the church and the shifting cultural landscape of Western society. Although the ECC can primarily be understood in terms of renewal, the discourse also has brought to light important missiological questions concerning the future of the church in the West.
- The engagement with post-World War II missiology and postcolonial theology. The works of theologians such as Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch seem to have played a significant role in articulating the agenda and framing the discourse within the ECC, as participants engage in ecclesiological deconstruction and reconstruction in light of the challenges of

postmodernity and post-Christendom cultures. The works of these missiologists have provided tools for the Emerging Church discourse to interpret Western culture as a mission context, deconstructing the traditional understanding of the Western church as primarily a sending agency to non-Christian countries in the developing world. In the changing cultural landscape of Western society, the mission field is merely a few blocks down from the church's doorstep, where the members live their everyday lives at work, in school, in cafes, and the local neighbourhood.

In this chapter I have also addressed the issue of whether or not the Emerging Church can be understood as a movement. Although it is a term that sometimes is used when referring to the Emerging Church phenomenon (as in the 'Emerging Church movement'), it is my conclusion that alternative terminology exist that are more useful and suitable. The use of the term 'movement' implies organisational forms, boundaries, creedal unity, leadership structures, and a homogeneity that simply is not applicable here. Although the word movement may be used in a colloquial way, from an academic perspective the term 'conversation' seems more appropriate. In this chapter I have made the case that the Emerging Church phenomenon share similar dynamics with what sociologists refer to as 'new social movements'. Approaching the Emerging Church in this manner seem to be consistent with an understanding of the Emerging Church as 'conversation', given the dialogical, relational, and diverse nature of new social movements. From this perspective, then, "emerging church" serve both as an identity marker for those involved in the conversation and a rallying point for those who seek to respond to the challenges posed by the changing cultural landscape in Western society by engaging in ecclesiological, missiological, spiritual, and theological experimentation and innovation.

The question of terminology is of significance here, as it affects what we can expect to find when searching for expressions of emerging church in Sweden. If the Emerging Church is a movement, then we may expect to find organisational ties, structures and relationships that link the communities in Sweden to the phenomenon in other parts of the world. If we approach the Emerging Church as a conversation and acknowledge that the phenomenon seems to share characteristics with what sociologists call 'new social movements', then we can expect to find groups in Sweden that share the same ethos and theological vision as emerging churches in other parts of the world, although they do not relate to the ECC in an organisational or structural sense. The influence of the Emerging Church seems to be greater than the sheer numbers of individuals or groups that associate or self-identify with the label "emerging church"²⁸⁶, which may very well be the case with communities that could be defined as expressions of emerging church within a Swedish context. This is important to keep in mind for our subsequent discussion in Part B.

²⁸⁶ C.f. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 10.

Chapter 5. Innovations in Church, Worship, and Mission: Four ‘streams’ of the Emerging Church

Previous chapter established that emerging Christianity is a multifaceted and diverse phenomenon that have developed in a number of Western contexts parallel to each other at the end of the 1980’s and beginning of the 1990’s. It is not until the turn of the millennium that it is feasible to speak of the ECC as a more coherent international phenomenon linked together by loosely formed networks, relationships, and communities and blogs on the internet, gathering under the umbrella term ‘emerging church’. I have also established that the Emerging Church lacks many of the characteristics of what we normally would associate with a movement, such as organisational forms, boundaries, creedal unity, and definable leadership structures. Instead, the Emerging Church as an international phenomenon is best understood by two complementary categories: as a “conversation”, and as a “new social movement”. The idea that the Emerging Church can be approached as a new social movement is helpful as it gives us an interpretative framework to understand the diversity, relational and discursive character, and fluidity of emerging Christianity. Rather than defining clear boundaries of a movement, ‘emerging church’ then serves as a rallying point and an identity marker for Christians that seek to address the numerous challenges that evangelical Protestantism is facing in the light of the changing cultural landscape of Western society. Robert Doornenbal appropriately refers to the ECC as “a spectrum of views.”²⁸⁷

The analytical tools we employ, then, to investigate the ECC need to allow for the complex and multifaceted characteristic of the phenomenon we study. It is not possible to approach the emerging Christianity as we would a denomination or Christian movement in a traditional sense, whether it be Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Charismatics, or similar. In order to illustrate this complexity, Stuart Murray uses the kaleidoscope (a child’s toy) to describe the ECC, writing that “Each time the viewer looks through the spy hole at the brightly coloured shards they have reconfigured themselves; different patterns have appeared.”²⁸⁸ Nevertheless, he concludes, despite the diversity of the phenomenon, “emerging churches evince similar theological emphases: creativity rooted in God as creator; community rooted in God as Trinity; and contextualisation rooted in God incarnate in Jesus.”²⁸⁹ Hence, our account of the ECC needs to be concise enough to say something meaningful, but dynamic enough to capture the complexity of the movement.

As a conversation and a new social movement, the ECC has served as an intersection for a diverse range of Christians representing a number of different contexts that many times reside at the fringes of evangelical Protestant church culture. Some have

²⁸⁷ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 46; C.f. Jason Wollschleger, “Off the Map? Locating the Emerging Church: A Comparative Case Study of Congregations in the Pacific Northwest,” *Review of Religious Research* 54, no. 1 (March 2012), 8.

²⁸⁸ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 93.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

approached the ECC from the perspective of mission, others by experimenting in new ways to worship, or finding alternative ways of living as Christian community, or by engaging in theological questioning and inquiry in light of postmodern culture and epistemology. In 2007 Scot McKnight presented a dynamic metaphor of the Emerging Church, describing five streams flowing into what he refers to as the “emerging lake”: *prophetic* (calling the Western evangelical church to renewal); *postmodern* (challenging the modern epistemological presuppositions of the Western church; here Emerging Christians can be divided into three groups: those ministering *to* postmoderns, those ministering *with* postmoderns, and lastly, emerging churches ministering *as* postmoderns); *praxis-oriented* (e.g. bringing worship on the agenda that values art and the aesthetics, and physical expressions of worship, as well as emphasising orthopraxis, social justice issues, and the missional nature of the Church); *Post-evangelical*; and lastly, *political* (which tends to lean towards the left, Democratic, side of the political spectrum).²⁹⁰ Bearing in mind that what McKnight describes is a particular North American flavour of the ECC, the metaphor itself - i.e. that of a “Lake Emerging” made up of different streams of emerging Christianity - is useful when studying the ECC as an international grassroots phenomenon.

Borrowing McKnight’s metaphor, then, I propose that the ECC as an international phenomenon within evangelical Protestantism may be understood as an intersection of four overlapping streams that both share characteristics as well as bring their own unique flavours and perspectives into the conversation: *The Emergent Theological Stream*, *The Neo-Monastic Stream*, *The Alternative Worship Stream*, and *The Missional Stream* (See Figure 9 below). Using this imagery of intersecting streams helps us to in greater detail grasp the complexity of the Emerging Church phenomenon, as well as understand the contextual differences that may exist when studying local emerging churches.

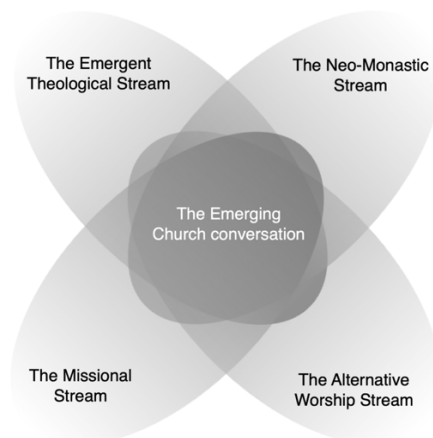


Figure 9. Four Streams that inform the Emerging Church conversation

²⁹⁰ Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today* 51, no. 2 (February 2007), 34-39.

Each stream contributes in unique ways to the Emerging Church conversation as well as sharing characteristics with the other three streams. If we view each of the four streams presented above as rivers that flow into “Lake Emerging”, we understand that local expressions of emerging Christianity will look different depending on where one “swims in the lake”. This metaphor is not only of heuristic value as it helps us to better understand the dynamics of the phenomenon as a conversation, but it provides a methodological framework when searching for local faith communities that could be categorized as ‘emerging churches’. Using this imagery, we can expect local emerging churches to express at least one, but not necessarily all, of the four streams presented here. The purpose of this chapter, then, is twofold; first, to present the four streams of the ECC, and second, to arrive at a working definition of the ECC as an international grassroots phenomenon. This, in turn, will serve as basis for Part B and our exploration of emerging churches in Sweden.

5.1 The Emergent Theological Stream

One prominent stream within the ECC is concerned with theological discourse, in particular the contributions of post-modern thought to Christian theology and critique of evangelical epistemological and doctrinal traditions. In his book *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (2006) Ryan S. Anderson labels this discourse ‘emergent’, which “refers primarily to theological change” and contrasts it to the term ‘emerging’ which has to do with “rethinking church and ecclesiology as any missionary would as we enter new cultures”.²⁹¹ Following Anderson’s reasoning here, ‘emergent’ can be seen as a specific theological undercurrent of the much broader umbrella term ‘emerging’. Anderson writes:

The relation of emergent to emerging is somewhat like that of a seed to the soil. An emergent theology needs the soil of emerging churches in which to take root.²⁹²

To some critics, the trajectory of emergent theology signifies a rejection of the premises of evangelical theological tradition.²⁹³ Scot McKnight, however, asserts that although emerging Christianity is post-evangelical, it is not so “in the sense of abandonment, not in the sense of rendering obsolete, but in the sense of taking up and moving beyond as a fresh work of the Spirit.”²⁹⁴ It is worth noting that this particular stream allows for a range of views and theological standpoints, from moderate engagements with post-modern epistemology, ecumenical theology, and contextual theology, to more radical theological experimentation and inquiry.²⁹⁵ By no means does emergent theology represent a coherent systematic theology - we have already established that the Emerging Church is best understood as a conversation

²⁹¹ Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 12.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁹³ C.f. Don A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005)

²⁹⁴ Scot McKnight, “What is Emerging Church,” *Fall Contemporary Issues Conference, Westminster Theological Seminary* (26-27 October 2006).

²⁹⁵ C.f. Katharine Sarah Moody, *Radical theology and emerging Christianity: deconstruction, materialism and religious practices* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015)

and does not involve an adherence to specific doctrines. What the *Emergent Theological stream* represents, instead, is a specific current within the ECC focused on a theological critique of evangelical Protestant tradition in the light of postmodernity. What is outlined in this section are some of the key concerns in this critique and examples of how this is expressed within the Emerging Church discourse. It is also worth noting at this point that the term 'emergent theology' should not be confused or equated with 'Emergent Village', which refers to a specific relational network within the ECC in North America (See Section 4.3 for details). Several prominent figures associated with the network have contributed to articulating the theological concerns of emergent theology, such as Brian D. McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Tim Keel, and Karen Ward, to name but a few. This, however, is done in conversation with emergent thinkers in other parts of the world, such as Peter Rollins, Kester Brewin, and Jason Clark in the United Kingdom, and Steve Taylor in New Zealand/Australia.

As already addressed, the post-evangelical dimension of emerging Christianity is grounded in the experience that evangelical Protestant theological tradition and culture is narrow and limiting. This calls for a wider engagement with philosophical and theological traditions outside of evangelical Protestantism. Mark Scandrette notes in his contribution to the anthology *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (2007), that people who are part of the Emerging Church discourse seek an "integrative theology and practice".²⁹⁶ This approach to theology covers a number of themes, but its essence may be described as a rejection of a dualistic approach to Christian faith and life, which - in the eyes of emerging Christians - has taken the Western church hostage as it has succumbed to the influences of modernism.²⁹⁷ Whether or not this is a fair assessment of the current state of Western churches, this "both/and" approach to theology is a key component to emergent thinking. It has opened up a number of themes for theological inquiry in Emerging Church circles: e.g. the communal aspects of soteriology; the social dimensions of the gospel of Jesus; contemplative and bodily spiritual formation; creation theology; the role of arts and aesthetics for Christian spirituality and faith; the re-examination of vocation, to name but a few.²⁹⁸ Mark Scandrette notes that, while

These streams of interest have perhaps always existed within Christian tradition in some form, what may be unique about the church in its current emergence is a desire to be proficient and passionate in multiple dimensions - because we live with a sense that everything matters and that no part of human experience is outside the light cast by the hope of the Good News of God.²⁹⁹

It is not only the theological substance of emergent theology that challenges conservative evangelicals, but that of theological method; *how* to do theology, and

²⁹⁶ Mark Scandrette, "Growing Pains - The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming'," Doug Pagitt, and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 27.

²⁹⁷ E.g. the divine between evangelism and social action; Liberal and Evangelical theology; Sunday service worship and the everyday life; personal salvation and the environmental and social transformation of the world, etc.

²⁹⁸ Mark Scandrette, "Growing Pains," 28.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

how to read the Bible. Here, emerging Christians have a preference for narrative theology and mysticism, whilst expressing a critique of traditional evangelical theological method. James S. Bielo writes:

The stress on 'beliefs' and 'facts' that dominates systematic theology is replaced with an emphasis on the moral and metaphysical truths that permeate scripture. Emerging Christians stress Biblical authority just as conservative Evangelicals do, but construe a different relationship to that authority. This creates a new space for mystery. Systematic theology prioritizes God's immanence and the revelation and knowability of the divine nature and plan. Narrative theology shifts the attention to divine transcendence and the unavoidably partial ability of humans to understand God's gracious schemes. In turn, the necessity of unflinching certainty in matters of faith disappears. Doubt and mystery become productive, beneficial places to dwell, not dangers to guard against.³⁰⁰

For the discussion presented here I rely primarily on the works of Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Peter Rollins, and Kester Brewin. Jones and Pagitt serve as examples of emergent theology from a North American context. Through their involvement in and leadership of Emergent Village they came to play important roles in shaping the theological agenda of the ECC in this part of the world. Rollins and Brewin are both from the United Kingdom and have played formative roles in pushing the boundaries of theological discourse within the ECC in the United Kingdom.³⁰¹ All four authors have been widely read both in their specific contexts as well as internationally and serve as good examples of theological concerns raised within the Emergent Theological stream of the Emerging Church.

5.1.1 A Post-foundational approach to knowledge

The theological discourse that runs as an undercurrent within the ECC is decidedly post-foundational in vision and posture. This post-foundational stance can be exemplified by John R. Franke and the late Stanley Grenz who co-wrote the seminal book *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (2001). This book, Bielo notes, quickly became a "theological calling card for Emerging Christians."³⁰² Here the authors critique both liberal and conservative systematic theology which, they argue, responded to the same agenda, that of modernity. Franke and Grenz state:

The rules, however, have indeed changed. Theology, which earlier moved from a premodern to the modern and in that process spawned both liberalism and conservatism, not finds itself confronted with the postmodern situation. And the current fragmentation of theological discourse, which has emerged even within traditionally liberal and conservative circles, is in part the fallout from this change in the rules of theological discourse. ... These thinkers, whether liberal or conservative, advocate that theologians maintain the course their forebears chartered in response to the questions that arose out of the Enlightenment. Yet a growing number of theologians are convinced that Christians

³⁰⁰ James S. Bielo, "Emerging Church," 222.

³⁰¹ Peter Rollins represents here some of the most revisionist voices within the Emergent Theological stream, and in later years moved further away from evangelical theological tradition, shifting from an apophatic to a radical theology. C.f. Katharine Sarah Moody, *Radical*, 182, 184-185. This presentation is concerned with his earlier contributions to the ECC, in particular *How (Not) to Speak of God* (2006).

³⁰² James S. Bielo, "Emerging Church," 222.

ought to take seriously the church's context within contemporary postmodern cultural milieu.³⁰³

The bedrock of evangelical theology is Enlightenment foundationalism, according to Franke and Grenz, which

assumed a realist metaphysic and evidenced a strong preference for the correspondence theory of truth, that is, the epistemological outlook that focuses on the truth value of individual propositions and declares a proposition to be 'true' if and only if – or to the extent that – it corresponds with some fact.³⁰⁴

The acquisition of knowledge can here be likened with that of constructing a building - knowledge must rest on a firm foundation.³⁰⁵ Accepting this approach, according to Franke and Grenz, led conservative theologians in the 19th century to approach the theological discipline as predominately an intellectual and scientific undertaking, focusing on proofs, stating universal facts, and building a theoretical foundation of essential truths on which the Christian faith rests upon. Franke and Grenz write:

With such firm foundation in place, conservative theologians were confident of their ability to complete the task of deducing from scripture the great, timeless theological truths about God and the world that divine revelation has placed within its pages. In doing so, they believed, they would formulate properly "the faith once delivered to the saints."³⁰⁶

This rationalist approach to theology and reading the scriptures is particularly troublesome to emerging Christians, where

reality is objective and immanently knowable; the human mind successfully discerns that reality; and the faculty of language dutifully conveys that reality via factual propositions. ... Systematic theology, like the natural sciences, is said to be made of rational argument, certainty, proof, and logical apologetics.³⁰⁷

This approach to systematic theology rests on epistemological presuppositions vigorously questioned within the ECC, as systematic theology is seemingly reduced to a series of propositional statements, and true Christian faith and identity rests on the acceptance of particular beliefs and the rejection of others.³⁰⁸ According to emerging Christians, the foundationalist belief in pure reason and absolute certainty has at best resulted in a perceived arrogance - or overconfidence - of the Church in a globalised and pluralistic society, and at worst led to authoritarianism, oppression, and idolatry.³⁰⁹ Here James Bielo identifies three key aspects of emergent theological thinking:

1. The aversion of dogmatic certainty

³⁰³ Stanley Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping theology in a Postmodern context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 10.

³⁰⁴ Stanley Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 32.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 335.

³⁰⁷ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011), LOC 297.

³⁰⁸ James S. Bielo, "Emerging Church," 222.

³⁰⁹ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), 2.

2. The suspicion of epistemological clarity
3. The dethroning of doctrinal beliefs as the key signifier of Christian identity³¹⁰

We can note here that the contribution of post-foundational thinkers such as Franke and Grenz to Emerging Church discourse is seminal, as it has provided a language for a theological methodology that is sensitive to culture, rooted in the experience of the Christian community, eclectic and rejects the correspondence theory of truth, in favour of the type of linguistic constructivism pioneered by philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein. Following this line of thought, Peter Rollins writes:

...we can still talk of a real world: it is just that we can never see it in an unadulterated manner because, as interpretative beings, we always filter the real world through our experiences, language, intelligence, culture and so forth.³¹¹

5.1.2 A Humble epistemology

Adopting a post-modern posture to theology is not unique to the ECC, but through the young leaders that were part of shaping the conversation in the United States and the alternative worship movement in the United Kingdom in the 1990's a sense of permission existed to engage with the challenges of post-modern philosophy and culture in ways that were outside the perimeters of conservative evangelical Protestantism. In particular the rise of blogs and similar meeting places on the Internet made the conversation accessible and not exclusive to academic circles.

Emerging Christians part of the conversation have at times been accused of embracing relativism or being anti-realists.³¹² Although there undoubtedly are elements of this within Emerging Church discourse, this is not necessarily part of the wider theological vision of the conversation. As example, Peter Rollins writes that he understands

the emerging community as a significant part of a wider religious movement which rejects both absolutism and relativism as idolatrous positions which hide their human origins in the modern myth of pure reason.³¹³

Rollins argues further that relativism ultimately is self-contradictory,

for to say that there is no meaning to the universe is itself a meaningful statement, as it makes a meaningful claim about the way the universe really is. Hence relativism is inherently self-contradictory and devours itself.³¹⁴

What emergent theology does, instead, can be seen as adopting an *apophatic or negative theology* of God.³¹⁵ Peter Rollins is perhaps the person representative of emerging

³¹⁰ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, Kindle LOC 314.

³¹¹ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 11.

³¹² C.f. R. Scott. Smith, *Telling the Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005)

³¹³ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 2.

³¹⁴ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 11.

³¹⁵ Kevin Corcoran, "Who's Afraid of Philosophical Realism? Taking Emerging Christianity to Task", in Kevin Corcoran *et al*, *Church in the Present* (2011), p. 3

Christianity who has articulated this most clearly in his book *How (Not) to Speak of God* (2006). Here Rollins develops the idea that the rejection of modern absolutism can be grounded in, firstly, a Biblical rejection of idolatry (in the sense that ideology can be viewed as some form of idolatry), and Christian theological tradition, building on the works of Meister Eckhart.³¹⁶ The premise is that no one can legitimately claim to know or understand who God really is, and any such attempt is merely an articulation of our subjective understanding of God. Rollins writes that “an emerging discourse acknowledges that speaking of God is never speaking about God but only ever speaking about our understanding of God.”³¹⁷ Claims of objectively knowing God as God really is, is then not merely epistemologically flawed, but an act of idolatry as what we worship is merely an image of God. Rollins uses a piece of art to illustrate his point, where he imagines entering a museum and contemplating one of the exhibits. He writes,

The painting could be said to offer us a type of revelation, for it stands before us and communicates a message. However, the message of a piece of art is not simple, singular or able to be mastered. This is evidenced in the fact that different people will take away different meanings from the same artefact, demonstrating that the message is concealed, elusive or fluid. When we ask ourselves about the meaning of the artwork, we are immediately involved in an act of interpretation which is influenced by what we bring to the painting. In similar way, the revelation of God should be compared to a parable that speaks out of an excess of meaning. This means that revelation offers a wealth of meaning that will be able to speak in different ways to those with ears to hear. The parable is given to us, but at the same time its full wealth of meaning will never fully be mined.³¹⁸

This might appear as relativism to some, and perhaps legitimately so, but an Emergent understanding of God is that God is not an object to be known or grasped, but an *absolute subject* who knows us and transforms us as human beings. Rollins illustrates this by the imagery of the relationship between a baby and its mother: “a baby”, he writes, “does not understand the mother but rather experiences being known by the mother.”³¹⁹ Rollins conclusion is that the Christian faith, then, is *atheistic*, which is believing in God, while at the same time remaining dubious or disbelieving what one believes in God.³²⁰

Emerging Christians, then, adopt a *humble epistemological approach* in how they understand the Bible, God and theological doctrine (What Grenz and Franke refers to as a “chastened rationality”).³²¹ This does not necessarily mean accepting the premises of philosophical relativism or the rejection of absolute truth. What is at the centre of Emergent theological thinking is the objection to the idea that we can grasp truth and knowledge about God objectively.³²² This epistemological stance has influenced the theological discourse within the ECC in significant ways and has become one of the

³¹⁶ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 11f.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

³²¹ Stanley Grenz, and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 22ff.

³²² Tony Jones, *New Christians*, 140, 153.; Kevin Corcoran, “Introduction,” in *The Church in the Present Tense - a Candid Look At What's Emerging*, ed. Scot McKnight, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 11.; Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 127-28.

chief causes for conflict and controversy with conservative evangelicalism.

5.1.3 An eclectic theology

The integrative vision of emergent theology and the advocacy for epistemic humility within Emerging Church discourse has led many participants to look beyond the traditions of evangelical Protestantism for sources for theological inquiry and reflection. Tony Jones writes, that

Emergents find little importance in the discrete differences between the various flavours of Christianity. Instead, they practice generous orthodoxy that appreciates the contributions of all Christian movements.³²³

Rollins similarly notes that the theological thinking within the Emerging Church conversation can be described as a “genuinely ecumenical device”. Rollins writes,

for by unsettling and decentring any idea of one, true interpretation held by one group over against all others, a network of bridges is formed between different interpretive communities who acknowledge that we are all engaged in an interpretive process which can do justice to the revelation itself.³²⁴

The call among emerging Christians for a theology that draws inspiration from and listens to Christian traditions beyond evangelicalism is well illustrated in Brian D. McLaren’s book *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004). Similar to Grenz and Franke’s vision in *Beyond Foundationalism* (2001), McLaren argues for a move beyond the conservative/liberal divide and the articulation of a Christian faith and spirituality that is better suited a post-modern cultural context.³²⁵ In the book McLaren encourages the reader to embrace that which is good in both traditions, as well as moving beyond the traditional debates in favour of new theological issues that can be seen as more pressing for our day and age (e.g. environmental issues, peace-making, hospitality, post-colonialism, etc). At odds with a ‘sectarian’ or ‘elitist’ approach to theology, he challenges the ECC with a call for

a humble rediscovery of the simple, mysterious way of Jesus that can be embraced across the whole Christian horizon (and beyond). What we need is something lived, not just talked or written about. The last thing we need is a new group of proud, super protestant, hyper puritan, ultra restorationists reformers who say, “Only we’ve got it right!” and thereby damn everybody else to the bin of five minutes ago and the bucket of below-average mediocracy.³²⁶

Theology ought to be done with a wider scope, according to McLaren, drawing inspiration and insights from other Christian traditions, whether it be Anabaptist,

³²³ Tony Jones, *New Christians*, 8.

³²⁴ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 31.

³²⁵ Stanley Grenz and John Franke’s influence on McLaren’s thinking in this book is unmistakable; Franke is the author of the foreword, and McLaren tributes Grenz as the direct inspiration for the use of the term ‘generous orthodoxy’. C.f. Brian D. McLaren, *Generous*, 23.

³²⁶ Brian D. McLaren, *Generous*, 19.

Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Celtic, Contemplative, etc. The task, then, of theological inquiry is to identify what is helpful in each tradition, and discard that which is not. Following McLaren's reasoning, it is evident that openness and dialogue are both key components for Emergent theological thinking.

Notably, this open and eclectic approach can also, but not necessary, include religious traditions other than the Christian faith. Kevin Corcoran writes,

In good postmodern or deconstructive form, [emerging Christians] help us, the church, recover ancient insights, listen to ancient voices too long ignored or overlooked. What is somewhat remarkable among emerging Christians, however, is the acknowledgement that flashes of God's kingdom are just as likely to be found among those who do not identify themselves with Christ as they are among those who do.³²⁷

5.1.4 Theology as contextual, transitory and evolving

The Emerging Church phenomenon is shaped by the understanding that theology, rather than being a neutral act, is shaped by language and culture, and for theology to be understood, we also need to understand the particular cultural context from which it has emerged from. Tony Jones writes that "this localness of theology is a hallmark of emergent thinking and sensibility."³²⁸ Articulating an Emergent approach to theology in his book *The New Christians* (2008), Jones argues that theology is *local*, *conversational* and *temporary*. It is local, according to Jones, because as any human enterprise the starting point is the individual's attempt to reflect on notions about God. His conclusion, then, is that "theology is not universal, nor is it transcendent", and although the "God about whom we theologize is transcendent ... our human musings about it is not."³²⁹ Somewhat polemically, Jones argues that

To assume that our convictions about God are somehow timeless is the deepest arrogance, and it establishes an imperialistic attitude that has a chilling effect on the honest conversation that's needed for theology to progress.³³⁰

Doug Pagitt illustrates this by the imagery of song and dance: there is no dance that is applicable to all kinds of music. Waltz demands a certain type of dance, and so does tango music, etc.³³¹ This contextual approach not only explains the variety of theologies within the Church, but it also encourages and celebrates plurality.

As cultures shifts, then, so does theology according to those shaped by the Emergent theological stream. Pagitt goes on to say:

Theology is not the story of God, and it is not our story; rather, it is the understandings that allow us to connect the two. When my theology no longer serves that purpose, because either my story has changed or my understanding of God's story changes, then the right

³²⁷ Kevin Corcoran, "Introduction," 68. See for example the discussion on the implications of the incarnation in Brian D. McLaren, *Generous*, 245ff.

³²⁸ Tony Jones, *New Christians*, 112.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*,

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

³³¹ Doug Pagitt, "The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology," in *Listening to the beliefs of emerging churches: Five perspectives*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 128 f.

and faithful thing is for theology to change as well.³³²

Central to Kester Brewin's thinking is the idea of 'emergence'. Originally a concept used in organisational theory,³³³ Kester builds a theological framework that is contextual, open, and continually evolving. Organisms with emergent properties, he maintains, may appear to be completely chaotic and anarchic at first sight, but when more closely examined reveal a highly complex and dynamic structure. Using the analogy of an ant colony, Brewin writes:

A huge mass scurrying in different directions, everybody seemingly oblivious to the others. All in a hurry to carry out some task, and clambering over one another in desperation to complete it. Yet closer inspection reveals a high level of order. Some ants are collecting food, while others are disposing of waste. Still others are carrying the bodies of dead comrades out to the 'burial ground' of the colony.³³⁴

Emerging systems are extremely durable as its survival or growth does not depend on one or a few single entities but is embedded in the collective whole. This, according to Brewin is crucial for the church to learn in its present situation. Brewin continues:

if the Church is to survive in the modern urban environment it must learn to find new peaks of the valleys by re-emerging as a complex, self-organizing system. It must be born again at the edge of chaos ... We must establish ourselves as the *body* of Christ, not the machine of Christ. Bodies are organic, dynamic, sentient and conscious.³³⁵

In a critique of hierarchical and institutional thinking, Brewin applies this concept to the church and what emerges is an ecclesiological vision that is highly decentralised, relational, grass root, and open. It implies a theological approach that is decidedly contextual as it self-organises, adapts to and learns from its surroundings. According to Brewin this also means that our understanding of truth will need to change. He states:

[Truth] will no longer reside in some intangible conceptual book that only the fully trained and ordained can unlock. Instead, the pursuit of it will be about our shared experience. Some will bring their wisdom from the Church's history, others a story from their social work, still others a passage from Scripture and others a song or poem. ... It is about an open dedication to understanding that each of us has a contribution to make, that no one is worthless, that no person can have the final say on what is true.³³⁶

Rather than locating truth to a single external authority where people can turn to, he continues to say that it is situated in "a distributed network of authorities that people look to in order to assimilate multiple perspectives on truth."³³⁷

³³² Doug Pagitt, "Embodied Theology," 123.

³³³ For instance, see Steven Johnson, *Emergence: the Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2001)

³³⁴ Kester Brewin, *The Complex Christ: Sings of emergence in the urban church* (London: SPCK, 2004), 54.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 63. Emphasis original.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

Albeit brief, the concepts presented in this section provide us with an understanding of some of the key concerns addressed within the emergent theological stream of Emerging Church discourse. Some contributions presented here, such as that of Pete Rollins and Kester Brewin, are perhaps best understood as more radical examples of emergent theological thinking. The theological discourse within the ECC is decidedly post-evangelical and post-foundational in outlook and challenges a number of central elements of conservative evangelical theology; the meaning of truth and knowledge, authority, and the place of culture in theological discourse, to name a few. To what extent this is emphasised depends on where one “swims in Lake Emerging”, and as already addressed above, it would be mistaken to approach the ECC as a uniform phenomenon in this regard. The ECC is, after all, a *conversation*. With that being said, what has been presented here serves as an unmistakable undercurrent of emerging Christianity and permeates the theological discourse within the ECC in significant ways.

5.2 The Alternative Worship Stream

The second stream that has influenced the ECC is what popularly has been called the Alternative Worship movement, or Alt. Worship for short. Originating in the United Kingdom in the late 1980’s and inspired by the Nine O’clock Service in Sheffield, England (See introduction to chapter 4), this movement came to play a seminal role in shaping the discourse and the various expressions of the ECC during the 1990’s in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and beyond. If to many Emergent Village became synonymous with the Emerging Church in North America, the same can be said about the Alternative Worship movement in other parts of the world.³³⁸ Alternative Worship, as expression of new emerging forms of church, is often characterised by what some refer to as ‘ancient-future worship’, blending traditional forms of symbolism, liturgy, and images with contemporary dance and club music, lights, sounds, art, and language. In the monograph *Alternative Worship in the Church of England* (1999), Paul Roberts describes this kind of liturgical experience in the following way:

If someone who is used to other forms of worship walks into an alternative worship service, they often spend the first few minutes not knowing where to look or what to focus on. Projected images, physical objects, words, music, smells and movement may all be happening simultaneously. Sometimes the plethora of points of focus is deliberately designed to obscure a single point of focus - so that people are given the freedom to locate their attention on a point to choose. At other times, they are designed to co-ordinate, so that a single point is elaborated using different media.

When each of the media is considered singly, they are normally the fruit of considerable amounts of local creativity. As much creative energy is put into framing the words of prayers as goes into putting together other aspects of the service. Creativity is also the name

³³⁸ Examples of Alt. Worship groups: The Late, Late Service (Glasgow, UK), The Vaux (London, UK), Moot (London, UK), Grace (London, UK), Visions (York, UK), Sanctus 1 (Manchester, UK), Resonance (Bristol, UK), Beyond (Brighton, UK), Parallel Universe (NZ), Cityside (Auckland, NZ), Raceway (Ellerslie, Auckland, NZ), Cafe Church (Sydney, Australia), Living Room (Melbourne, Australia), Church of the Apostles (Seattle, US), Solomon’s Porch (Minneapolis, US), House for All Sinners and Saints (Denver, US). For a more comprehensive list, see <http://www.alternativeworship.org>

of the game elsewhere - in home-produced or home-edited video, super-8 projections, slides, painting, music, and so on.³³⁹

Although much of the contemporary cultural elements that are used in alternative worship liturgy draw inspiration from urban club culture, music and imagery, people who are part of the Alternative Worship scene reject the idea that these emerging expressions of church and worship simply can be regarded as “youth church”. Paul Roberts notes that

alternative worship involves more than contemporary music, nightclub lighting and multi-media. Although it often uses these things, it has a wider agenda that embraces theology, the nature of church life, and how the gospel is applied in Christian proclamation and personal life. It arises from the need for the church to engage with a cultural shift, from the patterns of Christian life which took shape in modernity, to a faith which brings the authentic message of Christ to bear on life in postmodernity.³⁴⁰

5.2.1 Retrieval of tradition

Doug Gay traces the background of the Alternative Worship movement, and the wider Emerging Church phenomenon as it came to be expressed in the United Kingdom, in a growing sense of frustration with their own church tradition among younger Christians part of low church Protestantism.³⁴¹ Gay argues that creative and alternative forms of worship practices, as well as experimental Christian communities, emerged as a backlash to the neglect or distaste of liturgy and ritual within the low church Protestant tradition, viewed “as the enemies of grace and as obstacles to the effective working of the Spirit.”³⁴² With the growing sense, then, of that their own church culture failed to make sense in a postmodern and changing society, as well as being stripped away of the depths and riches of Christian tradition, younger evangelical Christians began to draw inspiration from media studies, postmodern epistemology, and the contemporary arts, as well as the ecumenical movement, Catholic contemplative spirituality, and Eastern Orthodox liturgy. According to Gay, this *retrieval of tradition* among younger Christians was made possible by, firstly, the loosening of cultural and theological inhibitions as the landscape of evangelical Protestant church culture began to shift in the 1990’s,³⁴³ as well as encounters with alternative forms of Christian traditions were made possible in ways that were nonthreatening.³⁴⁴

5.2.2 Remixing worship

Using references from popular music, Alternative Worship has been compared with

³³⁹ Paul Roberts, *Alternative Worship*, 5.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴¹ Doug Gay’s working assumption is that the Emerging Church phenomenon “is a mutation whose origins are decisively located within low church Protestantism.” Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 1.

³⁴² Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 20.

³⁴³ See discussion in Section 3.1 above.

³⁴⁴ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 23.

the act of *remixing* or *sampling*, which refers to what a DJ does when they use two vinyl turntables or CD players to mix together a new sound. By connecting bite sized samples of already existing music and sounds (e.g. a baseline, rap, spoken word, part of a song, rhythm track, a fragment of a film, etc.), usually revolving around a core track or melody, the DJ creates new tunes, rhythms and sonic landscapes that connects with the crowds and the specific circumstances of the event.³⁴⁵ Using this imagery, then, Steve Taylor refers to the practises of alternative worship and emerging church communities as “DJ-ing gospel and culture”³⁴⁶, as they creatively and freely mix cultural elements (whether it be music, art, poetry, news, documentaries, philosophy, etc) with Scripture, as well as liturgies, rituals and spirituality from Western and Eastern Christian traditions. Just as the music DJ transforms the strategies of the record company, the church when using this principle “can amplify, change, or clash with the strategies of the dominant order.”³⁴⁷ The practice of sampling, or remixing worship, can be seen as a deeply subversive and deconstructive practice, as it helps the participants to view and interpret both the secular world and Christian faith differently. Doug Gay writes that

Analogous practices can be seen within postmodern architecture and the metaphor overlaps with the idea of bricolage in post-structuralist theory and hybridity in post-colonial theory. Theologically, it can be associated with the grammar of renewal and, from my own tradition, of reform.³⁴⁸

5.2.3 Discovery of contextual theology

Doug Gay writes that “questions of worship and liturgy ... have historically been particularly prone to culture-blindness.”³⁴⁹ For the Alternative Worship movement, as with the wider Emerging Church phenomenon, mission studies and conversations around culture, gospel and the church have been a vital resource to overcome that issue. Missiologists such as Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, Vincent Donovan, Robert Schreiter, and Stephen Bevans helped those who were part of the movement to develop a hermeneutical lens with which to read Western culture and find tools to deconstruct ecclesial forms and practices³⁵⁰. Although the Alternative Worship movement for the most part can be seen as a renewal movement within the church, rather than a missionary movement, we need to keep in mind that part of the motivation for these communities to emerge was the growing frustration over the gap between the church and surrounding culture, and a growing awareness of church decline in terms decreasing numbers of church members and worship attendees. In the United Kingdom, as well as other parts of the world, the Alternative Worship movement and the experience of emerging churches became instrumental for

³⁴⁵ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 92.; and Jonny Baker, Doug Gay, and Jenny Brown, *Alternative Worship* (London: SPCK, 2003), xiv.

³⁴⁶ Steve Taylor, *Out of Bounds Church?* (Grand Rapids, MI: emergentYS, 2005), 139.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁴⁸ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 92.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

mainstream evangelical Protestant churches to see what Christians communities shaped by contextual theology and missiology in Western society could look like in practice.

5.2.4 Postmodern worship

Alternative Worship has at times been referred to as ‘postmodern worship’, referring to the postmodern posture and language that many within the movement tend to adopt. Here there is a clear overlap or intersection between the Emergent Theological stream (See discussion above) and the Alternative Worship movement, and many who have been part of articulating an emergent theology have also been part of experimenting with alternative forms of worship and spirituality within the Emergent Church conversation.³⁵¹ Paul Roberts writes that “there are parallels between alternative worship and postmodern theories of art and literature”³⁵² and Jonny Baker *et al* writes that the movement “has also been shaped by broader currents of post-modern living.”³⁵³ Similarly as ‘text’ is not a fixed object within postmodern thought, but has permeable boundaries depending on who the reader is and when and where the reader engages with the text, so is the ‘text’ of worship unbundled and deconstructed through alternative and experimentative worship practices. Paul Roberts explains further:

As such, no single element of the rite takes any precedence over another, be it word, music, singing, or visuals. This is reinforced by the fact that any number of these things can be happening simultaneously. One radical expression of this is when worship occurs through means of ‘installations’, labyrinths or ‘stations’. In these, the act of worship needs its ‘viewers’ in order to function properly as a complete work of art.³⁵⁴

Jonny Baker *et al* writes similarly:

The organist is a DJ. The vicar has been deconstructed. There is no front - people worship in the round - the space is visually over determined (you cannot look at or take in everything at once) so you have to make your own meanings - even which direction you face in is a decision about meaning making.³⁵⁵

Furthermore, we see in the embrace of an eclectic, or “pick-and-mix”, approach to spirituality and worship practice, further intersections between the Alternative Worship movement and the Emergent Theological stream. As emergent theology is generous in its approach to theological traditions other than evangelical Protestantism, the Alternative Worship movement tends to blend and embrace spirituality and worship practices from other Christian traditions. The movement similarly takes influence from Feminist theory, creation theology, environmentalism,

³⁵¹ E.g. Karen Ward (The Church of the Apostles, US), Doug Pagitt (Salmon’s Porch, US), Kester Brewington (Vaux, UK), Peter Rollins (ikon, UK), Jonny Baker (Grace, UK), Steve Taylor (Raceway Baptist Church, New Zealand).

³⁵² Paul Roberts, *Alternative Worship*, 14.

³⁵³ Jonny Baker, Doug Gay, and Jenny Brown, *Alternative Worship*, xv.

³⁵⁴ Paul Roberts, *Alternative Worship*, 14.

³⁵⁵ Jonny Baker, Doug Gay, and Jenny Brown, *Alternative Worship*, xv.

social justice theory, and rejects the division between the sacred and the profane, striving towards and integrative theology and practice within the church. In many ways the Alternative Worship movement could be seen as a liturgical expression of emergent theology.

5.2.5 Deconstruction of traditional forms of church

To some groups alternative forms of worship practices simply means incorporating more creative, participatory and eclectic liturgical elements into the church's communal worship experience. Other groups are examples of some of the most deconstructive expressions of church that we can find within the Emerging Church phenomenon.³⁵⁶ Peter Rollins notes that these groups experiment with what he calls 'transformance art', which

can be described as an immersive art form that invites people to engage in theatrical, ritualistic performance whereby they enact the death of God (as *deus ex machina*) and the resurrection of God (as one who dwells among us) with the purpose of reconfiguring one's social existence ... [it] is a multisensory provocation designed to cut the gap between belief and action, offering substantive transformation.³⁵⁷

Transformance art, then, is both transforming the self, subverting ecclesial spiritual and ecclesial assumption, as well as transforming the world. Rollins continues,

Transformance art seeks to undermine the ironic stance in which one actively ridicule's one's dominant social activity. It rejects any moves that would seek to remove us from the world. However, it also rejects total immersion in the world. Instead, it encourages us to be fully immersed in the world in a manner that breaks open and reconfigures the world.³⁵⁸

In conclusion, the Alternative Worship movement has played a significant role in shaping the developments and the agenda of the ECC, in particular in contexts such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand in the late 1980's and the 1990's. Alternative Worship has been an influential factor in other parts of the world as well, such as Australia and the United States, but not to the same extent. Nevertheless, through the Alternative Worship movement people part who are part of the Emerging Church discourse have gained tools for contextualising ecclesial forms and practices, overcoming the perceived secular/sacred divide, embraced an appreciation of the arts, symbolism, creative use of technology and multimedia, as well as an approach to faith that encourages questioning, mystery, and listening to the wider traditions of the global church.³⁵⁹ Addressing the influence and importance of the Alternative Worship movement on the wider ECC, Kester Brewin makes the comparison with the punk music scene in England in the late 1970's. Although "pure punk" really existed for only a brief time period in 1976/7, it had a major impact on the music industry in

³⁵⁶ E.g. *ikon* (Belfast, UK), *maji* (Birmingham, UK), and *Sanctus1* (Manchester, UK).

³⁵⁷ Peter Rollins, "Transformance Art", in Kevin Corcoran (Ed.), *Church in the Present Tense* (2011), p. 98

³⁵⁸ Peter Rollins, "Transformance Art," in *The Church in the Present Tense - A Candid Look at What's Emerging*, ed. Scot McKnight, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 100.

³⁵⁹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 88.

the 1980's and onwards, influencing a great number of bands that not necessarily can be regarded as punk.³⁶⁰ What punk did, according to Brewin, was to give people permission, "it drove through and trashed the ivory towers of the music business, dismantling all the perceived wisdom about musicianship, marketing, profit, contracts and boundaries."³⁶¹ According to Brewin, something similar can be said about the Alternative Worship scene that emerged in the 1990's:

In the same way, although the alternative worship scene and other fresh expressions may be producing innovative ways of being church, I believe their primary function will be simply to clear the ground and give permission to the wider Church to imagine new things.³⁶²

5.3 The Neo-Monastic Stream

The decades around the turn of the millennium saw an increased interest in the historic monastic traditions (e.g. The Benedictines, The Franciscans, The Celts, etc) among evangelical Protestant Christians. Emerging Christians were seeking ways to reimagine and experiment with ecclesial forms and practices, mission and Christian spirituality in postmodern and post-Christendom society.³⁶³ This third stream, which has come to inform the ECC in significant ways, is commonly referred to as the Neo-Monastic (or New Monastic) movement, and has attracted younger Christians throughout North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and beyond.³⁶⁴ Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel write,

Neo-monastics are "intentional communities" of Christians who either live together in a large house or close to each other in a specific geographical area.⁵⁹ They commit to compassionate service to each other and the local community, and attempt to live self-sustaining lifestyles often combining craftsmanship, environmentalism, and charitable work.⁶⁰ In contrast to the casual connections of pub churches or the occasional gatherings at conferences, neo-monastic communities are characterized by intense and holistic commitment.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁰ Kester Brewin writes, "Bands from U2 to The Smiths to Happy Mondays to The Prodigy to Massive Attack to Bestie Boys to graphic artist Peter Seville to The Designer Republic have all expressed punk as part of their inspiration." Kester Brewin, *Complex Christ*, 71.

³⁶¹ Kester Brewin, *Complex Christ*, 71.

³⁶² Kester Brewin, *Complex Christ*, 72.

³⁶³ Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy, eds. *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: Canterbury Press, 2010), 8.; The Rutba House, *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene: Wipe and Stock Publishers, 2005); Andrew Walker, and Luke Bretherton, *Remembering*, 38.; Peter Rollins, "Transformance," 100.; Andrew Jones, "Monasticism in the 21st Century." TallSkinnyKiwi, (12 May 2005): accessed 17 November, 2014, http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/05/monasticism_in_.html; Andrew Jones. Email communication to author, (24 October 2008).; Anne Wilkinson-Hayes. Email communication to author, (2 January 2008).; and Stuart Murray. Email communication to author, (24 October 2008).

³⁶⁴ E.g. Moot Community (London, UK), Contemplative Fire (West Sussex, UK), mayBe (Oxford, UK), Urban Neighbours of Hope (Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, and Bangkok, Thailand), The 24-7 Prayer Boiler Rooms, The Order of Mission (originating in Sheffield, UK), The Simple Way Community (Philadelphia, US), The Church of the Apostles (Seattle, US), Rumba House (Durham, US), and Community (Lexington, US), to name but a few examples of Neo-Monastic communities.

³⁶⁵ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, Kindle LOC 508. The authors also note that there are some 'dispersed communities' that also are neo-monastic, such as the Iona Community in Scotland, and the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland. Here, the members of the community do not live together in geographical proximity, but identify with the values of the community, maintain regular

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove notes that the roots of this phenomenon may be traced back to the *Bruderhof* community, The Catholic Workers Movement, the Civil Rights movement in the US, The Jesus People Movement, the Ecumenical Movement, and similar developments during the 20th century.³⁶⁶ The movement carries a clear countercultural ethos (e.g. against consumer culture, individualism, culture of violence, etc.) together with a strong emphasis social justice issues, peace-making, practical discipleship, and community.

To what extent the monastic influences has been expressed varies between emerging churches. Some communities clearly identify with the Neo-Monastic movement, adopting rhythms of life, shared practices, and rules inspired by the Benedictines, the Franciscans, and similar traditions.³⁶⁷ Tom Sine notes in his book *The New Conspirators* (2008) that this facet of emerging Christianity tends to differ from many of its other expressions and influencing streams; for instance, the Neo-Monastic movement is less preoccupied with the idea of church planting. Also, these communities tend to be more diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds.³⁶⁸ Other groups simply experiment with shared practices and communal rules of life, which are not necessarily explicitly monastic, but they resemble monastic practices in as much that they involve committing to a shared rhythm of life.³⁶⁹

5.3.1 Monastic rhythms and practices

Ian Mobsby, the founder of the Moot Community in London, United Kingdom, notes in the book *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (2010) that the phenomenon seems to have developed in three forms, and as such are distinctly different from traditional monasticism:

1. The first group may be understood as “inspired by monks and nuns who have established new places for prayer and contemplation, gathering communities of people for worship and loving action in the local community”. Mobsby continues, “Many within this group have a strong sense of being sent on God’s mission - the *missio dei*, and of seeking to catch up with what God is already doing to reconcile all things back to the restored relationship with the divine”.³⁷⁰ Groups like these may

contact with each other, as well as share rhythms of prayer and spiritual practices.

³⁶⁶ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What it has to say to today’s church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008)

³⁶⁷ E.g. The Church of the Apostles in Seattle, US, and the Moot Community in London, UK, to name a few.

³⁶⁸ Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the future one mustard seed at a time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 49.

³⁶⁹ E.g. Small Boat Big Sea in Sydney, Australia, which has developed a weekly rhythm of life following five practices: Bless, Eat, Listen, Learn and Sent (spelling the acronym BELLS). A detailed account of the rationale behind these practices and what they might involve can be found in Michael Frost, *The 5 Habits of Highly Missional People: Taking the BELLS Challenge to Fulfil the Mission of God* (Exponential Resources (Available Online), 2014).

³⁷⁰ Ian J. Mobsby, “The importance of New Monasticism as a Model for Building Ecclesial Communities

gather in pubs, youth clubs, the outdoors, car parks, in homes, and in similar places not traditionally associated with either church or monasteries, and are “seeking the sacred in the ordinary”.³⁷¹

2. The second group identify, according to Mobsby, with the friar tradition. He writes, “While the first group tends to gather for worship and action, and then disperse back to their homes, away from the meeting place, this second group tends to move into an area either as single households of pioneers or as intentional communities.”³⁷² Many of these groups are located in socially vulnerable areas, where traditional forms of church have previously had little or no impact.

3. The third groups seeks to combine the visions of both the first and the second groups. They may both create spaces for worship and spirituality in places traditionally not associated with church, as well as developing intentional communities of hospitality and service.³⁷³

From a critical perspective, we need to ask ourselves if these postmodern expressions of monastic communities really can be regarded as monastic, as we understand the term from church history. Where are the similarities between the lifelong vows of a Franciscan friar, and a group of young Christians striving to live in intentional community, with shared rhythms of prayer and commitment to serve the local neighbourhood? In what ways does this make the group *monastic*? To some extent we need to acknowledge that the use of the term simply is a way to pay homage to the source of inspiration for these groups, as they have attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct what a life in Christian community and mission could look like in Western, mostly urban, society. We also need to acknowledge that many of these groups are serious about the commitment that such life in intentional community involve, and the challenged that this pose to traditional, middle-class church culture. However, Mobsby notes that this is an issue that needs to be considered and addressed. He writes,

the phrase new monasticism seems to be used whenever an emerging or fresh expression of church focus on community in some form of intentionality. But we need to be cautious here; when is a spiritual community truly a monastic community? What needs to be in place so that we don't dumb down the tradition - even though we have a distinct context and calling?³⁷⁴

Mobsby goes on to suggest that there are four criteria that needs to be met in order to truly be a neo-monastic community:

1. A *shared rhythm or rule of life*,

out of Contextual Mission,” in *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church*, ed. Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy (London: Canterbury Press, 2010), 13.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ian J. Mobsby, “New Monasticism,” 14.

³⁷³ Ibid., 14-15.

³⁷⁴ Ian J. Mobsby, “New Monasticism,” 16.

2. Which defines some form of *shared practices*.
3. Some form of *inclusive and participative governance*.
4. Some form of *radical mission and generosity* to groups of people and individuals outside their spiritual community.

In our study of emerging churches, then, we need to distinguish between Christian groups that merely are inspired by the monastic tradition, and groups that on a deeper level are influenced and shaped by these Christian traditions in terms of Christian spirituality and how communal life is shaped on a day to day basis.

5.3.2 Monasticism as a catalyst for urban mission

Although the Neo-Monastic movement in many ways can be seen as a renewal movement within evangelical Protestantism, embraced by emerging Christians seeking to reform and reimagine Christian spirituality and communal life within a post-modern, post-Christendom, and mostly urban cultural context. The movement does also carry a strong emphasis on mission, with a commitment to the poor, hospitality, peace-making, social justice issues, neighbourhood transformation, and caring for the environment. To many believers within these kinds of emerging churches, shared rules and rhythms of life, and drawing inspiration from traditional monastic traditions, are not merely ways to experiment with alternative forms of ecclesial community; they are seen as necessary in order to engage in mission in a global and urban society. *Urban Neighbours of Hope*, a community that emerged in Sydney, Australia, in the 1990's explains on their website,

Our rhythm of life aims to help us as a community to live sustainable, radical and focused lives. By marking out common times together we can make space for that which really matters to us. Living among poverty is demanding. We can be tossed around from crisis to crisis, demand to demand, without making any lasting impact. This is especially true for our spiritual development which can quickly be overwhelmed and we can become secular if we do not keep giving sacred space to stop and be attentive to Jesus together and individually.³⁷⁵

Similar can be said for the *24-7 Prayer movement*, which started among young Christians in Chichester, England, in 1998 and today has established *Boiler Rooms*³⁷⁶ in a number of places in Europe and North America, committed to a shared life of prayer, mission and justice. In a planning document for the Ibiza Boiler Room in Spain, Brian Heasley (now International Prayer Director for 24-7 Prayer), wrote

³⁷⁵ "UNOH constitution 2004.", accessed 18 March, 2008, http://www.unoh.org/html/s02_article/article_view.asp?view=print&id=146&nav_cat_id=151&nav_to_p_id=56&dsb=827.

³⁷⁶ A *Boiler Room* is a form of missional and monastic community committed to a shared life of prayer, mission and justice, according to their website <http://24-7prayer.com>.

We have to develop a rhythm of working within our communities that allows for intense outreach, connections, friendship and involvement in very dark places, to work alongside a lifestyle that is reflective, recharged and intimate.³⁷⁷

For the 24-7 Prayer movement, then, drawing inspiration from monasticism is a way to both be rooted in church tradition, finding sustainable structures for Christian spiritual life in a fast paced and changing urban culture, as well as establishing day to day rhythms that help its members to live lives of service in their neighbourhoods and surrounding society.

In conclusion, then, the influence of the Neo-Monastic movement on the ECC cannot be overestimated; through this movement individuals and faith communities have been inspired and challenged to engage in holistic Christian mission, radical inclusive community, faith practices not traditionally associated with evangelical Protestant tradition (e.g. praying the Liturgy of the Hours, Lectio Divina, Ignatian Spirituality, etc), challenging what has been understood as a dualistic Christian spirituality that separates “church life” and “normal life”, attempting to connect the dominant middle-class culture of the ECC with the poor and the marginalised, and experimenting with rhythms of life and spirituality, in a fast paced urban society.

5.4 The Missional Stream

The 1980’s and the following decades witnessed the emergence of a number of innovative and experimentative expressions of Christian community within evangelical Protestantism in the Western and English-speaking world. From the beaches of Cornwall, clubs in London and Manchester, bars in Los Angeles, and cafes in Sydney and Melbourne, Christians found opportunities to experiment with faith, mission and spiritual practices, seeking ways to reach and connect with people disillusioned or alienated with traditional forms of church. Many of these expressions of emerging church have been shaped by an understanding that Western society no longer is a Christian culture; rather it has more in common with the non-Christian mission field, to which the Western church traditionally had sent missionaries in the past. Influenced by the writings of missiologists such as Lesslie Newbigin, Vincent Donovan and David Bosch, these Christian groups were motivated by the conviction that in order to respond to this new reality, churches and Christians have to act and think as missionaries “in their own backyard”. In this section I will highlight some of the main elements of the fourth stream that has shaped the Emerging Church - *the Missional Stream*.

³⁷⁷ Andy Freeman, and Pete Greig, *Punk monk: New monasticism and the ancient art of breathing* (Eastbourne: Survivor, 2007), 241.

5.4.1 The Missional Stream and the influence of Lesslie Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology

The contemporary discourse concerning the missionary nature of the church and the need of a missional ecclesiology for a post-Christendom society rests on the theological developments within the 20th century ecumenical movement and the conferences hosted by the International Mission Council as well as the World Council of Churches. The foci of much of these debates were the theological reintegration of church and mission, the nature of the church and its relationship to the world in God's mission, and a development of a post-colonial theology shifting from a Eurocentric to a global perspective.³⁷⁸ At the centre of these developments was Lesslie Newbigin, "one of the leading missiological thinkers of the 20th century",³⁷⁹ and his articulation of a missionary ecclesiology.³⁸⁰ The influence of Newbigin's work on Emerging Church discourse has been extensive, and a great deal of the missional emphasis within the conversation can be traced back to his work.³⁸¹

Newbigin spent nearly four decades as a Church of Scotland missionary in India, most of that time as the bishop of the Church of South India. During that time, he was active in the ecumenical movement and held seminal roles within both the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to examine Newbigin's voluminous authorship in any great detail, but it is necessary to highlight some of its most important components in order to put the missional stream of the ECC in context.

In Newbigin's understanding the church is missionary by its very nature - i.e. mission is not a program or activity added to the church, it is part of its very essence and calling.³⁸² In his exhaustive study of the life and work of Newbigin, Michael W. Goheen highlights three key components of Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology:³⁸³

1. *The church is sent to continue the kingdom mission of Jesus in between the times*
2. *The church exists for the sake of the world*
3. *The primary task of the church is to make known the message of Jesus Christ in its life, deeds, and words, and as such is distinct to the world*

³⁷⁸ Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Missional Church: A Historical and Theological Analysis of an Ecclesiological Tradition," *International Review of Mission* 102, no. 2 (November 2013), 249-61.

³⁷⁹ Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Missional," 254f.

³⁸⁰ Michael W. Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You: Lesslie Newbigin's Missional Ecclesiology," *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 362 (July 2002), 354.

³⁸¹ Joe Randell Steward, "The influence of Newbigin's missiology on selected innovators and early adopters of the emerging church paradigm," (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, December 2013), 38f.

³⁸² Michael W. Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me," 357-58.; and Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Missional," 256.

³⁸³ Michael W. Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me."; C.f. Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missional Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018) Kindle edition,

Newbigin stressed that church is a continuation of the incarnation of Christ, and as such, the mission of Christ also needs to be the mission of the church.³⁸⁴ Here his ecclesiology assumes a close relationship to the notion of the kingdom of God, as well as maintaining that its identity and calling can only properly be understood in eschatological terms. As the church we live in the overlapping in-between times of the coming of Christ and the present work of the Spirit, and the evil powers of the old age. God is redeeming his creation by the inauguration of his Kingdom in Jesus, which will be accomplished in full in the second coming of Christ.³⁸⁵ Newbigin wrote:

The meaning of this “overlap of the ages” in which we live, the time between the coming of Christ and His coming again, is that it is the time given for the witness of the apostolic Church to the ends of the earth. The end of all things, which has been revealed in Christ, is - so to say - held back until the witness has been borne to the whole world concerning the judgement and salvation revealed in Christ. The implication of a true eschatological perspective will be missionary obedience, and the eschatology which does not issue in such obedience is a false eschatology.³⁸⁶

“The church”, Newbigin maintained, “lives in the midst of history as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reign of God.”³⁸⁷ Goheen summarised Newbigin’s thinking here:

The church now has a foretaste of the salvation that God intends for the whole creation. God uses the church as an instrument for his work of healing, liberating and redeeming his world. As such, the church is a sign that points to human being beyond their present horizon to the coming kingdom of God which can give direction and hope.³⁸⁸

Newbigin’s return to England upon his retirement in 1974 made a significant impression on his subsequent authorship. Goheen writes:

Upon his return to England after almost forty years of missionary service in India, Newbigin found the West to be as much of a mission field as the nation of India he had entered four decades earlier. He found a “very tough form of paganism,” which he believed was “the greatest intellectual and practical task facing the church.” The problem was not simply the tremendous power of the global culture he found, although that was true. It was that the church was not living out its vocation in terms of a missionary encounter with this culture.³⁸⁹

In *The Other Side of 1984* (1983), Lesslie Newbigin wrote,

The peaceful co-existence of Christianity with the post-Enlightenment culture which this secured has endured so long that it is hard for the Church now to recover the standpoint

³⁸⁴ Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, “Missional,” 256.

³⁸⁵ Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me,” 359.

³⁸⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 154, quoted in Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me.”

³⁸⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 110. (Originally published in 1978).

³⁸⁸ Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me,” 359.

³⁸⁹ Michael W. Goheen, *Vocation*, 166. Here the author quotes Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 236.

for a genuinely missionary approach to our "modern" culture.³⁹⁰

Newbigin set out to articulate a missiological response in light of observation. He also articulated a stern critique of the institutional church in the West, which according to Newbigin, had lost its missionary identity and calling:

- The institutional church in the West was characterised by a non-missionary ecclesiological reflection and patterns of life, as well as a loss of anti-ethical tension with culture.³⁹¹
- It had capitulated to "the idolatrous core of modernity that has shaped Western culture and relegated the Christian faith to a private religious realm",³⁹²
- It had separated church and mission.³⁹³

It was this encounter that led Newbigin and others to establish the *Gospel and Our Culture Network* in the mid-1980's, which came to develop organisations in the United Kingdom, the United States, and New Zealand. The central question for the network was: "What faithful action is required of us in this kind of world?" The network's primary activities focused on three areas: cultural analysis, theological reflection, and ecclesiological conversations.³⁹⁴ Here we may also note that it was through the network and the book *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (1998), edited by Darrell L. Guder, that the term 'missional' was popularised.³⁹⁵ They maintained that

The ecclesiocentric understanding of mission has been replaced during this century by a profound theocentric reconceptualization of Christian mission. We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. 'Mission' means 'sending' and it is the central biblical theme describing the purposes of God's action in human history.³⁹⁶

As noted above, Newbigin's influence on the ECC has been significant. James S. Bielo writes:

The missiological foundation of the Emerging Church is much more direct than its theological lineage. It is defined by the idea of being a missionary in one's own society. ... More than any other source, Emerging Evangelicals trace the origins of "missional" to Lesslie Newbigin.³⁹⁷

Bielo also notes that emerging Christians "have applied Newbigin's missiology as a

³⁹⁰ Leslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches (Risk Book Series No. 18)* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 22.

³⁹¹ Michael W. Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me," 362f.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 364.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 366f.

³⁹⁴ Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, "Missional," 257.

³⁹⁵ Darrell F. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

³⁹⁶ Darrell F. Guder, *Missional*, 4.

³⁹⁷ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, Kindle LOC 314.

methodological critique of conservative Christian evangelism”, rejecting standardised evangelistic methods (e.g. street preaching, handing out Bible tracts, hyperlogical apologetics, simplistic conversion speeches, etc) in favour of “mimicking the acculturating foreign missionary” that is centred around long-term friendships and relationships.³⁹⁸ In his study of the influence of Newbigin on the ECC, Joe Randell Steward concluded that the phenomenon is “Newbigin’s philosophy reimagined and reinvented.”³⁹⁹ Newbigin’s influence - together with scholars such as NT Wright, John Howard Yoder, and David Bosch - on emerging Christian’s understanding of Jesus, the gospel, the kingdom of God, and *missio dei* is also noted in Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibb’s study *Emerging Churches* (2005).⁴⁰⁰ Although the influence of Newbigin has not been exclusive here, the consensus is that his missionary ecclesiology has been instrumental in providing emerging Christians with a language when articulating an ecclesiological vision for a missional church in postmodernity and post-Christendom society.

The relationship between the “Missional church” movement and the ECC is not clear-cut nor undisputed. For example, Doornenbal argues that the missional church and the ECC are distinctive movements with “shared interests” and “complementary and converging approaches.”⁴⁰¹ This is particularly true in the later developments of the ECC, when the conversation began to be increasingly fragmented. For instance, Alan Hirsch makes the point of distinguishing between what he refers to as “missional” and “emergent”, arguing that they do not share core ideas and concerns.⁴⁰² This becomes particularly clear when the emphasis rests on the missionary dimension of the conversation (as in the case of Alan Hirsch here), over against ecclesial renewal or on an emphasis on predominately theological discourse. With that being said, by arguing that the ECC has been influenced and shaped by a missional stream - exemplified here by the missionary ecclesiology of Newbigin - I do not suggest that the Missional church movement and the ECC are synonymous.⁴⁰³ Rather I take the view that the ECC from an early onset has been shaped by a *missional impulse and a missional ecclesiology*, which in significant ways has affected and influenced the nature of the conversation and local practices. Some part of emerging Christianity swim close to this specific stream, whilst it is less evident in other parts of the conversation. What follows are some examples of how this missional stream have been expressed and applied within the ECC.

5.4.2 Incarnational, rather than ‘extractional’

In their seminal book *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st*

³⁹⁸ Ibid., Kindle LOC 332.

³⁹⁹ Joe Randell Steward, “Influence,” 40. In his study, Steward focuses on the works of Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Alan Hirsch, and Mark Driscoll.

⁴⁰⁰ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 49.

⁴⁰¹ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 6.

⁴⁰² Alan Hirsch, “Missional.”

⁴⁰³ The Missional Church movement may be regarded as an off-shoot of the ECC and is today a movement in its own right.

Century Church (2003), Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch outline a missional ecclesiology that is informed by the doctrine of the incarnation and the enfleshing of God in the world in Jesus Christ. The say:

For us the Incarnation is an absolute fundamental doctrine, not just as an irreducible part of the Christian confession, but also as a theological prism through which we view our entire missional task in the world. So when we talk of incarnational mission, we hope to, in some real way, directly draw inspiration and motivation from that unique act whereby God entered into our world and into the human condition in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰⁴

Frost and Hirsch go on to say that the implications of the incarnation to our missionary encounter in the world are manifold: we immerse ourselves fully in the mission context; we identify with those we seek to reach with the gospel; it implies a real and abiding presence among a group of people; it involves a sending impulse of the church, rather than an extractational one; and it means that people get to experience Jesus within their culture.⁴⁰⁵ By 'extractational' Frost and Hirsch refer to a mind set or way of operating within the church where the traditional or inherited church culture is the norm, and new believers (directly or indirectly) are extracted or removed from their previous cultural contexts, networks, and relationships in order to join the church and its cultural expression, relational network, and associated social norms and behaviour.⁴⁰⁶

In their book Frost and Hirsch articulates a chief missiological concern for emerging Christians: what may be suitable among the art communities in New York or Los Angeles, may differ significantly from the ecclesiological and missiological practices appropriate among the urban poor in London, within the club cultures in Manchester, or middle-class suburbia in Sydney. For the emerging Christians faith, ecclesial forms, spiritual, and missiological practices are to emerge out of, and be shaped by culture, rather than being imported from elsewhere. This mind set has given birth to numerous and varied expressions of Christian groups, as people have sought to incarnate faith, community, and mission *from within* culture, and the new structures of post-Christendom society.⁴⁰⁷ These expressions of Emerging Church can be roughly divided into three categories: first, churches that emerge in *new places*, such as cafés, pubs, bars, clubs, the work place, and similar contexts;⁴⁰⁸ second, churches that engage in *specific subcultures and people groups*, such as punks and metal heads, surfers, bikers, skaters, artists, the urban poor, and the gay community;⁴⁰⁹ and third, churches that *engage in postmodern cultural sensibilities in more broader terms* (e.g. emphasising holistic spirituality, questioning, faith as journey, inclusive hospitality, deconstruction, participatory gatherings, dialogue, etc).⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *Shaping*, 35.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-40.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁴⁰⁷ Graham Cray, *Mission-shaped*, 4-5.

⁴⁰⁸ E.g. Holy Joe's (London, UK), Zac's Place (Swansea, UK), Bar None (Cardiff, UK), Solace (Cardiff, UK), Matthew's Party (California, US), Café Church (Melbourne), Glebe Café Church (Sydney, Australia).

⁴⁰⁹ E.g. Tribe (Los Angeles, US), Glorious Undead (London, UK), Scum of the Earth (Denver, US), Legacy (Essex, UK), Urban Seed (Melbourne, Australia).

⁴¹⁰ E.g. Salomon's Porch (Minneapolis, US), Jacob's Well (Kansas City, US), ReImagine (San Francisco, US), Vintage Faith Church (Santa Cruz, US), Church of the Apostles (Seattle, US), Ikon (Belfast, UK),

5.4.3 A sending impulse

Echoing the missionary ecclesiology of Newbigin, the missiological emphasis of Emerging Church discourse rests on the notion that the church is sent to participate in God's mission in the world. In the widely read church report *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004) Graham Cray *et al* write that it is "therefore of the essence (the DNA) of the Church to be a missionary community."⁴¹¹ They also write:

The Church must model the apostolic nature of Christ, if it is to be genuinely Christian. Being apostolic is equally about a future direction as it is about an authorized past. What might it mean then to call the Church apostolic? It is apostolic in that it was sent by Jesus: 'so I send you'. But there is more than this functional connection. The Church is apostolic because Jesus was apostolic first. 'As the Father has sent me...'. 'In Christ, God was his own apostle.'⁴¹²

This resonates with Alan Hirsch's working definition of 'missional church' in his book *The Forgotten Ways* (2006), arguing that

Missional church is a community of God's people that defines itself, and organising itself around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission in the world ... the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission. When the church is in mission, it is the true church ... The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus. To obstruct this is to block God's purposes in and through his people.⁴¹³

This missional, or sending, impulse of the people of God affects how many emerging churches understand the functional direction of church; rather than being centripetal (flowing in), the church expresses a centrifugal (flowing out) dynamic.⁴¹⁴ Instead of focusing on attracting crowds, emerging churches emphasise the equipping, sending out and multiplying of followers of Jesus as a central function of church.⁴¹⁵ Bolger and Gibbs quote Andrew Jones:

...the emerging church will take shape inside the new culture as a redeeming prophetic influence. The church follows the kingdom, the church happens in their house rather than our house, just as it did in Matthew's house, and in Lydia's house, or the home of Priscilla and Aquila. The motion is always centrifugal, flowing outward to bring reconciliation and blessing where it is needed. We are people flowing in the stream of God's go, participating with God, who is aggregating himself a people, a bride.⁴¹⁶

South Melbourne Restoration Community (Later Red Network, Melbourne, Australia), The Junction (Melbourne, Australia), Breathing Space (Melbourne, Australia), Small Boat Big Sea (Sydney, Australia).

⁴¹¹ Graham Cray, *Mission-shaped*, 85.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴¹³ Alan Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 82.

⁴¹⁴ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 50.

⁴¹⁵ This is less the case among some emerging churches primarily shaped by the Alternative Worship movement, which to some extent can be seen as operating in an attractional mode, whilst being embedded in a particular subcultural context.

⁴¹⁶ Andrew Jones, in Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 51.

5.4.4 “We’ll come to you”, rather than “Come to us!”

Rather than advocating *specific models* for church and ministry, Michael Moynagh argues in his book *emergingchurch.intro* (2004), the emphasis on the apostolic, contextual and incarnational nature of the church and its missionary calling in the world results in a specific *mind-set* that is characteristic of many emerging churches. Moynagh describes this as a “*We’ll come to you*” mind set, in contrast to the “*You come to us*” approach of inherited and traditional forms of church. Rather than trying to attract people to a church building, a church service, or an event, Moynagh explains, where people “from the outside” join “us”, emerging churches are motivated by an ecclesiological vision where they engage society and culture in an intentional and deep way and develop a suitable expression of church within culture. Moynagh writes:

“Emerging church” does not parachute a set model of church on to people: it is church from below. It starts not with a preconceived notion of church, but with the desire to express church in the culture of the group involved. It is church shaped by context, not by “This is how we have always done it.”⁴¹⁷

What makes emerging churches genuine, Moynagh argues, is when they flee from

franchise, look-alike church in favour of more bespoke versions of Christian community. Some leaders spy something new and exclaim “That must be emerging church!” But emerging church is more than a new form of church: it is culturally authentic expression of church.⁴¹⁸

This does not necessarily mean that emerging churches are more successful in developing culturally authentic, ‘non-franchise’ expressions of church compared with inherited and traditional forms of church.⁴¹⁹ It is nevertheless a theological framework and ecclesiological vision that nourishes the Emerging Church discourse in important ways.

5.5 Defining the Emerging Church conversation

How, then, do we define the Emerging Church conversation? We have already established that the ECC can be understood as a conversation with dynamics that resemble a new social movement (See discussion in Chapter 4). Although this shed light on the ECC in organisational terms, it is also of value to articulate a definition that locates the ECC in ecclesiological terms and how the phenomenon relates to the wider body of the church. One of the most often cited definitions of the movement is articulated in Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger’s’ book *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005), where the authors state that

⁴¹⁷ Michael Moynagh, *emergingchurch.intro*, 11.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ For instance, see Darren Cronshaw (2008) who in his study of emerging churches in Melbourne, Australia, conclude that these communities not always match the rhetoric in terms of community and missionary impact.

emerging churches are “communities that practice the way of Jesus in postmodern cultures.”⁴²⁰ Their definition is compelling, not least because it in a single sentence frames a multifaceted and relatively complicated phenomenon. As such it is understandable why it has gained popularity with both ‘insiders’ who identify with emerging Christianity as well as those interested in the conversation from a distance. With that said, for the purpose of academic inquiry it lacks in clarity and distinction; what do they mean by “practicing the way of Jesus”, and could not this definition apply to a great number of other churches that not necessarily display the characteristics of emerging churches presented in their book?

A number of contributors focus on the subject of mission when defining emerging Christianity. In the editorial to the *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* (2006) in an issue dedicated to Emerging Church, John Drane asks the question “What then is the ‘emerging church’?” While admitting the difficulty in answering that question, Drane writes that it may be understood as

a shorthand way of describing a genuine concern among leaders of traditional denominations to engage in a meaningful missional way with the changing culture, and as part of that engagement to ask fundamental questions about the nature of the Church as well as about an appropriate contextualisation of Christian faith that will honour the tradition while also making Gospel accessible to otherwise unchurched people.⁴²¹

Darren Cronshaw offers a similar, albeit abbreviated, description writing that “Emerging churches are Christian communities that are expressing new forms of mission and innovation for a post-Christendom context.”⁴²² Mark Driscoll⁴²³ writes in his book *Confessions of a Reformission Rev: Hard lessons from an emerging missional church* (2006), that

The emerging church is a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures. The emerging church welcomes the tension of holding in one closed hand the unchanging truth of evangelical Christian theology (Jude 3) and holding in one open hand the many cultural ways of showing and speaking Christian truth as missionaries to America...⁴²⁴

Of the three definitions presented above, Mark Driscoll’s contribution is perhaps the most problematic, as it raises more questions than answers. Most importantly, emerging Christians associating with the conversation would find it difficult to relate to statements such as “the unchanging truth of evangelical Christian theology” and “speaking Christian truth as missionaries to America”.

As has been established above, an emphasis on mission in the changing cultural

⁴²⁰ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 44.

⁴²¹ John Drane, “Editorial - The Emerging Church,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian faith* 6, no. 1 (March 2006), 4.

⁴²² Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 1.

⁴²³ Mark Driscoll is a church leader and author that was part of the early development of the ECC in the US, but since that has distanced himself to the movement.

⁴²⁴ Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev: Hard lessons from an emerging missional church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 22.

landscape of Western society is indeed a defining feature of Emerging Church, but it is perhaps not *the* defining feature of the conversation. Some emerging Christians and emerging churches enter the conversation from the perspective of liturgical innovation, others by engaging in theological discourse with postmodern epistemology, and still some by innovating new forms of Christian community. Some, but by no means all, emerging churches can also be understood as churches “for recovering Christians”, faith communities made up of exiles and outcasts of the established and inherited church.⁴²⁵

There are a number of definitions drawing from the field of sociology worth considering here. Robert Doornenbal, quoting sociologist Cory Lebanow, offers the following definition in his doctoral dissertation: the Emerging Church may be understood as “a decentralised network of frequently-disillusioned yet hopeful Christians claiming to be intentionally rethinking and re-imagining Christianity in a postmodern world.”⁴²⁶ In the book *Remembering Our Future* (2007), Luke Bretherton writes that from “the perspective of sociology of religion, the emerging church phenomenon fits the description of a transnational, glocalised, subcultural religious community.”⁴²⁷ Bretherton explains that a *transnational* organisation is one which transcends nation borders and functions as a network “over and above national and cultural superficialities” (e.g. Relationships and networking is sustained through interaction over the internet, at conferences and festivals, and similar event based meetings). Also, *Glocal* (a term popularised by sociologist Roland Robertson and is a portmanteau of the words *global* and *local*) refers to the emphasis that “local has global value”, and Bretherton suggests that this “kind of global-local relationship is a feature of emerging churches”.⁴²⁸ Lastly, he suggests that emerging churches “can be interpreted as a reactive subculture ... [which] is one in which its members develop norms and values that are a response to or in opposition against the prevailing norms and values that exist in a wider or ‘conventional’ culture.”⁴²⁹ In this instance, the specific “conventional culture” refers to churches and denominations that are part of the evangelical tradition. Although compelling as it helps us to understand a number of important features of the ECC as an international phenomenon, I find Bretherton’s definition unnecessarily complicated.

For the purpose of this study, I believe that the most useful definition of the ECC is offered by the *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*:

The emerging church movement is a loosely aligned conversation among Christians who seek to re-imagine the priorities, values and theology expressed by the local church as it seeks to live out its faith in postmodern society. It is an attempt to replot Christian faith on

⁴²⁵ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 63, 76.

⁴²⁶ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 38., quoting Cory E. Lebanow, *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church: A Congregational Study of a Vineyard Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 25.

⁴²⁷ Luke Bretherton, “Beyond Emerging Church,” in *Remembering Our Future - Explorations in Deep Church*, ed. Andrew Walker, and Luke Bretherton (London: Paternoster, 2007), 35.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ Luke Bretherton, “Beyond,” 35-36.

a new cultural and intellectual terrain.⁴³⁰

The definition is used by both Tony Jones in his study of emerging churches in North America, *The Church is Flat* (2011), as well as by Geraldo Martin and Gladys Ganiel in their sociological inquiry of the movement, *The Deconstructed Church* (2014). Tony Jones writes, and I agree, that “it avoids Christian and theological euphemisms, and terms that require further unpacking.”⁴³¹ Although it does not focus on any ecclesial practices unique to local emerging churches, for the purpose of this study it is a useful working definition of the Emerging Church as a movement. As established in this chapter, this enterprise of ‘replotting the Christian faith’ is approached by emerging Christians in different ways, depending on where they “swim in Lake Emerging”. The analogy of intersecting streams combined with the definition presented above provide us with a framework for understanding the diversity of emerging churches, as well as identifying shared characteristics and concerns of emerging Christianity.

5.6 Conclusion

The discussion in chapter 4 located emerging Christianity within the wider developments of evangelical Protestantism at the end of the 20th century. The chapter also addressed how we may understand the ECC in organisational terms, establishing that it is akin to a conversation that express characteristics of a new social movement. The purpose of the present chapter has been to deepen our understanding of the ECC as an international grassroots phenomenon by identifying some of the chief concerns Emerging Church discourse, and by that, answer one of the secondary research questions: *What are the main characteristics of the wider Emerging Church conversation?* By all accounts the Emerging Church is a diverse phenomenon, and any attempt to define the contours of the conversation has to allow for this. Borrowing from Scot McKnight, then, I adopt the imagery of the Emerging Church as a “lake” in which a number of intersecting stream flow:⁴³² *The Emergent Theological Stream, The Neo-Monastic Stream, The Alternative Worship Stream, and The Missional Stream*. The overlapping streams both share characteristics as well as bring their own unique flavours and perspectives. The imagery of “Lake Emerging” helps us to both grasp the complexity of the Emerging Church phenomenon, as well as helping us to understand the contextual differences that may exist when studying local emerging churches. The metaphor is not a model per se, rather it helps us to identify some of the chief theological strands that together make of the ECC as an international conversation and grassroots phenomenon:

- *The Emergent Theological Stream*: The stream is post-foundational in outlook and engages with the philosophical and theological challenges posed by

⁴³⁰ Warren Bird, “Emerging Church Movement,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, ed. Charles H. Lippy, and Peter W. Williams (Washington: CW Press, 2010), 682.

⁴³¹ Tony Jones, *Church is Flat*, 5.

⁴³² As stated above, the imagery of “Lake Emerging” is borrowed from Scot McKnight but is here reworked with a different set of streams that inform the ECC.

postmodern epistemology and culture.

- *The Alternative Worship Stream*: The attempt to create indigenous forms of Christian worship, which emerge from within postmodern culture and are rooted in church tradition, by creating an eclectic mix of contemporary cultural elements, and traditional and ancient Christian liturgies.
- *The Neo-Monastic Stream*: By adopting practices influenced by the monastic traditions, this stream seeks to develop ecclesial structures and spirituality that sustain Christian faith and life in a fast paced and pluralistic postmodern, urban and globalised society. This stream, perhaps more than any other of the four, has also contributed to the international Emerging Church discourse by highlighting the needs and missiological challenges of the poor and marginalised in society.
- *The Missional Stream*: The attempt to rethink ecclesiology and mission practices by emphasising the missionary nature of the church, as the people of God joining God in his mission in the world. Within this stream of the ECC, we identify an emphasis on ecclesial forms and mission practices shaped by and emerge from within culture, rather than imported from outside the specific cultural context.

As already established, the expression of emerging Christianity and local emerging churches varies to some degree depending on where “one swims in Lake Emerging”. We can also identify a number of shared traits, such as an intentional engagement with culture, a strong emphasis on contextualisation, and an eclectic mind set that allows for forms of Christian community, theology, missionary practices, and spirituality that challenges evangelical Protestant tradition. Doug Gay describes this as “DIY⁴³³ ecumenism, constructed by means of a series of unauthorized remixing and emboldened by an (evangelical) culture of innovation and experimentation.”⁴³⁴

The metaphor of Lake Emerging and the four intersecting streams that together shape the ECC serve as an important methodological framework for this research project. Given what has been established so far, when searching for local expressions of emerging church in Sweden we are not necessarily expecting to find connections to the wider ECC in organisational terms (which would more be the case if the Emerging Church was a movement), but that these communities express the concerns and characteristics of one or several of the streams presented in this chapter. The four streams of Emerging Church, then, serve as an important criterion for the case study research presented in Part B of this thesis.

⁴³³ DIY stands for “Do it yourself”, a standard term in the UK for non-professionals undertaking home improvements and construction by themselves.

⁴³⁴ Doug Gay, *Remixing*, 93.

PART B. Empirical Work: An exploration of emerging churches in Sweden

Rather than trying to import culture into church and make it 'cool', we need instead to become 'wombs of the divine' and completely rebirth the Church into a host culture.
- Kester Brewin, *The Complex Christ* (2004)

Chapter 6. Introduction to Part B

The purpose of this study is to inquire in what ways emerging churches in Sweden may contribute to shaping the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society. Following an inductive hermeneutical research process, I have first examined how the ECC as an international grassroots phenomenon may be understood in the light of the wider changes and developments within evangelical Protestantism in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States at the turn of the millennium (chapter 4). This contextual discussion is important as it helps us to better understand some of the key concerns of the ECC. We also have established the Emerging Church phenomenon best is understood as a conversation that express characteristics of a new social movement. From this perspective, then, "emerging church" serve both as an identity marker for those involved in the conversation and a rallying point for those who seek to respond to the challenges posed by the changing cultural landscape in Western society by engaging in ecclesiological, missiological, spiritual, and theological experimentation and innovation. In chapter 5 we took a closer look at emerging Christianity, establishing that the conversation - as an international grassroots phenomenon - may be described as a number of intersecting and overlapping streams: *the Emergent Theological Stream*, *the Neo-Monastic Stream*, *the Alternative Worship Stream*, and *the Missional Stream*. Each stream contributes in unique ways to the ECC as well as sharing characteristics with the other streams. The imagery of streams that flow into "Lake Emerging" help us to better understand and analyse the diversity of emerging Christianity and local emerging churches. The theoretical framework presented in Part A provides an important criterion for the communities selected for the case studies conducted, as we expect emerging churches to express at least one, if not more, of the streams presented in Chapter 5.

In this introductory text to Part B I will briefly set the case studies within the wider contexts of emerging Christianity in Sweden. In chapters 7 to 10 I present my findings; three groups are located in Gothenburg (Oikos, H2O, and Underground Church), and one group in Stockholm (Tribe). Each chapter is divided into in five sections: a brief introduction, background, community, mission, and worship. The rationale behind focusing on these three ecclesiological dimensions of the Christian church -

community, worship, and mission - are twofold: first, these categories have been used elsewhere when discussing the Emerging Church phenomenon,⁴³⁵ and second, together they are central constituent parts that make up the church, in which discipleship and spirituality are expressed⁴³⁶. Together, then, they serve as a useful heuristic instrument that help us frame and understand the groups in a meaningful way. Chapters 6 to 9 are predominantly descriptive, leaving the analysis and critical discussion for Part C. In line with the hermeneutical approach presented in Chapter 2, the reason for leaving much of the analytical discussion to later is to let each group “speak for themselves” at this stage, giving room for their unique narratives and expressions of Christian community.

6.1 Signs of Emergence in Sweden

The purpose of this brief account is to locate the emerging churches presented in here within the wider trends of emerging Christianity in Sweden. Although it proved more difficult than initially expected to find Christian communities that fulfilled the criteria for participating in this research project, it is by no means the case that the groups presented in subsequent chapters are the only expressions of Emerging Church in Sweden at the time, nor that they have emerged in a vacuum. In this section I will briefly highlight some “signs of emergence” in Sweden during the last decades that to my understanding seem to resonate with the ECC ethos. It is by no means an exhaustive list, nor do I claim that they are directly connected to the groups studied in this project. Rather, what this section does is to provide a basis for the discussion of the four case studies in Gothenburg and Stockholm in a wider context, indicating similar shifts in evangelical Protestant church culture as other parts of the Western world.

6.1.1 Brommadiologen

In 1991 Baptist pastor Harry Månsus started the ministry *Brommadiologen* [The Bromma Dialogue], motivated by an acute observation that Swedish society had changed dramatically in the 1980’s and the church had lost its ability to communicate the Christian faith in an intelligible way. At the same time church statistics revealed decreasing numbers of people were becoming church members and attendances were falling too. Swedish people showed an increased interest in alternative spiritualities and the New Age movement. Månsus began to seek a way to “dialogue with private religious people as well as spiritual seekers within the New Age and the Twelve Step

⁴³⁵ C.f. Stuart Murray, *After Christendom.*; Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging.*; and Robert Warren, *Being Human*. See also Henk de Roest, “Ecclesiologies,” 252.

⁴³⁶ C.f. Graham Hill, *Salt.*; Graham Hill, “Shaping.”; and Scott W. Sundquist, *Understanding*. Some suggest (e.g. Graham Hill), that the church comprises of four dimensions: community, worship, mission, and discipleship. This is viable viewpoint, although I would argue that rather than being a separate category, discipleship (as well as spirituality) is expressed within the community, worship, and mission of the church, and are as such an integral part of and emerged out of the other three dimensions.

movement".⁴³⁷ As *Brommadialogen* developed in the 1990's it began to fulfil a number of functions:

- It became a network that created meeting places within the context of the spiritually open therapeutic landscape
- It became a context for people with different backgrounds and spiritual convictions to meet in an environment that was defined by respect and curiosity, where no one had the right to claim to own the truth
- It became a way for people to work for healing and restoration of the creation and human life
- It became an intersection where the Twelve Step program spirituality, new spiritual movements, the tradition of Christian counselling, and theological and religious discourse could meet
- It emerged as a network of local churches and organisations that value opens and dialogue⁴³⁸

Harry Månsus frequently emphasised the need for the church to leave their buildings and meet people "on the plains" or the "spiritually open landscape of Sweden", but *Brommadialogen* did not carry an implicit vision to start new churches. Attempts were made, such as *Shalomgemenskapen* [The Shalom Community] in Stockholm, which was founded by Eva-Karin Holst in 2002 and supported by the Baptist Union of Sweden. The group was influenced by the ethos of *Brommadialogen*, and Helena Rönnerberg writes that "the Jewish Sabbath tradition, the Twelve Step movement, and Christian mysticism came to characterise [the group]."⁴³⁹ *Shalomgemenskapen* closed down in 2005. The influence of *Brommadialogen* - in particular on churches that were part of the Lutheran Church of Sweden - has primarily been the emphasise on discourse and dialogue, bridge-building between the church and alternative spiritualities, and creating meeting places for spiritual exploration.

6.1.2 Neo-monastic communities

A second "sign of emergence" is characterised by an increased interest in historical monasticism and intentional communities during the last decades in Sweden, particularly among younger Christians. Since 2008 there has been a loosely formed network of Christians emerging with individuals and groups exploring alternative ways of living in Christian community in today's society, inspired by monasticism, Anabaptism, and the house church movement.⁴⁴⁰ The network hosts an annual gathering called *Sammankomst*, addressing themes such as peace-making, shared finances, social justice, and practical issues associated with communal living. This phenomenon bears close resemblance to the Neo-Monastic stream addressed in chapter 5.

⁴³⁷ Helena Rönnerberg, *Tolv steg in i livet* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 2007), 134. *My translation.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-31. *My translation.*

⁴³⁹ Helena Rönnerberg, *Tolv steg*, 271. *My translation.*

⁴⁴⁰ For example, see <http://kommuniteter.se>, a website described as a home for intentional communities, collectives, monasteries, house churches and other alternative Christian communities.

6.1.3 Simple churches

A further “sign of emergence” in Sweden is a growing interest in the idea of *simple church*. Similar to those interested in the monastic traditions and living in intentional community, it shares an emphasis on radical discipleship and Christian community rooted in everyday life. However, groups and people who associate with this term seem to lean more towards the evangelical and charismatic ends of the theological spectrum, placing less emphasis on social justice issues and similar themes. Without a more in-depth study it is difficult to ascertain how many Christian communities in Sweden would describe themselves as “simple churches”, but at the time of writing to my estimate there are a handful of Christian groups and churches that would associate with the term. Much of the work with *simple church* in Sweden revolves around a few key leaders. In 2011 Charles Kridiotis and Rickard Cruz launched the website simplechurch.se and began to network among Christians interested in church multiplication movements, house church, discipleship making and simple forms of Christian community.⁴⁴¹ Since then, a relational networked has emerged with the vision “to see a movement of disciples who make disciples as well as simple, missional and multiplying churches.”⁴⁴² Charles Kridiotis explains that “any ‘joining’ is purely based on developing friendships that mutually benefit the multiplication of disciples and churches and the expansion of the Kingdom of God.”⁴⁴³ According to Kridiotis and Cruz, Simple churches are:

- *Centred around Jesus*: The aim is to glorify Jesus by making disciples who follow him.
- *Missional*: The aim of the church is not to gather, but to send out.
- *Small*: The groups are purposefully small, often between 3-20 people.
- *Exists anywhere*: Simple churches meet where people live their lives; in homes, cafés, restaurants, the workplace, etc.
- *Relational*: They build on relationships rather than church programs.
- *Organic*: They function as living organisms shaped by DNA [I.e. Core values]
- *Based on the priesthood of all believers*: Every believer is a priest and has something to contribute to the community.
- *Lead by servants*: Leaders are not paid but function as spiritual parents to a spiritual family.
- *Connected*: Simple churches do not exist in isolation, but network with other churches.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ The Simple Church network in Sweden later reconfigured into a new organisation, *Katalysator Sverige*; a network for leaders of simple missional churches, focused primarily on multiplication of disciples and church planting. See <https://www.katalysator.net>

⁴⁴² Richard Cruz. Email communication to author, (21 December 2015).

⁴⁴³ Charles Kridiotis. Email communication to author, (7 January 2016).

⁴⁴⁴ Charles Kridiotis. Email communication to author, (18 December 2015), and Richard Cruz. Email communication to author, (18 December 2015).

6.1.4 Nya sätt att vara kyrka

The last example of “signs of emergence” that I will highlight in this section is *Nya sätt att vara kyrka* [New ways of being church], an initiative that was launched in 2013 in collaboration with the Lutheran Church of Sweden and the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM)⁴⁴⁵. The network serves as national partner to the Fresh Expressions movement in the United Kingdom. The purpose of *Nya sätt att vara kyrka* is to “inspire and equip the missional church and learn from countries that have experience of working with fresh expressions of church, e.g. England, Germany and Norway.”⁴⁴⁶ According to Tin Mörk, the project leader for the initiative: Those who are part of the network are

for the most part individuals working within the Church of Sweden, i.e. Church ministers and vicars. But there are also lay people involved in the network and those who work for the church on a volunteer basis. Some are involved with Messy Church and some try to develop the churches according to the values of *Nya sätt att vara kyrka*. We have not seen any new churches started (as far as we know), but there are new groups that worship together and “missional communities”⁴⁴⁷

A fresh expression of church, according to Tin Mörk, is defined by the following characteristics: missional, contextual, disciple making, centred around Jesus, and aims to embody all the marks of the church.

As stated above, this is by no means an exhaustive list of what could be regarded as “signs of emergence” in Sweden, but they serve as examples of what has been developing in the country during the last decades, in particular in the last 10 years. These developments help us to put the case studies addressed in this dissertation in a wider context, and we understand that although the ECC as an international phenomenon can trace its roots to the mid 1980’s, it is a relatively recent phenomenon in Sweden. This could at least in part explain why the number of Christian communities and groups that seek to experiment with alternative ways of being church are few in number. As written above, it is also possible that ECC primarily has come to be expressed as *theological discourse* in Sweden, rather than resulting in any specific church planting efforts or the formation of communities shaped by an ECC ethos. This discussion, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

6.2 So, what are we looking for?

What, then, are we looking for when we are searching for emerging churches in Sweden? We have established that the ECC can be understood as an international conversation that express characteristics akin to a new social movement. This has

⁴⁴⁵ In Swedish *Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen* (EFS), an independent mission organisation within the Church of Sweden. C.f. <http://www.efs.nu>.

⁴⁴⁶ Tin Mörk. Email communication to author, (10 March 2016). Tin Mörk is an ordained SEM minister and served at the time of study as project leader for *Nya sätt att vara kyrka*.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

implications for the criteria used in the selection process of this study, as these kinds of Christian communities are neither defined or held together by an organisational structure (e.g. similar to a movement), shared creeds or doctrinal statements (e.g. similar to a denomination), or necessarily self-identify as “emerging churches”. In that respect, a church can express the ECC ethos and characteristics without seeing itself being part of a global conversation, or even aware of its existence. Therefore, it has been necessary to develop alternative markers that allows us to identify these kinds of groups.

First, the groups need to express an awareness of and understand their identity and ministry in relation to the cultural shifts occurring in Western society (e.g. post-modernity, post-Christendom, or similar). In that sense, the groups are expected to some extent to express a reformist and deconstructive mind set in relation to inherited church tradition, as they seek to respond to these changes in culture.

Second, they express characteristics that resonate with one or more of the four streams of Emerging Church presented in Chapter 5 (Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monasticism, and Missional).

Also, in order to limit the scope of the study I only include Christian communities part of the wider Protestant ecclesial tradition.

With these conditions in mind, I crafted a set of criteria based on to the criteria used in Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger’s study *Emerging Churches* (2006):

1. The group consider themselves Christian or Christ followers.
2. They consider themselves a congregation, church plant or mission (not merely a small group of an existing church).
3. They meet at least monthly (as a larger congregation, small groups, etc).
4. The community is not older than 15 years.
5. They are still meeting.
6. The community is located in Stockholm or Gothenburg.
7. The group is purposefully attempting to respond to the changing cultural context in Sweden and is in this sense motivated by a fresh vision and a pioneering mind-set.
9. They express characteristics that resonate with one or more of the four streams of the Emerging Church:

- a) Emergent Theology
- b) Alternative Worship
- c) Neo-Monastic
- d) Missional

To my surprise it proved more difficult than first expected to identify potential case study candidates and I had expected a greater number of groups to be included in the initial preliminary survey. Sweden is a country that for several decades has been characterised by a steady secularisation process, the marginalisation of the church, and declining attendance and membership numbers. In such a context one would assume to find ecclesial experiments and attempts to counter these developments. At least that was my hypothesis. Besides the four groups included in this study, there were only a handful other groups that fulfilled, or partly fulfilled, the criteria.

There are a number of possible reasons for why this was the case. For instance, there could have been issues with the selection process and that I simply was unable to get in contact with enough churches that potentially could fulfil the criteria. With that in mind there could be more groups that would fulfil the criteria, but for some reason I missed them in the preliminary survey. Another issue to consider is the limitation of the study to Stockholm and Gothenburg; potentially there could have been more groups that fulfilled the criteria that were located in other parts of the country. Another possible explanation is that there in fact were at the time of study very few churches or Christian communities in Sweden that could be regarded as emerging churches. It is possible that the ECC, as a phenomenon within evangelical Protestantism in the West, has been more influential in Sweden in terms of shaping a theological discourse around faith in postmodern culture, rather than resulting in actual groups and communities that seek to embody the ECC ethos in a structured way, for example by planting new churches and establishing missional communities. It is my personal experience that Christian leaders in Sweden are at least partly familiar with some of the more popular writes associated with the ECC (e.g. Brian D. McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Peter Rollins, Dan Kimball, Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost). However, it goes beyond the scope and purpose of this study to discuss this in any detail and therefore left for future research.

Chapter 7. Oikos - Hospitality, Service and Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

Oikos is an intentional community located in Hammarkullen, a suburb north of Gothenburg, and part of the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM). The preliminary survey indicated that the group expressed a number of shared characteristics with the Emerging Church phenomenon. The survey indicated an awareness of the challenges that the church is facing in the light of post-modernity and post-Christendom culture, as well as the need for the church in Sweden to explore new ways of being church. In the preliminary survey Oikos scored relatively high in all four streams of the ECC (Emergent, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monastic, and Missional), something that makes the group stand out when compared with the other faith communities that were part of this study. The preliminary survey response gave the impression of a young Christian community committed to both deconstructing their traditional understand of church, as well as reconstructing a faith community authentic to who they are as a group and the context in which they were situated. When asked why the group was formed the respondent wrote,

We were group of people who felt that the traditional church, which for the most part was centred around the Sunday worship service that you attended once a week, did not provide the help and the tools we needed to live out our faith in our everyday lives.⁴⁴⁸

The preliminary survey also stated that they,

Seek to embody the Gospel in their everyday lives, it has to be incarnated and born from within every new time and culture. Theology is a conversation about the Bible, God and the Church, and it is a work in progress, something which is expressed in our community. We are shifting from a unified society marked by the Christian faith, to a pluralistic society. How we as Christians can live in the world, in our society, in our local community are questions we try to find an answer to.⁴⁴⁹

Although aware of the need to engage with society in new ways, the survey also expressed some criticism towards a traditional seeker-sensitive, or church growth approach. Rather than attempting to be relevant, Oikos seeks to be authentic as a Christian community, stating that “to attract people is not an end goal in itself, instead we go to where people are, rather than trying to attract them to us with any means possible.”⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ Preliminary electronic survey, conducted on Nov 16th 2009

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

7.1 Background

Oikos is located in Hammarkullen, a multicultural housing estate part of the municipality of Angered, with approximately 8,000 inhabitants. The majority of people living in the area are born outside of Sweden, approximately 150 nationalities are represented, and 50% are under 25 years of age. According to the Rule of Oikos, their vision is

to be a community for the everyday life, that together learn to love and follow Jesus, and who invites others to do the same. Through work and prayer they seek to act in such a way that the Kingdom of God grows in their hearts and in society. Being part of the Body of Christ they desire to live in unity with the churches in Hammarkullen.⁴⁵¹

The dream, which later became Oikos, began to take shape when the minister of the community together with a group of friends studied in Umeå, a university city in the north of Sweden. They were reading Shane Claiborne's *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006), as well as books by Brain D. McLaren and Rob Bell, while at the same time exploring alternative ways of living as Christian community. They asked the question, "What does it look like to be a church rooted in every-day life?" The friends eventually moved to Gothenburg in 2007 and joined two other groups already living in Hammarkullen who were exploring questions around Christian community and radical discipleship. They shared an observation and conviction of how contemporary churches seemed to fail to provide their members with resources for living as Christians in their everyday lives. This in turn motivated the groups to explore alternatives to a traditional understanding of church community and life. The only way to live the Christian life they longed and aspired to, they concluded, was to live together in shared households or in close geographical proximity to each other. One of the respondents explained:

We felt that the more traditional church format for the most part revolved around attending a worship service once a week as well as other programs that one "went to" did not provide us with the help and the tools needed to live our lives [as Christians], to "be church". These kinds of ideas grew, people started to meet up, another group we knew of started to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Eventually we decided to become one group.⁴⁵²

The formation of the group took two years, and in 2009 they officially launched Oikos as an intentional community. Besides the valuing of a life lived in close proximity of each other, combined with a radical discipleship, many in the group also shared a desire of living in a multicultural context. Interestingly, the reasons for choosing Hammarkullen were less about mission, and more about identifying an internal need among the members of the community, most of which had backgrounds in traditional, middle-class free church contexts. One of the respondents explained:

We talked about living in an urban fringe area.⁴⁵³ We felt that we were isolated from the

⁴⁵¹ Kommuniteten Oikos Regel [The Rule of the Oikos Community], adopted Autumn 2009. *My translation.*

⁴⁵² Oikos participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 26 April 2010. *My translation.*

⁴⁵³ The term for urban fringe areas in Swedish is *förort*, often associated with multiculturalism, high

new Swedes [i.e. immigrants], other cultures, and we felt that we needed to get to know them because we were convinced they had something to offer us. And we thought of Hammarkullen.⁴⁵⁴

When the study was conducted, the community was made up of seven households living in walking distance from each other and included 15 members as well as approximately 10-15 friends of the community. The members have diverse background, ranging from the Lutheran Church of Sweden, to the Mission Covenant Church, and the Pentecostal Movement.

7.2 Community

To the members of Oikos, being part of an intentional community involves living in geographical proximity or in shared households with other community members. It also includes a commitment to the shared values and vision of the group. During the interviews it became clear that they have drawn inspiration from a number of contexts, such as *Korsvei* in Norway, the ecumenical Bjärka-Säby Community in Linköping, Sweden, Taizé in France, the international L'Abri Fellowship, as well as the Charismatic renewal movement in Sweden in the 1970's, which in turn was influenced and shaped by the Jesus People movement. Drawing from the historical monastic movements, such as the Franciscans and Benedictines, the group has adopted a Rule as well as a weekly Rhythm of shared practices that governs the communal life. The Rule states,

We have chosen to live in the community in order to share our everyday lives with each other, support, help and serve each other and primarily because it helps us to show hospitality and serving other people.⁴⁵⁵

The members value having as little scheduled programs as possible in order to free their time for involvement in the local community. The weekly rhythm involves morning prayer on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7.15am, evening prayer on Sundays and Thursdays at 9.15pm, as well as a Tuesday Mass celebrated at 6pm at the local Mission Covenant Church. The Mass is followed by a meal in one of the households that is part of the community (all meals are vegetarian with vegan alternatives). Oikos also hosts a monthly discussion event called *Oikos utforskar* [Oikos explores], as well as regular parties.

Membership

There are three ways one can relate to Oikos: either as guest, "people who rarely or occasionally visit the community"; friends, "people who often spend time with us,

immigration numbers, and social vulnerability. Many of these areas were built during the 1960s and 1970s and are more often than not known for their large scale architecture and planning.

⁴⁵⁴ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

⁴⁵⁵ "Kommuniteten Oikos Regel" [The Rule of the Oikos Community], adopted Autumn 2009. *My translation.*

and take part in our communal life"; or as members, people "who have decided to commit to the vision and values for a period of time"⁴⁵⁶. Members are normally asked to commit to the group for at least one year, and being member also involves a greater responsibility for the shared life of Oikos as well as the right to affect decisions.

In order to become a member of Oikos, the person first needs to be a friend of the community for two months, participating in the weekly rhythm and communal activities. They also need to live on or in close proximity of the Hammarkullen estate. Once ready to become a member, the person declares a covenant during one of the weekly shared meals in front of the whole community. The covenant is part of a brief liturgy including a reading from Romans chapter 12, a prayer, as well as a recital of Oikos' vision. The candidate makes the following vow:

During the coming year I will be a member of the community Oikos.
I commit to the rule, vision and rhythm of the community.
I will live by and practice hospitality, social involvement, peace, justice and openness.
I ask for your help to live in this way, and I will help you to do the same.⁴⁵⁷

During the interviews we discussed to what extent this kind of commitment was problematic in today's culture, especially among younger people. The respondents acknowledged that a high commitment community indeed could be seen as countercultural. But, they also emphasised, the goal has never been for Oikos to grow numerically simply for the sake of becoming a large group. Rather, Oikos exists for its members to grow as followers of Jesus. One participant explained:

I believe that a clear commitment liberates people, rather than the opposite. If we lack this element, people will start to wonder what their responsibility is, what their role is, and what is expected of them.⁴⁵⁸

The interviews also focused on to what extent the members saw Oikos as their church or not. To some, this was clearly that case, but the majority also belong to other churches and view Oikos as an important context for spiritual growth and their daily walk with Jesus together with other believers. The respondents emphasised that Oikos is not to be seen as competing with the churches in the area, but rather as offering a complement to existing churches. Oikos is there to serve, support and offering means for deeper spiritual exploration and discipleship.

During the interviews we also discussed the demography of a typical member of Oikos. One participant explained,

[It is a] woman between 20 and 30 years ... Who has thought a great deal about justice and environmental issues in one way or the other. Who likes Jesus and who desires to find a Christian community for the everyday life. Who perhaps has not finished her university studies.⁴⁵⁹

The participants acknowledged that it was not unlikely that one could find members

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Oikos participant 3, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 8 June 2010. *My translation.*

⁴⁵⁹ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

that have had a problematic relationship to traditional and inherited church culture. Membership in a particular denomination is a non-issue to many, although they are thankful for their relationship to SEM. One person explains,

Many come from the Mission Covenant Church, some from the Church of Sweden, others from free church Baptist churches and some have no church background whatsoever. This might be the first real Christian community they are part of. Some come from quite charismatic contexts, almost word of faith. Many of us come with mixed feelings, including some bitterness from past church experiences. It has not produced the fruit that we longed for. So, we are wrestling with this issue. One can be critical to one's past experience [of church] and still try to keep some of the good stuff, without becoming bitter. But it most likely has to do with this generation we are part of, the 20-30 year olds that is. We are the children of our times to some extent. But I am really glad that many of us that are bitter because of past experiences still have the courage to get involved in a Christian community.⁴⁶⁰

Leadership and Decision making

A striking element of the community was how the group understand leadership and handle decision making. As a community Oikos is part of the Lutheran church tradition and formally belonged to the Church of Sweden. Still they have been significantly influenced by the Anabaptist tradition. The interviews also showed an influence of Feminist thought and critical theory. The participants downplayed, or even rejected, the importance of having one or a few individual leaders in the group. Even though one person at the time of the interviews was employed to work with the development of the community, the minister on several occasions during the interview emphasised that he sees himself as a servant of the community, not a leader tasked to make decisions on behalf of the group. Although recognising that being an ordained minister automatically presents a certain amount authority and power, he likewise emphasised that Oikos:

has no formal leader apart from Jesus. ... We believe that Jesus leads us. We make decisions by means of consensus. We always seek consensus when decisions are to be made. But if we view leadership as guiding, giving input, and perhaps influencing other people about what the next step might be, then I may be one of the leaders. But there are different areas, we have other leaders in other areas, and other functions. It is more about function than title. As a priest I am to serve the community. I cannot decide over the community, but the community stands above me. This is actually how it works in the Church of Sweden. There is a church council that may be seen as the extended arm of the congregation; the priest submits to the church council and serves the congregation. Then this does not always work in practice, because standing in the pulpit gives you a position of power. But [our way of doing things] is not really foreign to the Church of Sweden.⁴⁶¹

He continued to explain,

How can we find structures where we are freed from automatically be in positions of power? We are not totally freed from this even though we use consensus as method, but it is helpful against master suppression techniques. It comes from that experience, as well as inspiration from the non-violence and feminist movements. ... We take Jesus' words quite literally, and he says we are not to have a leader, instead we are to serve each other. ... The

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

Bible does not tell us the alternative, just that we are not to have that, so we need to find other ways that can help us to move forward somehow. And I believe consensus is a good model.⁴⁶²

Practically, this is expressed at the monthly 'house meetings', which at the time of the interviews was the only place for decision making in matters relating to the life of Oikos. During these meetings, the group makes decisions by adopting a detailed consensus model, and the meetings are facilitated by a number of roles: a moderator; a person in charge of keeping the time; a person with the responsibility of being vigilant to underlying conflict that needs to be addressed, potential master suppression techniques, manipulative communication, etc; as well as a person taking notes of the meeting. The vigilance against potential power structures and oppression is also expressed in how the group gather to worship in the round, only serving vegetarian food at their gatherings, as well as in the kind of topics they engage with during sermons and discussion nights (e.g. violence and peace-making, egalitarianism and women in the church, and how to relate to other religions).

7.3 Mission

Sustainable community life is a chief concern to the members of Oikos, and they aspire to keep the organisation and structure as light as possible in order to not be distracted from the essentials of the Christian life (e.g. relationships, spiritual transformation, and serving the community). Rather than arranging a number of different activities and programs, then, Oikos serve as a 'nave' out of which the members live their lives, engaging in ministry and living out their faith in their respective contexts. For this reason, they have decided not to own a building of their own, instead the group meets in people's homes or rent or borrow venues from other churches in the area. The group has very few scheduled programs and activities hosted by Oikos as a community, instead a significant part of what the members actually do in terms of following Jesus and living out their faith happens in their everyday lives. What a member does in their everyday life in terms of serving Hammarkullen and expressing their faith in action is seen just as much as part of Oikos' communal life, as are events and programs hosted by the group. Therefore, there are no clear differentiation between what Oikos 'does' and 'does not do'. The group seems to adopt a networked and porous structure, with a centre made up of the core members of the community who have committed to the Rule and weekly rhythm. Officially, Oikos only hosts a limited number of events and programs: the Tuesday evening Mass and praying the Liturgy of the Hours; *Oikos utforskar* [Oikos Explores]; as well as the many parties hosted by the group. Part of Oikos' vision and intention is to be involved with and serve the local community, to "be there for Hammarkullen [and] help Hammarkullen to be the best it can be for the people who live here."⁴⁶³

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Oikos participant 2, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 8 June 2010. *My translation.*

One way of living out this vision involves helping a family financially and practically in any way they can, as well as being involved with the local youth club, where members of Oikos are helping young people with their homework. Other members visit the local school and have lunch with the pupils, run a support group for teenage girls, offering a bed to someone who needs somewhere to sleep, or assist asylum seekers. Oikos is also involved with a local network called *Hammarkullens bästa* [The Best for Hammarkullen], as well taking care of a small allotment in the area, which functions as good way to build relationships in the community. Being part of the wider community life in Hammarkullen is a key value to Oikos. One participant explained,

We are the church, and the church is present wherever we are, we are the body of Christ in that context. Our calling is to be signs of the Kingdom of God in those places. It is about being present where people hang out and meet them there.⁴⁶⁴

What strikes me as noteworthy is the emphasis on not hosting or being responsible for a number of programs of their own, but rather to encourage members to be active in their local churches (if applicable), or in local projects and programs run by the city council or local organisations. If they would start up programs on their own, the respondents reasoned, they would run the risk of competing with existing projects. Instead they see a great benefit and strength to be part of what is already happening in the area, as it becomes a way to practically live out their faith and serve the wider community, as well as safeguarding them from unhelpful structures and organisations.

A further theme that emerged during the interviews was the groups commitment to non-violence and reconciliation work. Hammarkullen is an estate, like many other urban fringe areas in Sweden, associated with high numbers of drug abuse and violence (although the respondents were keen on problematising this popular view of the area). The commitment to non-violence stems both from a conviction of how Christians ought to live their lives, as well as a meeting a practical need in the community and serves the area in a positive way. One participant said,

We favour non-violence because we are Christians and that is how we should live ... We run courses [about non-violence], we want to learn more about how to live in this way practically, how to solve conflicts non-violently, because there are conflicts here and you notice that if you walk the streets at night. In the future we would like to train the youth in non-violence, and how to deal with conflicts in this way. Because there are conflicts on the estate, which is not strange as many people come from countries affected by war and violence. And we have conflicts in Sweden as well. The question is how you deal with the conflicts ... to gain the tools to deal with this in a loving and non-violent way.⁴⁶⁵

The group is also involved with helping immigrants and refugees, practice hospitality by helping people financially, and assists asylum seekers in the contact with local authorities and the asylum-seeking process.

⁴⁶⁴ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

Although this may vary on an individual level, Oikos as a group appear not to be explicitly evangelistic nor particularly concerned with growing numerically as a faith community. One respondent explained,

Of course, there is a vision to see people get to know Jesus and God. To know that God is searching for them and already is near to them. And I believe in this way of being a Christian community. But there are other Christian communities [in the area] that can welcome people when they find a faith. That is why we have very few programs, we can help existing churches ... they already have the structures in place, but few people. I see this as an important reason for why Oikos exists.⁴⁶⁶

The participant continued,

It is important that [Oikos] does not become yet another project, which is driven by quick results. At least not results that are easy to measure, like for example the number of members or programs ... but that something else gets the chance to grow. Discipleship, and how we live out our faith. And that is difficult to measure in a quantitative way, what the results are from our contacts with people. I would not want to focus on the end result the whole time.⁴⁶⁷

During the group interview, another respondent explained that a kind of classic church growth perspective is not a good framework for understanding Oikos, stating that

In terms of mission, the idea has never been to be an outreach focused group, rather the only mission field that Oikos has is the life of its members. That we become better disciples ... The aim has never been to change Hammarkullen, but that we become better disciples. But with that said, we believe that if we are to be disciples, we also ought to be involved in society. But not in terms of programs, that has never been the point to Oikos.⁴⁶⁸

Reflecting on the contrast between a more traditional church growth approach to church and the life of Oikos, one person said that "we try to do it in a different way, that we do not reach a great number of people, but that those we do reach, we reach with greater quality."⁴⁶⁹ In that sense, personal transformation is a primary feature of the vision and life of Oikos as a community, and may be seen as a prerequisite for transformation in society (I.e. As peoples' lives are transformed and grow in quality as disciples of Jesus, society is transformed). The main focus for Oikos as an intentional community is for themselves to grow as Christians and learn to live as disciples in their everyday lives, and any kind of practical work in society is therefore seen as a natural outcome and an extension of that discipleship.

⁴⁶⁶ Oikos participant 2, 8 June 2010.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Oikos participant 3, 8 June 2010.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

7.4 Worship

Central to the life of Oikos is the Weekly Rhythm of communal worship, prayer and meditation. As a whole, the worshipping practices of the group seem to be a blend of traditional expressions and practices (such as the Church of Sweden's liturgy, and praying the Liturgy of the Hours) as well as more contemporary and creative practices (such as the use of arts, poetry, and secular music as part of the Tuesday evening Mass). The participants explained that praying the Liturgy of the Hours and committing to a weekly rhythm plays a significant formative role in the life of the group, as it provides a common language and reference point.

I visited the Mass on a Tuesday evening in June 2010, which was held at *Tomaskyrkan*, the local Mission Covenant Church in Hammarkullen. The atmosphere was relaxed and informal, yet reverent, and the minister was dressed casually with a hoodie, jeans and red Converse shoes and a clerical collar. People started to arrive approximately 15 minutes early, and those who wished to do so were free to meditate and pray in silence in the church hall. As the meeting started, people gathered to sit in the round, a few crossed themselves as the minister greeted the congregation. I was informed that incense is sometimes used as part of the liturgy, as are icons, together with written and free prayers, hymns, songs from Taizé and more contemporary praise songs. The Mass can be seen as a window into the eclectic spirituality that characterises Oikos as a group. It also shows the varied background of its members, as well as their ecumenical mind set.

The Tuesday evening Mass can be seen as consisting of two parts: First, the Eucharistic celebration at *Tomaskyrkan*, and second, the open meal that follows the Mass hosted by one of the members of the group in a home environment. Some people only attend the service, whilst others only come to the meals. To Oikos as community the two parts are seen as a whole and embody values of a prayerful lifestyle, community and hospitality. One participant explained:

To us it is important to keep together what we traditionally refer to as the Mass celebrated according to the liturgical order of the Church of Sweden, and the meals we eat [in our homes]. We always try to eat together after the Eucharist service ... It is important to us that we are a community that gathers around the table in a genuine way, that we are not only a table community in a symbolic way.⁴⁷⁰

Although hosted by Oikos, the Tuesday evening Mass is part of the ecumenical life of Hammarkullen and seen as something that the churches do together. The liturgy is based on the standard order of service in the Church of Sweden, although Oikos has reshaped texts and format in conversation with other churches in the area. Oikos has also incorporated elements of Eastern Orthodox tradition in the worship. The respondents explained that this reflects, to some extent, Hammarkullen as a multicultural context, but they also stressed that it perhaps has more to do with the fact that several of the members share an interest in Eastern Orthodox spirituality.

⁴⁷⁰ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

Although it is of importance to take into account the people who live in Hammarkullen, why they don't go to church, we don't really believe that the worship service is the primary way of becoming part of the church. We believe that relationships are more important in that regard. Where we are in the community, the church is also present and [by that there is a way into the church]. It's not the worship service. Sometimes we make the worship service so accessible to people that it stops saying anything at all. The liturgy is a language, we want to provide people with the keys to understand that language. We don't need to remove everything that seems strange and difficult to understand, but we need to still do it in a way so that people have a chance to connect with what is happening ... If a new person visits us, let us help that person to understand what is happening, why we do what we do. Twice a year we normally go through the liturgy and explain what we do, why we break the bread, why we have a priest. That is our approach.⁴⁷¹

The Mass also incorporates secular elements, such as music with no explicit Christian references, poetry, art and similar. The conviction is that the church has drawn artificial lines between what can be regarded as Christian and non-Christian; what matters is how it is used in the liturgy and if it can help people meet with and experience God. The worship and liturgy seem to be shaped more for Oikos as a community and its members, rather than an attempt to contextualise the practices in relation to Hammarkullen. As one respondent said, "it becomes what we are."⁴⁷²

Furthermore, Oikos seems to value participation and the creative involvement of its members. As one participant explained,

We all come from backgrounds where we are tired of church as a show, something that only happens at the front. We sit in a circle, for example, to symbolise that we do not have that kind of structure. We believe that how we sit and move shape our theology. When [the minister] preaches, he stays seated in the circle, he does not use the pulpit. It creates a different kind of dynamic in the room.

Finally, then, Oikos does not seem to attempt to do a trendy service that might attract people or shape it for the benefit of people outside of the group. Rather, it is an expression of who they are as a faith community and they invite others to participate and engage with the worship in any way they want and feel comfortable with. With that being said, the group has at times discussed how the context of Hammarkullen could shape the liturgy and their communal worship experience, and the participants expressed a hope to work with these issues more in the future. For instance, when Oikos started they discussed a great deal about the use of language as they shaped the Tuesday Mass liturgy, and they are aware of a potential need to include other languages than Swedish in the future. But any form of contextualisation, they reasoned, has to happen in a natural and organic way.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

Chapter 8. H2O - Creating spaces for spiritual exploration

H2O is a small Christian community based in Angered, a suburb north of Gothenburg. At the time of the case study research the group was working in partnership with Christian Associates International (now *Communitas International*),⁴⁷³ Saron Church, and Reningsborg, a local second-hand store. They are now part of the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden (EFK).⁴⁷⁴

The group scored high on two of the ECC characteristics in the preliminary survey; Missional and Emergent Theology. On the other hand, the Alternative Worship and Neo-Monastic streams were close to absent as themes. Rather than shaping the group around a worship service, as many traditional church plants often do, the survey indicated that H2O was reaching for an alternative strategy, writing that “church services is probably the last thing we start, as all (or almost all) of our contacts are not interested in this”.⁴⁷⁵ The preliminary survey also pointed to a strong emphasis on a missional strategy, through answers such as

We try to find meeting places where people who would not feel comfortable in a church setting would feel safe...

We try to lead people into a ‘pre-conversion discipleship’, which means that people start to behave like Jesus before they follow him...

We have no church venue and are not looking for that. Instead we believe that most of our spiritual life should happen in the same place as most of our life happens. We meet in our homes ... or in the second-hand shop or in public places.⁴⁷⁶

When conducting the study, H2O was still at an early stage as a mission project and faith community. Naturally, a relatively large part of the interviews was spent talking about their vision and dreams for the group, the people they come into contact with, and Angered as a local community. When engaging the material presented in subsequent sections we ought to keep this in mind, that at the time, H2O was a community still at a very formative stage, trying out a lot of new ideas without really knowing what the end results would be. Still, they can provide insights into what it could mean to be an emerging church in Sweden today.

8.1 Background

The project began in April 2006 as a response to an international mission consultation in Sweden, hosted by EFK. The team leader had travelled from Germany and met with the denominational leaders, who subsequently invited them as a family, to move

⁴⁷³ <https://gocommunitas.org>

⁴⁷⁴ <https://efk.se>

⁴⁷⁵ Preliminary electronic survey, conducted on Nov 17th 2009

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

to Sweden and start an experimental pioneering work, responding to the challenges of a secularised post-Christendom culture. H2O officially launched in 2008, and at the time of the study the core team group was made up of seven adults and ten children, with backgrounds in Germany, the Netherlands, the USA, and Sweden. Using a local second-hand store in Angered as a base, H2O as a faith community extends to a number of decentralised mission initiatives, both locally and in the wider Gothenburg area.

Angered is a multi-cultural municipality north of Gothenburg, with approximately 50% of its population born outside of Sweden. For H2O this has resulted in a diverse network of contacts made up of ethnic Swedes, many who have lived in the area for a long time, as well as immigrants from different parts of the world.

The second-hand store, Reningsborg, is situated in a large building complex in Angered. Once a treatment plant it has now been converted into a store and a café, with the goal to help people in need both locally as well as internationally, through aid work and through help to self-help schemes. Approximately 500 people visit the second hand store each Saturday; many who are returning customers. H2O has from early on in the project worked in close relationship with Reningsborg, and the core team is working towards the goal of establishing a community centre on the premises.

H2O, which is an abbreviation for *Hopp, Hänsyn* and *Omsorg* [Hope, Consideration and Care], emerged from a vision to establish a church that is relevant for people living in today's secular and post-Christendom society. Part of the vision is to initiate "a self-acting movement that grows and aids people to explore their spirituality",⁴⁷⁷ by facilitating meetings at places where people who are not part of a church would feel most comfortable. As one respondent said, "we do not wish to push or force anyone, we want to create opportunities or places where they feel safe to open up and discover who they are and perhaps what they need, as well as give opportunities to grow closer to Jesus."⁴⁷⁸ Rather than planting one church in a traditional sense, the team seeks to establish a multiplication movement of new Christian communities made up of new followers of Jesus.

In addition to the core group, there are approximately 20 people who are part of the immediate faith community of closer relationships, as well as 100 people in the wider network extending to a number of different contexts.

8.2 Community

H2O differs in many aspects from what a traditional church or church plant normally looks like, and one of the questions that was raised during the interviews was how the people who are part of H2O see themselves as a community? One participant said:

We are, or at least want to be a community with a missional purpose. That is how I would

⁴⁷⁷ H2O Participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 27 April 2010. *My translation.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

describe it. We want to be a community, we want to share each other's lives, we want to encourage each other, we want to pray for each other. But we also have a purpose [beyond our group].⁴⁷⁹

The group can be understood in different ways: as a mission team; a small missional community; or a network of spaces for spiritual exploration. This sense of vagueness in regard to self-identify may have several explanations. For instance, the mission project was relatively new at the time of study and still in a formative phase. Also, it is a strategic choice of the core team to hold the forms and structures as flexible as possible. The interviews rarely, if ever, refer to H2O as church in a traditional sense.

The vision of H2O, according to one of the leaders, is

To initiate a self-perpetuating movement that grows and helps people to discover their spirituality. We don't want to push or force people, we want to create opportunities or spaces where people feel safe to open up and discover who they are and what they need, and provide opportunity to grow closer to Jesus ... The goal is that the people we connect with gets such a positive experience that they start to talk to their families and friends, "I have found something there!". Just like the disciples who met Jesus and then told their friends: "Come and see, come yourself and see who he is!" So that really is the vision, to initiate a self-perpetuating movement that makes disciples, new followers of Jesus. We really don't talk so much about 'being Christian' as the term mean different things to people. It can mean everything and nothing.⁴⁸⁰

The main gathering place for the core group are the weekly team meetings, which may include a mixture of planning, worship, prayer and teaching. During the time of the study, H2O also started a fortnightly gathering called *Impressions* on Sunday evenings. Initially they had decided not to start anything that would resemble a worship service but then they realised that in respect of contact with people from outside the church, they needed something that at least vaguely resembled a worship service for the sake of familiarity.

We realised that people just didn't understand what we are about. They understood that we were some form of church, something Christian. But it didn't add up to them. We weren't a pub or a café, but we hosted events that resembled such things. So, we realised that some people got a bit suspicious of what we did, that we had a secret agenda. So, we realised that we had to be a bit clearer to people of who we are ... So, we decided to start with, well not a Sunday service, but a public gathering at least ... We don't expect people [outside of H2O] to come, but at least it gives us a public face. We call it *Impressions* and can refer people there if they are interested and it gives them an idea of what we're about and what it looks like when we explore spiritual things.⁴⁸¹

During the interviews the participants explain that on a surface level it does not look like H2O does a lot in terms of programs and activities. On the other hand, they compared H2O to an iceberg where only 10% is visible (in terms of events and programs) and the remaining 90% happens "under the surface" through personal relationships, spontaneous meet ups after work, dinner parties with friends, team

⁴⁷⁹ H2O Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ H2O Participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 7 April 2011. *My translation.*

gatherings, and similar.

H2O might best be understood as a network of meeting places and contexts, most of which are characterised by an informal and relational environment, rather than being centred around a specific set of church members, events or program. One respondent gave the analogy of a church with many kinds of meeting rooms, with “different expressions from which people can wonder in and out” - they went on to say:

It is a little bit like that, instead of just saying “come in and get into the little box that we’ve made”, it would be us moving out and creating boxes that would look a little bit more like the people [we reach] ... helping them to feel at home and take ownership and participate.⁴⁸²

8.3 Mission

Judging by the interview material, mission is at the heart of H2O’s self-identity, and an important focal point for what they are and do as a group. Only reluctantly, or perhaps more as an afterthought, did they decide to start anything that would resemble a more traditional church service. The interviews also revealed a flexible and pragmatic approach to their programs and strategies. The participants emphasised that relationships with other people is what has the highest priority in what they do in terms of ministry. Any program or event hosted by H2O is merely a method used to develop, nurture and sustain the relationships they have made, and provide opportunities for spiritual explorations for those people. A program may be cancelled or changed at any time, and the participants also highlighted that no one meeting place can be suitable to all people. Rather, what H2O tries to do in terms of community building and mission, is to develop different kind of *spaces* depending on context and the current need and interest of the people to connect with.

When describing Angered as a mission context, one respondent said that “the people we get in contact with has a hunger for spiritual things, but they are sceptical of the church.”⁴⁸³ Therefore, H2O strived to keep the places they gather as neutral as possible, for example the second hand store, a café, pub, or similar. One respondent said

There’s probably a number of ways to express the vision, but as I understand it, it would be to set up some spaces that would facilitate spiritual explorations. [Spaces] for people that otherwise would be afraid of a normal church, that they could come and interact with normal Christians ... and interact in a safe environment.⁴⁸⁴

The concept of ‘spaces of belonging’ is significant for both H2O’s self-understanding and missionary strategy, and it frequently came up during the interviews. Here the group is influenced by Joseph Meyers’ concept of ‘four spaces of belonging’, which he developed in his book *The Search for Belonging: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and*

⁴⁸² H2O Participant 3, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 24 May 2010.

⁴⁸³ H2O Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁴⁸⁴ H2O Participant 2, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 24 May 2010.

Small Groups (2003). Building on the work of anthropologist Edward T. Hall and his study of communication and culture, Meyers argues that belonging is multidimensional and that “people belong to us on different levels”⁴⁸⁵. According to Meyers these ‘four spaces of belonging’ are the Public, Social, Personal, and Intimate spaces. The respondents emphasised that pushing people to get too intimate too early in the process (e.g. in a home group meeting) is not necessarily the best way to engage in mission or cultivate community. Instead, the strategy of the core team is centred on providing a number of different meeting places in all four categories for spiritual exploration; spaces in which people can connect depending on where they are on their faith journey and what kind of relationship they have with people who are part of H2O. So far H2O only work with spaces in the public and social spheres, for example *Serve the City* and *Medvandrarna*, which will be explored further below.

When asked what makes a space a good space, some of the answers were

[that] it is their area of interest, and it might be the very reason you connected with that person and your relationship continues to develop, to grow. And it’s a time for them to be with you, for the whole relationship building. With hopes that making an open door for other things to happen.⁴⁸⁶

I would definitely say that a good space is a space where I myself don’t feel comfortable, but the person I invite feel comfortable. Because that is what we want to do, create a space for them to feel safe and feel loved and welcomed and cared for. To develop the relationship there, to go deeper, to develop more spiritual conversations.⁴⁸⁷

I think that a good space too, is where the facilitator or the person, or the leader, has a passion for that space.⁴⁸⁸

If we would need to choose between a number of spaces I would pick this one where I feel that people are getting curious about who we are, it is not about us but about our spirituality. ... And as we can start to talk about it, trust grows. We don’t want to preach at people, and we don’t want to push something. We want to model something that makes people curious, “why are they doing what they do?” People are getting curios - then that is a good space.⁴⁸⁹

The group also emphasised that spiritual life is to take place where life in general happens. This is why H2O firmly is committed to the idea that any kind of mission activity is to emerge out from peoples’ homes, or in public places like the second-hand store, cafés, pubs, or similar places. The spaces that H2O creates are characterised by hospitality and openness - anyone should feel welcome, safe and able to express their point of view or beliefs. One respondent said

People don’t want to be controlled and we want to give people the opportunity to make their own minds, [have] their own experiences, rather than preaching at them; “this is how it works, this is what you need to do” ... our hope [is to] provide these spaces for people, where they can experience their own spirituality in some ways, which might lead them

⁴⁸⁵ Joseph Meyers, *The Search for Belonging: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialities, 2003), 20.

⁴⁸⁶ H2O Participant 5, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 24 May 2010.

⁴⁸⁷ H2O Participant 2, 24 May 2010.

⁴⁸⁸ H2O Participant 3, 24 May 2010.

⁴⁸⁹ H2O Participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 24 May 2010.

further [in their faith]...⁴⁹⁰

At the time of study, besides spontaneous gatherings in pubs, cafés, and parties in peoples' homes, H2O primarily worked with three specific spaces: *Serve the City*, *Medvandrararna* [Co-travellers, in English], and *SMAK - Sällskap, Mat, Andlighet och Kreativitet* [Fellowship, Food, Spirituality and Creativity].⁴⁹¹

Serve the City is a biannual event that stretches over the course of a weekend hosted by H2O and is run in collaboration with the Saron Church in Gothenburg. The core group expressed the conviction that serving people in practical ways is the key to overcome peoples' distrust towards the church and Christians. It is also a way to involve people - Christians and non-Christians alike - in activities that bring a sense of meaning and depth in their lives. The location of the event changes each year, either locally in Angered or somewhere central in Gothenburg. The program may include music, sport activities, arts, crafts, activities for children, food, as well as serving the community in practical ways, such as picking up trash in the streets, collecting food for various social welfare programs, or helping out in the homeless shelter.

One participant explained that, "we want Serve the City to act as a sermon, sort of, or an act of worship"⁴⁹². At each event they take the time to explain to the participants why H2O is hosting the event each year and why the group does what it does in terms of serving the community in practical ways. To the people participating in the event they explain that

they didn't just hand out food to people when they hosted a picnic for the homeless in the park but proclaimed who God is ... that God goes to those who are rejected in society ... that God loves them.⁴⁹³

The group experienced that these kinds of events provoke curiosity and questions among people.

We are followers of Jesus and this is a way for us to follow him. And [these kind of events] open up for conversations about Jesus. They ask me questions and I don't feel the need to preach at them ... They ask me questions and they see my actions, which makes them curious. This is an important value to us, we want to make people curious. We want people to ask us questions.⁴⁹⁴

Angered is an area of Gothenburg normally associated with crime and violence. Therefore, part of the goal for Serve the City is to encourage people, whatever faith they may profess, to cross boundaries of personal comfort, as well as boundaries caused by ethnicity, social class, or geographical location in order to promote unity and a healthy community environment.

Through Serve the City we try to challenge people to come to Angered... "Do something different, out of your normal context" It's so easy to travel just a few kilometres and see

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ The latter closed down during the course of this study.

⁴⁹² H2O Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

something different, experience something different, that it is not as bad as they first thought.⁴⁹⁵

Medvandrarna is a mission initiative that involves members of H2O visiting the café at the second-hand store at Reningsborg each Saturday. There they help the staff with practical tasks and build relationships with the customers. One respondent explained,

We developed a contact with Reningsborg and it was clear that we should do something together. We started with *Medvandrarna* and make use of the contact network that already existed there. Approximately 500 people come there each Saturday ... it's a very big second-hand store ... and there's a café on site ... And we felt that this is our context ... we build relationships with the people who visit the café.⁴⁹⁶

A third space which H2O developed is *SMAK*.⁴⁹⁷ The general idea behind the monthly event is to gather around food and a specific topic (e.g. beauty, life, dreams, hope, and similar). Participants are encouraged to contribute to the gathering, whether in practical things such as providing or preparing food or drinks, or something that would help facilitate the conversations in a positive way. The *SMAK* gatherings do not necessarily focus on the Christian faith, but part of the vision is to stimulate and open up conversations around existential issues and spirituality. Also, if the opportunity would present itself, it gives the members of H2O the chance to share about their own journeys as Christians and their walk with God. One person explained:

The reason [for hosting] *SMAK* is to help people to meet each other and to open up to each other ... [for it to be] one of those spaces where it feels easy for people to meet with one another ... [to] build community between people who have never met before.⁴⁹⁸

Besides the people part of H2O, the team deliberately choose not to invite Christians to the *SMAK* events. When asked why, one respondent explained that

if you have Christians there, and sometimes we've had Christians take part in the discussions and the conversations hit some spiritual area we always sit there and think, "oh, hopefully he or she will not start preaching now!" Because we want people who come to open up and to feel safe: "Here's a group where I can say what I think and I can ask my questions and [express] my weird ideas and they just listen, they might not agree with me, but they will listen, not immediately say something against it or come up with bible verses or something." That is very important actually, to give people the feeling that they are welcome even though we don't agree with them.⁴⁹⁹

When asked if including people who already are Christians in the conversations automatically affected the discussion in a negative way, one respondent answered

It depends on which type of person you have. You can have someone from a church who would jump on somebody right away. We had a lady saying that she cried her hopes and

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ *SMAK* closed in Spring 2011.

⁴⁹⁸ H2O Participant 1, 24 May 2010.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

wishes to the universe, that she believed in a power out there, that the universe could help her. We deliberately didn't say, "That is wrong, you should pray to God!" and things like that. You can have Christians that react like that. Obviously Christians do not necessarily react like that, we don't have such a negative view of Christians in general, but this is a sensitive issue to us.⁵⁰⁰

8.4 Worship

When this study started, H2O only gathered for corporate worship during their fortnightly house group meetings. These gatherings were not public, but a way for the team to meet without focusing on work related issues, but instead to pray, study the Bible together and worship. At the time of the interviews the group were also reading and discussing Dan Kimball's book *They like Jesus but not the Church: Insight from Emerging Generations* (2007) together as part of their meetings. As written above, during the course of this study the team also started a public worship gathering called *Impressions* as a way to provide a public front to non-Christians interested in H2O, but who found it difficult to understand what the group was about. However, the participants were careful to emphasise that they did not expect non-Christians to come to these meetings. The strategy was never to try to attract people to worship gatherings that the H2O team hosted, instead the primary function of *Impressions* is for the group to connect spiritually and support each other in their faith. According to them, the plan has always been to let different contexts and groups of people shape their own worship experiences, as people start following Jesus and grow spiritually.

When asked about *Impression*, one respondent said that he was reluctant to use the term 'worship service' as this might create certain expectations of what ought to take place during these gatherings. Rather, he continued

Every second Sunday we host a gathering that more resembles an Alpha course. We eat together, everyone brings something to eat and we share what is available. The first hour we hang out, talk about whatever. This then naturally flows into a time with a more spiritual focus, this part takes about one hour and we discuss a topic, not necessarily a Christian topic, not your usual Christian stuff. We might read a Bible text, or we pray together and for each other or we might sing some praise songs. We take Communion every time we meet. We see that as our core, the core of our faith. To come together as a community, to talk about what is going on in our lives and our faith, about the Bible, to take communion, to meet Jesus. The idea is that this expresses our faith and is a way for us to live out our faith.⁵⁰¹

The gathering is open for anyone who wishes to take part. The team keeps the bar high in terms of what opinions are allowed to be voiced, and the Communion table is open for anyone who wishes to share in the bread and the wine. One respondent said

We are open to anyone to take part in the gathering, whether you believe or not believe [in God]. You can be part of the discussions and you can ask whatever question you like, and you are allowed to criticise the Bible if you feel like it. Also, the Communion is open to anyone to take part, if there are guests present I take the time to explain [why we take the

⁵⁰⁰ H2O Participant 2, 24 May 2010.

⁵⁰¹ H2O Participant 1, 7 April 2011.

Communion] and they can make up their own mind if they want to take part or not. It is a way to meet with Jesus, and I explain this ... Why do we do this? Because hopefully it will be a way to meet with Jesus. We believe that he is present and that anyone who is interested [in Jesus] can meet him.⁵⁰²

Participation is a theme that frequently comes up during the interviews, and the respondents are critical as to what they perceive as a consumer culture within many traditional churches. Instead, whether during worship gatherings, community projects, social gatherings or mission activities H2O seeks to encourage participation and involvement. One respondent explained that it is

important not to just to serve [the people we come in contact with], in the way of preparing something which we deliver to them, but one challenge is not to nurture this consumerism attitude of people, that they come to something and they get something which we have prepared. But rather to find ways ... How can we create spaces where they can give something and have a meaningful experience by doing that, rather than just being served by us? Like in a regular church where you go to a Sunday morning service and you sit there, beautiful worship, beautiful sermon and you don't need to do anything, and you can go home quite relaxed again.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ H2O Participant 1, 24 May 2010.

Chapter 9. Underground Church - Relationships, Metal and Music Festivals

Underground Church is a community of Christians in Gothenburg, primarily made up of people who are part of the alternative subcultures in the city, such as metal, punks, goths, and similar. The group is drawn together by their common interest in alternative music, clothing and lifestyles, as well as their Christian faith and interest in spirituality and theological questioning.

The preliminary survey gave similar results as H2O, where both Missional and Emergent Theology were strong themes, and the Alternative Worship and Neo-Monastic streams scored low or very low. The preliminary survey indicated a strong missional focus toward people part of the alternative music scene and subcultures in Gothenburg:

The group started when I, early on in my life as a Christian, wanted to share my faith to people who attended music festivals. I started to get to know “alternative” Christians. We had a vision and a longing to meet up on regular basis. Some had no connection to a church and felt the need to meet other Christians to study the Bible, discuss, pray and do mission within the contexts we are part of.

We connect with [people who are part of] the alternative scene, such as metal heads, people part of the electronic music scene, punks, etc... For various reasons they might not belong to a church or they are curious about the Christian faith, but do not want to visit a church. We do mission in clubs, at music gigs and festivals. We are a complement to the traditional church. Here you are free to speak your mind.

We integrate an alternative lifestyle with a Christian one.⁵⁰⁴

Underground Church stopped meeting together as a group during the course of this study project. It is beyond the scope of this study to engage in any detailed analysis of the reasons behind this turn of events and if therefore left for future research.

9.1 Background

Underground Church began as an idea when Magdalena, the founder of the group, met with other Christians from the organisation Street Church at a music festival in Arvika, Sweden.⁵⁰⁵ Raised in a Christian home, she had left the church and the Christian faith in her teenage years and began searching for meaning and spiritual experiences in the metal music culture, the New Age and the occult. Some years later and unsatisfied with the life she had been living at the time, the encounter at the

⁵⁰⁴ Preliminary electronic survey, conducted on Nov 22nd 2009

⁵⁰⁵ Magdalena's story has been documented previously in two newspaper articles, which is why her real name is used in this text: Pierre Eriksson, "Alla fördomar försvann." Dagen, (9 June, 2006): accessed 28 January, 2009, http://www.dagen.se/dagen/Article_Print.aspx?ID=109447, and Pierre Eriksson, "Målet är att få bort fördomar om kristna." Dagen, (6 April 2006): accessed 28 January, 2009, http://www.dagen.se/dagen/Article_Print.aspx?ID=109447.

music festival with the team from Street Church changed the direction of her life and made her realise that she could be a Christian and still be part of the metal culture she treasured. During the interview she explained that the mission organisation inspired her in how they were reaching out with the Gospel, and she began experiencing a calling herself to reach people who were also part of the alternative subcultures. During that time Street Church supported her and helped her to find a way back to the Christian faith she once had rejected.

In the summer of the same year, Magdalena packed a bag with a Bible, grave candles and a stereo and visited *Gates of Metal*, a music festival in the southern part of Sweden. She also visited several other music festivals in Sweden that year and connected with Christians who were part of the metal music culture. The people she met with shared a similar vision as herself, and the idea to start a Christian community that reached out to the alternative subcultures in Gothenburg was born. At first they called themselves Metal Church, but after six months they decided to change the name to Underground Church. She explained:

We became like a house group, and we were thinking about a suitable name to call ourselves and settled on Underground Church. The name had a somewhat wider appeal, and could include other groups such as punks, electronica and similar. People felt welcome and included, and we became quite a large group. People from other parts of the region came as well.⁵⁰⁶

The group was primary meeting in peoples' homes, for discussion, prayer and Bible studies. Initially they gathered once a month, but after some time they started to meet every week.

At the time we were relatively few people, but people were drawn into the community through relationships. We started meeting every week because we felt a need to do that ... [we met to] hang out and pray, share ideas and talk about our faith. We read the Bible together and discussed the meaning of what we read. Mission is also important, we all think that it is.⁵⁰⁷

The purpose of Underground Church is twofold: First, to connect Christians who are part of the alternative subcultures in Gothenburg, and support each other in their Christian faith and walk with God; and second, to reach out to the alternative scene in Gothenburg, by being a Christian witness and affect some of the preconceived ideas about Christianity and the Church that can be found among people part of those subcultures. "We want to show that you can be a Christian and alternative at the same time, that is the whole point actually",⁵⁰⁸ one participant answered when asked why Underground existed.

⁵⁰⁶ Underground Church Participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 27 April 2010. My translation.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

9.2 Community

At the time of study there were approximately 15 people part of the core group, but the numbers have fluctuated since Underground Church began. Besides frequently hanging out at music clubs in the city, the group meets weekly on Thursday evenings either in peoples' homes or at a café in the city centre. During their weekly gatherings the focus rests on supporting each other on their journeys as Christians, study the Bible together, pray and discuss theological issues and current events.

It is clear from the interviews and visiting the group that Underground Church is made up of a diverse group of people, both in terms of interests, personalities and Christian backgrounds. One respondent explains that

We are a mixed group of people. Some have a lolita style, some are part of the steam-punk scene ... Some listen to electronica, some are metal heads and some have adopted a Medieval style [in terms of clothes] ... some are goths. We are quite different also in terms of personalities.⁵⁰⁹

The age of the members ranges from late teens to people in their mid-30's, but most people are in their early 20's. To many, the Underground Church seems to function both as a Christian 'support group' as well as a group with a missionary purpose to reach people who are distant or negative towards the church and the Christian faith. Many have had negative experiences in traditional churches, with judgmental attitudes and preconceived ideas of their life styles and physical attributes, and the group serve as a safe space to be themselves.

It is the value of openness that stands out more than other themes during the interviews. Some have little previous experience of the church, but for the most part the members of Underground Church come from different Christians backgrounds, ranging from Roman-Catholic, Pentecostal, the Swedish Mission Covenant Church, and the Lutheran Church of Sweden. The group frequently visit different churches together, a practice they hope will help them to keep an open mind and learn from each other's Christian traditions. The eagerness to be accepting and embrace differences is perhaps understandable, as many of the members are part of subcultures that identify with the idea of living outside the norm of mainstream society. When they meet the topics tend to revolve around areas that often can seem taboo in more traditional Christian contexts, discussed with a bluntness that reflect much of the alternative subcultures they associate with. The ambition is to keep a high ceiling in terms of what kind of opinions and views that can be expressed, and they aim to inclusive in terms of different ways to interpret Scripture and theological traditions. One participant said:

I can always suggest how a certain topic can be understood, I can discuss and argue for my opinion. But I don't try to shove it down your throat, that you ought to live in a certain way ... I don't think it's my role to judge people in that way.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁵¹⁰ Underground Church Participant 2, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 7 April 2011.

Another participant explained:

of course, we try to base our understanding on the Bible. And when someone raises a certain issue, often there are other people who have already thought about that topic. But the Bible can provide different perspectives on the same topic ... We often keep an open mind and we often land at some kind of middle ground.⁵¹¹

Whether or not Underground Church is a *church* per se was a topic that received a great deal of attention during the interviews. Although 'church' is part of the group's name, many members seemed conflicted about the issue. One person said

It is perhaps difficult to compare us to a traditional church because we don't function in that way, it is more similar to a cell group...⁵¹²

Another participant answered that the group functions as more of a complement to traditional churches,

It is a network similar to a house group. We have no sacraments, so we are not a church in that sense. In a traditional way. ... And no pastor who is part of the group regularly. So, no, our focus are discussions, Bible studies, prayer, mission and fellowship.⁵¹³

There were, however, people who were part of the group that do see Underground Church as their church. For others, it seemed like a non-issue:

To me, church is not where you belong but a way to express your faith. And in my of thinking we are each and every one the church, we belong to Christ and we are the church. I don't know, I don't think a lot about church. To me, it is good that we all come from such varied backgrounds and we have a lot to bless each other with. To enrich each other's lives with.⁵¹⁴

Another participant explained,

To me it becomes more or less [my church] because I am not part of anything else. ... But in another sense the whole concept of church is pretty fuzzy. It is hard to define if Underground Church is a church or not. If you define Underground church as a church, then I clearly am part of a church. But no-one has expressed those words in a clear way. To me it is not important. It is the community with other Christians that is important, I can't care less about what you call it.⁵¹⁵

9.3 Mission

Underground Church exists for two primary reasons: for Christians who are part of the alternative subcultures of Gothenburg to support each other in their Christian life and faith, and to be a Christian witness within these contexts, hopefully making a positive

My translation.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁵¹⁴ Underground Church Participant 4, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 7 April 2011.

My translation.

⁵¹⁵ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

impression on people who have negative views of the church. As with H2O, the aim of Underground Church's gatherings is not to make them as accessible as possible to non-Christians, attempting to attract people who are far away from Christian culture and faith. As a matter of fact, non-Christians rarely attended the Thursday evening gatherings. Instead the members of the group intentionally visit alternative music clubs and similar places together, with the intention to be a Christian presence in a context that the church normally does not reach or influence. One participant said,

If we connect with a person and that person is interested in Jesus Christ and all that, we try to avoid doing what many churches do, to get them into the church [culture]. But if we do that they cannot continue to spread their faith among their friends, because they leave that world behind. And that is not our aim ... the focus is for people to stay [in their contexts].⁵¹⁶

The mission approach can be described as non-confrontational and relational witnessing with the aim to, as one participant expressed it, "sow seeds and stir up interest"⁵¹⁷ for the Christian faith.

It is not like we walk up to people and say, "have you heard about Jesus?", sort of the classical approach ... None of us believes that this is an appropriate way of doing it, but we build relationships and talk to people, just ordinary conversations. And, for example, just wearing a Christian cross says a lot. It can connect you with people, at least that is my experience.⁵¹⁸

The participant explained further:

We have a strong outward focus and we try to sow seeds and stir up an interest for the Christian faith through dialogue with people. We don't try to shove the Christian faith down peoples' throats, like "Become a Christian now!". We don't feel the need to add more people to the group, we feel content with the group as it is at the moment. But of course, it nice if people want to join us, but we don't try to chase people down and get them to join us.⁵¹⁹

Members of Underground Church often face preconceived ideas about the church and Christian faith, and has sometimes met with hostility in the meeting with 'alternatives', as they call them. Meeting hostile attitudes in a loving and humble way is an important value to the members of the group. During the interviews the participants also highlight the preconceived ideas that Christians and the church have about people part of these subcultures. One person said:

In my experience there are a lot of preconceived ideas among churches about people who are part of the metal scene, and priests and pastors have communicated a lot of negative things. Both contexts have pushed each other away, so I totally understand why a lot of people part of the metal subculture have negative views of the church. So how can we go to them and show that the church isn't like that, of course those attitudes exist, but to attempt to reach them where they are. I don't try to pretend to be someone I am not, but I share an interest with these people, I have something in common with them, I can

⁵¹⁶ Underground Church Participant 3, Interview by author. Tape recording. Gothenburg, 7 April 2011.

My translation.

⁵¹⁷ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

understand them. I relate to their experiences, this is really important.⁵²⁰

Time was spent during the interviews to discuss how the members of the Underground Church view and related to the various cultural contexts they associate with. It was evident that many were aware of the tension that can exist between the Christian faith and values that sometimes are expressed in alternative music and the lifestyles that often are part of these subcultures. One participant explained that:

One has to be discerning between the culture and music and the Christian faith, and there are some pretty dark stuff ... but we are all kind of different, we draw our limits at different places in terms of what we can accept ... There are also differences between different kind of alternative subcultures.⁵²¹

When talking about the tension that can exist between the Christian faith and alternative subcultures on participant answered:

We haven't reached a consensus as to how we are to deal with these issues, but we approach this from individual perspectives. Is it, for example, ok to visit a club that hires strippers? I want to go out and evangelise these places in the same way that Jesus for example hung out among prostitutes. But is it ok for me to pay the entrance fee? In that way I support them financially. These are real issues, and we talk about this. We try to support each other as a group and listen to each other. Some would say, "I would never do that!", and other people would say "Yes, it is for a good cause, it is at these places you can meet people who are hungry for the Word of God."⁵²²

Some held the viewpoint that the cultural expressions only could be a superficial element in the life of a Christian (e.g. a certain way to dress, or what kind of music the person likes to listen to), but maintained that there also were deeper elements in terms of lifestyle and values in many subcultures that clash with the Christian faith. One participant said:

In my opinion the culture becomes something superficial, because if you are a Christian you cannot embrace it all. Because we are to live in love and humility and all that, and it's just not compatible. ... The difference between the Christian faith and the world becomes a lot clearer if you are part of these alternative subcultures. You face a lot of egoism and a darker view of life, it becomes apparent in these kinds of circles. And the radical Christian message stands out a lot more [in these places].⁵²³

Besides visiting music clubs and parties, an important part of Underground Church's mission approach is to be a Christian witness at various music festivals in Sweden, such as *Metal Town* and *Sweden Rock*. Again, the approach is non-confrontational and focusing on building relationships; being a Christian presence and handing out 'Metal Bibles' (a Bible that also includes stories and testimonies from Christians who are part of the metal music scene, or who have been involved with New Age and the occult in the past). One respondent said that, when receiving the Bibles some people are positive and interested, while other people burn them on site. Just by being there,

⁵²⁰ Underground Church Participant 3, 7 April 2011.

⁵²¹ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁵²² Underground Church Participant 4, 7 April 2011.

⁵²³ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

setting up a table by the entrance to the music festivals attracts attention. One participant explained:

We play music with a stereo and put up a banner between a couple of trees, and for example [last year] there were a couple of girls who really went at us, with all their preconceptions about the Christian faith, and almost spat at us. But we stayed calm, we started to talk to them, we refrained from shouting back at them and they calmed down and started to listen to us. We managed to meet with one another. It was a really interesting experience. A lot of people just walk past us and stare at us. Some stop and talk. We aim at having a dialogue with people, just stay true to who we are. But it can be quite mentally exhausting if someone verbally attacks us, that is a real challenge.⁵²⁴

Not all mission activities, however, that Underground Church participates in are done as a group. Much of what is happening in terms of mission, happens through the lives of the individuals members. For instance, one member is a gothic belly dancer (a fusion of Oriental belly dancing, and gothic music, clothes and imagery, according to one of the interviewees), which she uses to communicate her Christian faith in contexts far from church culture. Another member is a skilled and acclaimed magician and illusionist, who has created several magical acts centred around the Gospel and the Christian faith.

9.4 Worship

The emphasis of Underground Church rests on community and mission, rather than worship in a traditional sense. One member explained that "they used to sing together when they were called Metal Church."⁵²⁵ That quickly changed, however, and at the time of the study their gatherings focused on theological discussions, prayer and studying the Bible together. Why this is the case was discussed during the interviews. One participant said that the discussions take up too much time at their gatherings and leave little room for other things, but to my understanding the absence of corporate worship may be related to their varied ecclesial backgrounds and different understandings of what church is. Although valuing diversity and openness, the interviews revealed a difficulty in finding a common ground in terms of worship, in particular how they would handle the sacraments together as a group. One person said

Can we celebrate the Communion when we gather together? This is a sensitive issue, and we sometimes need to choose not to do certain things [as a group]. And we're not supposed to function as a church in a traditional sense, and if we wanted to [have some form of communal worship] someone would need to sit down and work out a middle-ground. But that is not our goal.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁵²⁶ Underground Church Participant 2, 7 April 2011.

Chapter 10. Tribe - Tattoos, cafés and church as club

Tribe is a Christian community that emerged out of a vision to see a new expression of church that can reach teenagers and young people who have little or no previous experience of the Christian faith. At the time of study, the community was based on Södermalm in central Stockholm, an area of the city known for its laid-back atmosphere; attractive to young professionals and creatives. The vision behind Tribe is expressed in the following way:

We want to be a church for young people, on the terms of young people. We want to be a glue that binds together all kinds of Christians. We want to encourage new ways of seeing things, and new ways of doing things.⁵²⁷

Scoring high on both the Alternative Worship and Missional streams characteristic of the ECC, the preliminary survey gave the impression of a Christian community invested in experimenting with new forms of worship, as well as finding creative ways to engage in mission among young people in Stockholm; in particular those people who are part of the music and skate scenes in the city. When asked why the group started, the survey responses were as follows:

Out of a longing to see something new happen among young people in Stockholm. To reach cultures that are unreached.

We encourage people to be church where they live their lives. We empower people to be salt and light in their everyday lives.⁵²⁸

At the time of study, Tribe was a small but vibrant Christian community that hosted an innovative music club in the inner city that each week reached a large group of teenagers from predominately non-Christian backgrounds. Similar to Underground Church, Tribe has undergone dramatic changes since then and gradually shifted into “a house church in hibernation”, before closing down completely. When asked about the current state of Tribe and what the future might hold for the group, one member wrote that

even if we close down our programs, the relationships still are there ... We have Jesus and each other and when we feel that we should do something active as a group, we will do that.⁵²⁹

It is beyond the scope of this study to engage in any deeper analysis for why these developments have occurred and I have left this for further research.

⁵²⁷ Taken from a document provided by Tribe, stating the group’s vision and mission. *My translation.*

⁵²⁸ Preliminary electronic survey, conducted on 20th April 2010

⁵²⁹ Tribe participant 3, Interview by author. Tape recording, Stockholm, 24 May 2011. *My translation.*

10.1 Background

In 1999 a group of young Christians from a number of local churches began meeting at *Slagverket* - a local drum store on Södermalm in the southern part of central Stockholm, to pray, fast and seek God together. At the time no one talked about starting a church together, as most of the people already were members or leaders in other churches. Instead, the gatherings were informal, leaderless, and relational; focusing on encountering and experiencing God in creative ways. One of the leaders explained:

I gathered a number of youth pastors to Slagverket [the drum store] and asked what their vision for Stockholm was? No one really had any fresh ideas, it felt like "Come on, we've tried this stuff for 40 years now, get a grip!" ... And I had felt for a long time that we should start a music club. We should start a club that is a church, that is one and the same. Club and church, where people come and dance and get to encounter God in a natural way, where we can serve people and they can relax and be comfortable.⁵³⁰

The group started experimenting with alternative ways of worship; incorporating club music and dancing, as well as using a DJ instead of a traditional worship band. They met at Slagverket, as well as travelling around Sweden hosting club events for youth in local churches and at Christian festivals. The gatherings were characterised by high energy dance music, experimentative worship, and charismatic practices such as words of prophecy and prayer for healing. One participant explained:

This is where it all started. I bought a deck and DJ stuff. We went out to clubs, travelled to London and bought vinyl records... And God began opening our eyes to what worship is, what does it mean to praise him, what is prayer? We come from free church contexts where a praise song is 3 minutes, which ends in soft cymbals playing and we all sing in the spirit together. ... Jesus is tired of the music.⁵³¹

During this period contacts were made with youth churches in the United Kingdom, as well as various Christian DJs (e.g. Andy Hunter, Doug Ross, and Kenny Mitchell). The relationship with the 24-7 Prayer Movement,⁵³² which started around the same time as Tribe in September 1999 in Chichester, England, was particularly important to the group that met at Slagverket. One of the leaders stated:

If you read the vision behind 24-7, you find the same driving force behind those who started Tribe. The passion for prayer, the simplicity, the wildness ... There was something that had to be released, something that was channelled in Tribe through the ordinary lives of the members ... we feel a strong connection to 24-7.⁵³³

After a period of three years the group began talking about starting a church together, instead of simply being a loosely formed worship community. Although the idea initially was met with some hesitation, the group decided to form the church Tribe in 2002.

⁵³⁰ Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² <https://www.24-7prayer.com>

⁵³³ Tribe participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Stockholm, 24 September 2010. *My translation.*

Over the years Tribe has experienced a number of distinct phases, the first being the period when the group was meeting at Slagverket. A second formative period was between 2006 and 2008, when Tribe no longer was able to meet at the drum store and was forced to look for alternatives. An opportunity opened up to start meeting at a local café on Södermalm, *Café String*, during their normal opening hours on Sunday mornings in the basement of the venue. There they gathered to worship, whilst paying customers had their coffee, experimenting in different ways to pray and celebrate the Lord's Supper in an open and public environment.

A third phase began in 2008, as the group stopped meeting at Café String and were invited by a local Baptist church on Södermalm to share the building together with three other Christian groups. A multi-congregational structure emerged, and Tribe was given the opportunity to develop their ministry among youth and teenagers. At that time Tribe began hosting Friday night music clubs in the basement of the church called *Kryptan* [The Crypt], featuring local, young and up and coming bands (the majority being non-Christian acts), with styles ranging from pop, rock and indie music, to death metal. It is during this time that Tribe began to see an increased numerical growth in terms of baptisms and young people giving their lives to Jesus.

At the time of study, the group had started to shift into a fourth phase, as the future of the Baptist congregation was uncertain and with that, the future of the building. At the time of the interviews, Tribe had not hosted a club event for several months due to sanitary issues in the basement, and had begun looking for an alternative venue.

Although the group is driven by the vision to find news forms of church and mission that makes sense to people who are part of the many youth subcultures of central Stockholm, the participants emphasised that they never have been interested in attracting people who are interested in being an alternative church for the sake of being alternative. One participant said:

We don't want to be something that is attractive simply because it's cool. It has been a challenge for us to be discerning with what we want to shape, who we want to come alongside us and do this. We want to do something for the people who come to our club nights, but we don't want to have loads of people coming because they long for an alternative church. The truth is that those who are Christians that come and long for an alternative church, they stop longing after some time. Suddenly they realise they kind of like the traditional church, and they fade out from the group. It's such a hassle to need to deal with all the baggage that people bring with them [of traditional church culture], those who want to escape something. That is not our calling.⁵³⁴

Tribe has also been careful not to attract too much attention among the traditional churches in Stockholm and Sweden as a whole. They express a desire to encourage and help other churches, but they also want to avoid any kind of hype. One participant explained:

⁵³⁴ Tribe participant 1, Interview by author. Tape recording. Stockholm, 24 September 2010. *My translation.*

We have no desire for *Dagen* [a Christian newspaper in Sweden] to write about us, or that other Christians know about who we are. That doesn't matter, it is completely uninteresting. We do not want to become Christian celebrities that do "the new Christian thing". We want to be faceless prophets. We meet other people, we love other people. We share our lives with these people, we love them.⁵³⁵

10.2 Community

Tribe has, from the beginning had the ambition to keep the organisation and the number of meeting down to the essentials. One participant explained,

Our dilemma has been not to ruin the visions and dreams God has given us with too much organisation ... We are fairly uninterested [in discussing] exactly how we are to do things, instead we just pray. Something that has characterised the church and been a driving force is prayer ... Prayer and fasting has been the things that have patched things up when we missed structure and taking care of each other.⁵³⁶

The interviews reveal a desire to live open and authentic lives together as Christians, 24 hours a day seven days a week. This vision partly originates from reaction to a traditional free church culture, which according to the participants often means that you only see each other on Sundays as Christians. Emphasis rests on sharing each other's everyday lives in a natural and organic way, rather than through scheduled programs and organised gatherings.

At the time of study, Tribe may best be understood as a network of house churches with a common vision to reach young people in Stockholm with the Gospel in creative ways. Part of the vision states that the group wants to

be a network of relationships rather than fixed structures, forms or buildings. We want to see churches in a network of smaller groups who in different contexts work for God.⁵³⁷

Although the Friday night clubs and similar events play significant parts in the life of Tribe, the emphasis still rests on the smaller groups that meet together during the week. You can be a member of Tribe and not be actively involved in the Friday night clubs - "the club or skate [culture] and all that are just different expressions, different tools [to reach people]", the participants said, "what matters are the relationships."⁵³⁸

During long periods of time the communal life of Tribe has revolved around weekly prayer gatherings in the morning. At the time of study, the only planned weekly gatherings, besides the Friday music clubs, took place on Tuesday evenings, as well as prayer meetings on Friday mornings. Although the structure and focus of the Tuesday evening meetings varies, it serves as an important connection point for the group, providing a forum for teaching, discipleship training, prayer and worship.

At the time of study Tribe had approximately 30 members, with a relational network extending well beyond those numbers. The participants estimated that between 70 and 100 young people attended the weekly Friday night clubs. When

⁵³⁵ Tribe participant 2, Interview by author. Tape recording. Stockholm, 24 May 2011. *My translation.*

⁵³⁶ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵³⁷ Taken from a document provided by Tribe, stating the group's vision and mission. *My translation.*

⁵³⁸ Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

asked to describe the typical Tribe member, one participant said:

I would say a person who is interested in music, about 20 years old. Who has a creative interest ... [and] a certain 'out of the box' mentality.⁵³⁹

But, he explained further, there are people part of the group that are older than that, as well as families with young children. Another participant said:

Of course, there are groups within the group, as there always are. But we're quite a motley crew really, not all are the same ... That this is just a youth thing and just for one generation and everyone are 18 years old, that is just not how things are.⁵⁴⁰

Tribe has no formal membership; the emphasis rests on the members' commitment to the relationships in the group.

We do not see it as "now you are in or now you are out of the group", instead it is based on a sense that "I am part [of Tribe]". That can, of course, create questions of belonging, "am I part of this or am I not?" But we are very intentional in confirming that the person is part of the group and are intentional on bringing people on a journey, when they have said "yes" to Jesus and start to follow him. You start to deal with issues from the past, and so on. We are a baptising church. And we [put emphasis on] being part of the community and take responsibility.⁵⁴¹

Tribe has never had any form of paid leadership; instead anyone who is part of the leadership team does so on a voluntary basis. Part of the interviews focused on how decisions were made in a group that emphasises relationships and expresses a sepsis towards too much organisation and structure? No formal forums or structures for decision-making exist, instead decisions seem to happen ad hoc, as ideas develop and are discussed. According to the participants these discussions and decisions often happen when the members and leaders gathered to pray in the mornings. One leader explained:

We have a leadership, but [decisions] are made in an organic way. Those who are participating, those who are there and pray. They express their opinions and what they feel, and we listen. It is an organic way of influencing the decisions, rather than presenting formal motions and having a church governmental body ... We regularly meet as a leadership, we try to hear what people think through the relationships in the group, we also try to listen as we pray ... A sort of culture has been formed when it comes to decision making, you pray and God gives you a dream, you share it with other people and talk things through ... We sometimes feel that we need to formalise things, but in reality ideas and decisions happen when we pray. And then we go with that.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ Tribe participant 2, 24 May 2011.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

10.3 Mission

Tribe may best be understood as relationship driven rather than a program driven Christian community. Events such as the Friday night club are an important part to the mission strategy of the group. With that being said, the participants also emphasised that what really matters is that those who see Tribe as their spiritual home are encouraged and equipped to live out their faith in their everyday contexts during the week. The group expressed very little interest in the idea of simply trying to attract non-Christians to church or some form of Christian program. Tribe also encourages people to take their faith to public places, for instance when they were gathering for worship and prayer at Café String on Södermalm in Stockholm during regular opening hours. One of the leaders told a story which he felt would serve as an illustration:

[The owner of Café String said] that we were allowed to come and have our worship service there if we brought our own sound system and if we were the first there. So, for almost two years we gathered in that basement fortnightly. It was a very interesting journey, discovering that it is possible to pray for each other in a café environment. We even hosted a prophetic workshop while café guests sat there drinking their coffees. At one time we shared the space with some kind of conspiracy group, who was sitting there, folding DVD sleeves. They were critical to the USA and claimed that September 11th was fake and all that stuff, I cannot remember what the group was called. But they sat there and was working on their propaganda material at the same time as we worshipped and talked about forgiveness. It was a really interesting time [for Tribe], with all those kinds of meetings.⁵⁴³

At the time of the interviews, a great deal of energy and resources were spent hosting the weekly Friday night music clubs at *Kryptan*, in the basement of *Salemkyrkan*, a Baptist church on Södermalm, south Stockholm. The club nights gathered approximately 70-100 young people, mostly teenagers, who have little or no previous contact with the church and the Christian faith. The interview participants are careful to emphasise that the event as such is not a “Christian event” in the traditional sense, or a “Christian music club”. Instead the aim is to host a high-quality music club for up and coming artists and bands, where they can build relationships with and serve the guests, and live out their faith in an environment where non-Christian youth feel comfortable. The vision is to blend the idea of church and club, being church in a club environment rather than running a club in a church. One leader explained:

Usually there are three bands playing each night, and most acts are non-Christian and the styles range from pop, indie and electro to rock and death metal. Before each band plays, members of Tribe sit down and talk with the musicians in order to get to know them better, encourage them and share some of the vision behind the church. They also take the opportunity to pray with the band or artist.⁵⁴⁴

We strive to regularly pray with the bands. We are open with who we are and then we have a dialogue with people. We are inviting them onto our “home”, but we also emphasise that we are not responsible for the whole show. [We tell them that] “You are hosting the show in our home”. It creates an interaction that is very difficult to get right. If you are not

⁵⁴³ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

present in the moment it will fail, if you let them take over. You need to keep the "saltiness". You see them, pray for them, ask questions and trust that God can use them. If you don't do that it will be useless, just a social club that will not lead anywhere. If you do what we do, without any openness to the Spirit, then I do not see the value in doing this.⁵⁴⁵

Tribe seems to be open and inclusive in terms of who they allow to play during the club nights (anyone is allowed to play, although they do not accept lyrics that are explicitly sexist in nature), at the same time as striving to be authentic to who they are as Christians and as faith community. Besides introducing Tribe as a group as well as briefly explaining the vision behind the church at the beginning of the evening as part of the welcome message, there are no sermons or Christian talks from the stage during the club nights. One participant said,

All kinds of music are welcomed. They can growl and form a mosh pit if they like. And we don't stand there on the stage and preach at them. Someone briefly introduce the band and who we are, at most two minutes. But what is amazing is what kind of relationships we get with the bands. Sometimes when you meet the bands outside the club they give you such big hugs, they really like you. But that is because we have included them, we help them rehearse, cook food for them. They get to meet some of the leaders who also work in the music industry ... They feel an ownership of Kryptan. They help out as well. The main focus has been on relationships, not building a platform to preach at them.⁵⁴⁶

Members are encouraged to be intentional during conversations with the guests, looking for opportunities to connect with people, pray, share prophetic words and encouragements in a natural and relaxed way. One participant explained:

If there is no saltiness, if we don't share the Gospel then all that we do is in vain. But how do we do that? We have wrestled with that question a lot ... At the end of the day, it has to do with engaging with people and talking with them. You need people who are evangelistically driven to do that, who are unafraid. Some people got it. Others need to step out of their comfort zone to do that. So, it's different from time to time. It depends who are there and what kind of day they have had [before the club night].⁵⁴⁷

When discussing what it is like to share the Christian faith in an environment like the music club, one leader said:

We have been surprised by the fact that it has been so easy, we haven't felt that it is hard, that it is difficult to talk to people about spirituality, God and Jesus. Sometimes it is almost like we try find problems and stuff that hinders the conversations, but it has actually been so easy. Of course, there is a human element we all need to get over, about engaging with people in conversation, introduce yourself and talk about whatever ... But we have been really careful to pray for the venue before each club night, so that all [spiritual] garbage stays outside. We have felt such a peace even when the bands growl and sing about demons, because those demons are not even allowed to be there! God is there. We try to keep a high ceiling, try not to be too religious about it.⁵⁴⁸

The participants were aware that some of the bands playing at the music club and the cultural expressions that they come in contact with may be controversial in a

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ Tribe participant 2, 24 May 2011.

⁵⁴⁷ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁴⁸ Tribe participant 2, 24 May 2011.

Christian context. Part of the interviews was spent discussing how they view and relate to the culture that they try to reach with the Gospel. One leader said:

Intuition is important, to be discerning. What makes it possible is good intuition ... Who are these people, what is their motivation? And we talk to them. To some of the bands it is just about image, a front they adopt ... But one has to be discerning. There is a God culture, and there are some pretty rubbish and unhealthy things that shape youth culture. But there are also aspects of God there as well. You need to be ready to engage and be present, but not to accept everything. It is about being culturally present, but not culturally relevant really. If there for example are sexist attitudes [in the music], then I'm not accepting that.⁵⁴⁹

People sometimes adopt a certain style to be affirmed and seen. If we are able to see and affirm them, at the same time as we help them experience something different, then perhaps we can affect both the musician and their fans.⁵⁵⁰

Another participant explained:

I don't want them to become "free church kids". The girl that shows up with a punk rock attitude, I want her to stay punk but to love Jesus. To have her heart changed. ... I would say that in terms of music and culture, and we have punks here and all these different expressions, there is nothing that really goes against Christian beliefs. These are all creative expressions, a kind of identity that is expressed aesthetically. Of course, there are values that create a tension [with the Christian faith] and we need to deal with that. When we gathered as skate church and were part of that culture, we encountered a context that was quite exclusive. Very selfish and exclusive. A great deal of alcohol. They kind of look up to a bad boy attitude. But we came there and served them.⁵⁵¹

During the interviews it became apparent that the leaders of Tribe viewed the cultures they engaged with through a lens of intentional discipleship. This means that there are positive and negative aspects of all cultures, and Tribe never expected people to leave their cultural contexts. Instead they want to disciple people to be Christians within their cultural contexts. One participant said:

You change when you encounter Jesus, that is [Jesus] job. Our job is to love people and continue to love them ... Those who are part of Tribe invest a lot of time in each other's lives. In particular those who are new Christians. It is a kind of discipleship where you walk together with other people.⁵⁵²

Time was also spent discussing the issue of homogeneity and church community, and whether they saw any issues with being a church emerging out of and shaped by youth culture. The responses from the interview participants consisted of a mix of pragmatism as well as desire to see a contextually shaped church emerge that also involved other generations. One participant reasoned that some of the criticism towards churches like Tribe comes out of a fear of things that are different from a traditional free church ecclesiology. However, the same person also said,

In my opinion there has to be room for churches shaped by youth culture, but you can be

⁵⁴⁹ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Tribe participant 2, 24 May 2011.

⁵⁵² Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

70 years old and still be part of that. You can be a grandpa for these people, if you know why you are there ... Just like there are young people working with older generations, older generations need to be involved in the activities of young people ... I'm convinced that there is a great deal of old people who would like to get involved in some way.⁵⁵³

One leader explained how he interacts and is involved in the lives of the parents of the youth who come to the club and become members of Tribe. When parents see the way their children are affected in a positive way by the Gospel and Tribe as a faith community, they want to help out and get involved. He continued:

We work with young people, but there are other connections. We invite parents home to our place and eat a meal together. That happens all the time. To us relationships build community, and community is church. The more [the parents] connect with us, the more at ease they become, and they realise that this is what they long for as a family. We need to stop dividing things up in separate categories, like church, religion and life in general.⁵⁵⁴

Tribe, then, can be understood as a homogenous Christian community, whilst at the same time trying to include diversity and connect with other generations. This, however, seems to happen through natural everyday relationships, rather than through church programs or organised in a traditional sense.

10.4 Worship

Since the group began meeting at the drum store *Slagverket*, Tribe has sought to experiment and widen their understanding of what Christian worship could be, sound and look like. As noted above, early on the group began incorporating elements of club culture and music as part of their worship, rather than traditional contemporary praise music. There are a number of aspects that stand out in regard to the worship practices of Tribe:

Eclectic approach

During the interviews it became clear that Tribe carries a strong commitment to push the boundaries of and deconstruct a traditional free church/charismatic understanding of Christian worship. Trying new things and do things in different ways seems to have been a strong motivating factor for the interview participants. As an example, one of the leaders recounted an account when Tribe gathered for worship at Café String on Södermalm, experimenting in different ways to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The philosophy has always been that we use something that works in a practical way. Sometimes it's been the joy of exploring new ways of doing things, to stretch our boundaries, that it can be fun. Why do we need to use a red drink [for communion], we might as well use a blue one? It excites us. Why does it need to be the way it always has been? Many of us carry that DNA. If they use consecrated wafers in the Church of Sweden, why can't we use *Brago* cookies? The philosophy is that Jesus took what was served, when

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

he made the connection between [the bread and wine] to his life and his sacrifice. And we all believe that if Jesus had been here today he wouldn't have used wine, and not necessarily unleavened bread. It depends on the context.⁵⁵⁵

As a group, Tribe has been committed to overcome what they perceive as a false or unhelpful divide between what may be regarded as sacred or secular, whether it is music, or some other aspect of worship or life as a Christian in general.

Faith and worship in public spaces

Related to this is Tribe's commitment to express their faith in the context of ordinary everyday life. This is perhaps best illustrated by the group gathering for worship at café String during normal opening hours. One of the leaders explained:

Sometimes there were a lot of people who came downstairs to drink their coffee and eavesdrop on what we were doing. One time when we met for worship, we shared the venue with a bachelorette party, as the owner had mistakenly double-booked the room.⁵⁵⁶

In the middle of the meeting the two groups began talking and interacting, and the person who was leading the worship had the opportunity to share biblical stories about the Church as the bride and Jesus as the groom. He continued:

We sang karaoke together with all the girls in the group on the stage, and after that we had the opportunity to pray for them all and God met with them. We were allowed to pray for them and the whole group stood there and cried at Café String! We had many of these kind of meetings.⁵⁵⁷

Another interview participant said

It was a very interesting journey where we learned to express our faith, that it is possible to pray in a café environment ... we even had a prophetic workshop there with other [paying customers] having coffee around us.⁵⁵⁸

The structure and content of the meetings at Café Strong varied:

What became important was to in a clear way explain the things that we did. You cannot just say, "Let's worship", you need to explain what worship is. Sometimes we sang worship songs, sometimes a singer-songwriter performed, preferably with a clear focus on God ... Everyone was allowed to share. Whatever they had to contribute; if God had spoken to them, if they had experienced anything in particular during the week. Sometimes we had a very simple structure with communion. It all changed in different periods, sometimes we focused on teaching, sometimes [our meetings] almost felt "seeker sensitive" with PowerPoint and stuff. We focused on the Word and tried to explain it.⁵⁵⁹

Tribe did not see much numerical growth during that period; rather the experience challenged them in their understanding of what Christian spirituality is. They also

⁵⁵⁵ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁵⁶ Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

had to deal with the question of what is or is not OK to do in a public and secular environment, shaping their spirituality in important ways as Christian community.

An emphasis on charismatic spirituality

A third component which stood out during the interviews was the strong emphasis on charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality. This theme runs like a “red thread” throughout the interviews, and not only in connection to worship (e.g. prophetic prayer and an emphasis on freedom and spontaneity), but also in regard to their approach to mission (e.g. prayer for healing and prophetic evangelism), an emphasis on personal transformation as the work of the Spirit, how the church ought to be shaped and governed (i.e. it is God, through the work of the Spirit, that shapes the community, not any of the leaders), as well as an emphasis on a Christian life lived in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. One leader explained:

We want to encourage them [the people part of Tribe] to live in the freedom, let God come with the Holy Spirit and be like acetone dissolving all the “stickiness” in their lives. So that they become free.⁵⁶⁰

Recounting the early days of Tribe and the influence of charismatic spirituality, one interview participant said,

It was something that to a large extent shaped us from the start. The charismatic and prophetic played an important role. Magnus [one of the leaders] was opening these things up to us, to him it was an important journey on a personal level, and it shaped us as well. Both the prophetic and the evangelistic, but the prophetic has always superseded the evangelistic.⁵⁶¹

Another leader said, when asked about the early developments of the group,

We tried to deconstruct the traditional ways of doing things. We celebrated communion with sweets and pop soda, did “prayer tunnels” and anointed each other with oil, even though we hardly had any clue of what we were doing. But God kept meeting us again and again, and new people kept showing up.⁵⁶²

The influence of charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality may partly be explained by the church backgrounds of several of the leaders of Tribe. However, what I observed here may perhaps best be understood as a traditional charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality dressed in a highly deconstructive format, blending practices such as prophetic prayer, healing, deliverance and an emphasis on freedom in the Spirit, with an emerging Christianity that emphasise overcoming the spiritual/profane divide, eclecticism and post-Charismatic Alternative Worship.

⁵⁶⁰ Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

⁵⁶¹ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁵⁶² Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

PART C. Critical discussion: Ecclesiological and Missiological Considerations

The culture of modernity is an unprecedented missionary frontier. It is the first culture which has had long encounter with the Christian faith, but where vast numbers of people live post-Christian lives. The non missionary church of Christendom remains a dominant form of church in modern culture. This ecclesial reality can be made salvifically and socially relevant only if reshaped by *basileia* to become the means of incarnating the reign of God in modern culture.
- Wilbert R. Shenk, *The Good News of the Kingdom* (1993)

Chapter 11. Types of Emerging Churches

At a first glance the four case studies may be perceived as having relatively few shared features. Oikos is a neo-monastic community located in a socially vulnerable fringe suburb of Gothenburg, which pray the Liturgy of the Hours, experiment with Eastern orthodox liturgy, and emphasise peace-making, social justice issues and community involvement. H2O is a church planting project led by a team of missionaries supported by an international mission agency, which experiment with spaces of spiritual exploration, and deliberately function as a networked structure building a faith community “from the outside in”. Underground Church is a small group of Christians coming from diverse church backgrounds, drawn together by their common interest in alternative music, clothing and lifestyles, and the longing to be a Christian witness to people who are also part of the alternative music scene in Gothenburg. Tribe is a dynamic church in Stockholm made up of predominately young people, invested in deconstructing traditional ecclesial practices with the aim to shape a Christian community that emerges out of youth and club culture.

Emerging Christianity is a multifaceted phenomenon, so when studying local communities that express the ECC ethos we can expect a degree of diversity in how they view the world, understand themselves ecclesologically, engage with the world in mission, and express their faith and spirituality. We have established that the ECC as an international grassroots conversation can be understood as the intersection and overlap of a number of streams; how each local community express (or do not express) these streams shape the group in important ways and account for much of the diversity within the conversation. This observation has been instrumental for the case study criteria in this project, informing us what kind of Christians communities we are looking for and what kind of groups should be included in the study. From this perspective we can speak of different types of emerging churches. The four “streams of Lake Emerging” presented in Chapter 4: (The Emergent Theological Stream, The Neo-Monastic Stream, The Alternative Worship Stream, and The Missional Stream) is helpful from a methodological perspective as it helps us to

identify local emerging churches, and we expect these groups to express at least one, if not several, of the four streams presented in this study. What will be established in this chapter is that these streams are not only helpful when mapping the Emerging Church as a conversation, but also for developing a taxonomy of local emerging churches.

The diversity of the groups that are part of this study is not coincidental, but the result of a selection process that ensured that the case studies were not too similar in character but captured at least some of the breadth of the Emerging Church phenomenon. As we have seen in previous chapters, the ECC as an international conversation incorporates a variety of contextual church expressions (e.g. pub churches, neo-monastic groups, churches among punks, skaters, goths and other subcultures, house churches, etc). For the purpose of this study it would have been unhelpful if all the groups were neo-monastic communities, or house churches, or only ministered to a specific subculture.

11.1 Initial observations

Oikos was the only group that scored relatively highly within all four streams of the ECC; whilst Tribe scored high results in three of the four categories during the preliminary survey (Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, and Missional). Underground Church and H2O scored high results in two streams (Emergent Theology and Missional). The case studies and interview data support these differences. Neither Underground Church nor H2O revealed any emphasis on communal worship (although H2O launched a worship gathering called *Impressions* during the course of the study), rather the life and ministry of the groups focused primarily on community and mission (Hence, the absence of Alternative Worship and Neo-monastic themes). Oikos, a self-identified neo-monastic community, expressed all four streams, with an emphasis on intentional everyday community, eclectic liturgical practices influenced by traditions outside Protestantism, daily and weekly rhythms of prayer, community involvement, emphasis on social justice issues, radical discipleship, hospitality and openness. Tribe may be described as a deconstructive and highly contextualised Christian community, innovating and experimenting with ecclesial forms and mission practices. A shared feature was that all four groups expressed a desire to go beyond the norm of what traditional church culture and structures are in Sweden, regardless of denominational ties, demographic or geographical location.

The groups differ from each other organisationally. In the light of what we know of the wider ECC this should not come as a surprise. Doornenbal notes in his study that there is no best way of organising for emerging churches, although they tend to lean towards relatively flat organisational structures. Rather, to emerging churches Christian community is often likened with an organism that responds and adapts to the environment.⁵⁶³ Oikos was the group with the most clearly defined structure in

⁵⁶³ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 174, 195.

terms of belonging and decision making; one can either relate to the group as a guest, friend or member, and decisions are made at the monthly community gathering by means of consensus - utilising a detailed and structured process agreed upon by the members of the group. Tribe has no formal membership, although belonging to the group is publicly acknowledged by the community, and decisions seem to be made on an ad hoc basis, during community prayer meetings and informal leader gatherings. Underground Church has no formal membership, one belongs through relationships and by taking part in the gatherings and events hosted by the group. Similarly, there are no structures for decision making - most decisions are made by the informal leadership that at one point started Underground Church - not as a rule, rather it seems to be a practice taken for granted and expected by the group. During the interviews it was difficult to ascertain how and to what extent one can be a member of H2O. Judging by the interview responses, belonging seems to be organic in nature, relying on participation and relationships, rather than formalised membership. However, the direction and ministry of H2O was clearly shaped by the team leader and the wider church planting team.

When we look beyond these differences, we also observe several features shared by all or most of the communities:

- The groups do not necessarily self-identify as a church in a traditional sense, rather they identify as a “complement” to other local churches (Oikos and Underground Church) or as a “missional community (H2O). In fact, it was only Tribe that clearly stated that they were a church community, albeit of a less traditional category.
- All four groups are relatively small in size and neither church expressed any intrinsic value in growing numerically simply for the sake of growing, thus rejecting basic tenants of the church growth paradigm.
- The groups expressed a clear sense of belonging to or relating to a specific local or cultural context, and all four groups emphasised the need of some form of contextualisation of the Christian faith and life.
- The preliminary survey and the case study data reveal that both the Missional and the Emergent Theology themes were expressed in all four groups.⁵⁶⁴
- Three of the four groups started out of mission incentives (e.g. to reach a specific cultural context or network of people, create contextual missionary practices in the light of post-modern and post-Christendom cultural shifts, etc). In fact, Oikos stood out in this matter, emphasising that they started the community for the sake of its members, and that “they needed this kind of Christian community in order to become better disciples”.⁵⁶⁵ This does not mean that mission was of less significance in the life of the group, only that it was not the main motivating factor for the founding members.

⁵⁶⁴ However, the interview data revealed that the Emergent Theology stream was less prominent than initially expected for Tribe. See discussion in Section 11.5.

⁵⁶⁵ Oikos participant 3, 8 June 2010.

- The groups that practiced some form of communal worship all expressed innovation and experimentation as important values in the worship life of the communities.
- With the exception of Underground Church, three of the four groups expressed familiarity with the term “emerging church” and had previously come in contact with literature, individuals or groups associated with the term (e.g. books by Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Shane Claiborne, Alan Hirsch, and Dan Kimball, movements such as the 24-7 Prayer Movement, and emerging church conferences in the 1990s).
- The groups tend to strive towards a “low maintenance” mind set in terms of ecclesial forms and programs. The participants emphasised the importance of joining what is already happening in the wider community (e.g. Oikos), or the importance of nurturing and building relationships in a more organic sense (e.g. H2O, Tribe and Underground Church), rather than being motivated by the need to start programs or arranging events of their own.

11.2 Exploring different taxonomies of emerging churches

In the light of the nature of emerging Christianity, any typology of local emerging churches needs to contain boundaries that are “porous and vague.”⁵⁶⁶ The models presented in this section vary in detail and scope, and I will begin by surveying the discourse before presenting a typology that will be used in this project for analysing the case study data.

An initial starting point would be to divide emerging churches, as Doornenbal suggests, in two distinct and major paths: One ‘reactive’ path, which consists of emerging groups and Christians who react against the traditional church, striving for authenticity whilst being less concerned with reaching people outside of their own group. The other is the ‘proactive’ path, representing communities and individuals who are particularly interested in mission. These groups value the ECC as a means to deconstruct and reform the church for mission in post-Christendom society.⁵⁶⁷ This distinction is important, as it highlights the tension that exists within the Emerging Church discourse between emphasising *mission* or *renewal*. Not all emerging churches are mission minded, although, as we have seen above, missiology has played a significant part in shaping the ECC and provided frameworks for deconstructing traditional evangelical Protestant church culture and its ecclesial forms and practices.

Stuart Murray provides us with two additional tentative categories for classifying local expressions of the ECC. The first classification focuses on the specific *orientation* of emerging churches:

There are *mission* oriented emerging churches that respond to diverse mission contexts: Some are attempts to establish contextually shaped churches in particular

⁵⁶⁶ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 46.

⁵⁶⁷ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 39-40.; C.f. Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy, *New Monasticism*, 9.

segments or sectors of society where there is little or no Christian presence. Other groups start as creative approaches to community engagement or evangelistic initiatives. Murray identifies three subgroups here; groups that seek to restructure church for mission; groups that import church in new places; and lastly, groups that incarnate church in different subcultures.⁵⁶⁸ Within the second category are emerging churches that are *community* oriented, which reconfigure their own community life as they have listened to their immediate context, built relationships and developed partnerships to respond to particular needs. Murray presents two subgroups here: Churches shaped by community engagement, and second, churches shaped by community dynamics.⁵⁶⁹ The third category includes emerging churches that are oriented around *worship*, exploring alternatives to traditional or Charismatic expressions of worship and spirituality. Murray presents four subgroups here: Alternative worship (introduced above); culture-specific worship; customised worship, which recognise the legitimacy of different cultural expression but resist homogenous groups and fragmentation; and lastly, new-monastic groups, which go beyond the traditional Christian worship gathering and instead explore fresh thinking about daily spirituality and rhythm of living.⁵⁷⁰ Although the categories of mission, community, and worship-oriented churches are helpful, the a critique of Murray's taxonomy can be made that it is too wide in scope and include churches and groups that not necessarily can be considered expressions of emerging Christianity.

The second classification system provided by Stuart Murray focus on the relationship between emerging experimental forms of church and more traditional, or "inherited", forms of church: First, churches that emerge *from* an inherited church by reinventing it with a different focus, structure, and style. Second, churches that emerge *out of* inherited forms of church, sent out as church plants, mission projects, community engagement, etc, with the end result of forming an autonomous congregation. Third, churches that emerge *within* a culture context without any specific relationship with or influence of an inherited church.⁵⁷¹ Although Murray's categories, again, are relatively wide in scope they help us to explore some of the differences in emphasis and style among emerging congregations.

Whilst Murray attempts to keep the categories as wide as possible in order to stimulate conversation and learning between emerging Christianity and traditional churches, there are models available to us that offer categories more helpful for our discussion. The Australian sociologist Alan Jamieson distinguishes between four terms: Church (i.e. the Church universal, which all Christians are part of); established church; emerging forms of church; and post-church groups. It is only the two latter terms that Jamieson locates within the ECC. Jamieson defines the term "post-church

⁵⁶⁸ Stuart Murray, *After Christendom*, 74ff.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 83ff.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 87ff.

⁵⁷¹ Stuart Murray, *Changing Mission: Learning from the Newer Churches* (London: Churches together in Britain and Ireland, 2006), 42-45.; C.f. Darren Cronshaw, "Shaping," 8.

groups”, a term new to this study, as groups “formed by people who have left ‘established’ forms of church and yet want to support and sustain each other in their spiritual journeys.”⁵⁷² Some intentionally reject the structure of established churches and leave, others drift away. Jamieson writes:

From a functional perspective, established churches and post-church groups may meet for similar purposes: to worship, to pray, to teach and to learn to share the sacraments. ... The distinction being made here between established forms of church and post-church groups is not based on theology or function but on a structure and sociological understanding.⁵⁷³

Regarding the term “emerging forms of church”, Jamieson notes that we can discern two sub-categories here: On the one hand we find highly reactive groups, with the mind-set that church as we know it has no future and lacks any hope of reaching the so-called postmodern people. On the other hand, we have groups, for instance church plants, “acutely attuned to the sensitivities, especially theological sensitivities, of the ‘churches’ community.” Jamieson continues, “While they tend to embrace the latest in technology they remain seemingly unaware of a depth of theology and diversity of Christian expressions.”⁵⁷⁴ These categories resonate with Doornenbal’s ‘reactive’ and ‘proactive’ paths presented above. Jamieson then turns to Kester Brewin’s book *The Complex Christ* (2004) in order to further differentiate between different forms of emerging groups. Brewin distinguishes between *emerging* church and *emergent* church. Some groups, Brewin argues, adopt the label ‘emerging’, but truly ‘emergent’ churches display two key characteristics: first, they operate at the “conjunctive faith stage” (corresponding to James Fowler’s fifth faith stage, in his well-known model of stages of faith)⁵⁷⁵, and second, they are shaped and operate in accordance with the principles of emergence.⁵⁷⁶ According to Brewin, then, emergent systems “only evolve in the strange places between anarchy and rigidity ... at the edge of chaos”,⁵⁷⁷ and are systems that are open, adaptable, learning, have distributed knowledge, and model servant leadership.⁵⁷⁸ As a taxonomy of emerging churches, Jamieson’s (as well as Brewin’s) contribution is perhaps not as succinct as we need for the purpose of this study. But it does help us to understand that there are variations between groups that adopt the label “emerging church”, and some of these groups express more deconstructive and reactive characteristics than other group in their approach to traditional and established church culture.

Scott Bader-Saye presents a similar distinction between congregations that *seem* emerging (Evangelical Pragmatics), and post-evangelical congregations that embrace emerging sensibilities and characteristics on a deeper level (Post-evangelical emergents). Bader-Saye also introduces a third category, *Mainline Missionals*. According to Bader-Saye, Evangelical Pragmatics are groups concerned with changes

⁵⁷² Alan A. Jamieson, “Post-church Groups and their Place as Emergent Forms of Church,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006), 68.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁷⁵ C.f. James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1991)

⁵⁷⁶ Alan A. Jamieson, “Post-church Groups,” 68.

⁵⁷⁷ Kester Brewin, *Complex Christ*, 92.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 75ff.

in style and culture in order to engage postmodern culture, but they are not interested in theological and ecclesiological transformation. Rather, “it becomes just another means of packaging the gospel for a new generation.”⁵⁷⁹ The second category, Post-evangelical emergents, embrace the idea of changing both methodology and theology, form and content. Bader-Saye explains, these “communities exhibit a spirit of inquiry about doctrinal questions and spiritual formation as well as a desire to move beyond the traditional liberal-conservative divide.”⁵⁸⁰ Third, the category that Bader-Saye refers to as *Mainline Missionals*, do not have the traditional past in evangelical Protestantism, rather they are emerging out of mainline denominational settings as a reaction to a “maintenance mind set” of existing ecclesial forms and practices.⁵⁸¹

When studying emerging churches on the Pacific West Coast in the United States, sociologist Jason Wollschleger makes similar observations. Through his research he concludes that there are at least three different categories of groups associated with emerging Christianity: *Emerging congregations*, which “are uniquely different from the other dominant Protestant subcultures ... [with] their own moral worldview”; *Relevant congregations*, which essentially remain evangelical and effectively engage their primary religious market (i.e. young adults), and while “on the surface they conform to the concept of what emerging is, they hold at their core a moral worldview similar to Evangelicals.” And lastly, *Wilderness congregations*, which Wollschleger locates between the first two. These kind of groups “struggle towards emergence but have yet to achieve it ... they are constrained by conservative roots, histories, and conceptions.”⁵⁸² We see here a notable overlap, where Evangelical Pragmatics and Relevant congregations share characteristics, and Post-evangelical emergent and Emerging groups constitute a second category. I do not believe that we can group the third categories in a similar way, as there seems to be some distinctions between Bader-Saye’s ‘Mainline Missionals’ and what Wollschleger refers to as ‘Wilderness Congregations’.

11.3 The Stetzer-McKnight Typology

Perhaps the most widely used and accepted taxonomy of emerging churches was developed by Ed Stetzer, who has written extensively and engaged with the ECC, and who now serve as professor and dean at Wheaton College as well as Executive Director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center. Stetzer observed that emerging churches and their leaders can be divided into three categories: *Relevants*, *Reconstructionists* and *Revisionists*. He writes that

some are taking the same Gospel in the historic form of church but seeking to make it understandable to emerging culture; some are taking the same Gospel but questioning and reconstructing much of the form of church; some are questioning and revising the Gospel

⁵⁷⁹ Scott Bader-Saye, “Improvising,” 13.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵⁸² Jason Wollschleger, “Off the Map?”, 76.

and the church.⁵⁸³

In his doctoral dissertation *Crossroads* (2012), Doornenbal notes that Stetzer's categories correlates well with Scot McKnight's understanding of how emerging churches relate to post-modern culture; ministering *to*, *with*, or *as* postmoderns.⁵⁸⁴ *Relevants*, then, minister *to* postmoderns and are less concerned with rejecting postmodernity but "seek to correct its possible relativistic extremes [and] are interested in changing things such as forms of worship, preaching styles, and church leadership structures" in order to better connect with surrounding postmodern society whilst remaining conservative in their theological convictions.⁵⁸⁵ Mark Driscoll, a pastor and author once associated with the ECC but who in recent years has distanced himself from the conversation, adds a sub-group to this category. Driscoll writes that "within the Relevants there is also a growing group of outreach-minded Reformed Relevants, which look to men like John Piper, Tim Keller, and D. A. Carson for theological direction."⁵⁸⁶ Examples of leaders in the Relevant category are Mark Driscoll, former pastor of *Mars Hill Church* in Seattle, and Dan Kimball, founding pastor of *Vintage Faith Church*, in Santa Cruz, California⁵⁸⁷.

Reconstructionists, on the other hand, minister *with* postmodern people. This group finds the current form of church frequently irrelevant and the structures unhelpful. They share some postmodern sensibilities, such as a critique towards a too certain propositional language, adopting an eclectic approach to symbols, liturgies, theological traditions, and ecclesial forms. However, they tend to adhere to a more conservative understanding of Christian faith, the Bible and the gospel, while being highly experimental and pragmatic in regard to ecclesiology. Doornenbal notes that many within the Missional Church movement, as well as the neo-monastic movement resonate with this category.⁵⁸⁸ Examples of Reconstructionist leaders are Michael Frost, author and founder of the church *Small Boat Big Sea* in Sydney, Australia, and Alan Hirsch, author and missional strategist, currently based in the United States.⁵⁸⁹

The third category, *Revisionists*, seek to not only reshape ecclesial forms and missiological practices, but also to minister *as* postmoderns. This group tends to adopt a radically deconstructive approach to theological inquiry and a critique of conservative evangelical doctrinal tradition and epistemology. Revisionists not only view postmodern epistemology as something the church needs to deal with out of necessity, but also as a gift that can help the church free itself from the shackles of modernity. Doornenbal notes that, in North America, many revisionists can be found within the Emergent Village network; for instance Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt.⁵⁹⁰ The taxonomy, which I will refer to as the customised *Stetzer-McKnight*

⁵⁸³ Stetzer, Ed, "Understanding the emerging church." *Baptist Press*, 6 January 2006, <http://www.bpnews.net/22406>

⁵⁸⁴ Scot McKnight, "Five Streams," 34-39. See discussing in the introduction of Chapter 4 above.

⁵⁸⁵ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 41.

⁵⁸⁶ Mark Driscoll, "Pastoral perspective," 90.

⁵⁸⁷ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 93-94.

⁵⁸⁸ Robert Doornenbal (2012), p. 43. C.f. Mark Driscoll (2006), p. 90.

⁵⁸⁹ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 94-96.

⁵⁹⁰ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 45, 90-93. C.f. Mark Driscoll, "Pastoral perspective," 90.

Typology, which Robert Doornenbal introduced in his doctoral thesis, is helpful as it in a distinct way, highlights the spectrum of views of emerging churches; in particular how these groups relate to, post-modern culture on the one hand, and evangelical Protestant tradition on the other hand.

There are a number of overlaps between the different models presented here in this and in the previous section: Evangelical Pragmatics and Relevant congregations both fit within the Relevant category, ministering *to* postmoderns. Mainline Missionals and Wilderness congregations are somewhat amorphous categories, but to my understanding they could be placed under the Reconstructionists label, although perhaps leaning further from the Revisionist category. Lastly, Post-evangelical Emergents, Emergent, as well as Emerging congregations all fit well with the Revisionist category, ministering *as* postmoderns. Murray’s typology stands out here, addressing different categories all together. If we place the categories in a diagram (excluding Murray’s taxonomy), I propose it would look like this:

| The Stetzer-McKnight Typology | Relevants* (to) | Reconstructionists (with) | Revisionists (as) |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Bader-Saye | Evangelical Pragmatics | Mainline Missionals | Post-Evangelical Emergents |
| Jamieson/Brewin | Emerging → | | Emergent |
| Wollscheleger | Relevant congregations | Wilderness congregations | Emerging congregations |

* Including Reformed Relevants

Figure 10. Diagram of Typologies of the Emerging Church

For the purpose of this research project, I believe that the Stetzer-McKnight Typology, as it is presented in Doornenbal’s study, provides us with a useful heuristic instrument for a comparative analysis of emerging churches. The categories are clearly differentiated, and they help us to understand some of the spectrum of views that exist within emerging Christianity and the diversity of local expressions of emerging church. Also, in particular Stetzer’s typology of Relevants, Reconstructionists, and Revisionist has been widely used when discussing emerging Christianity in the past. The question at hand is how this typology relates to the four streams of the ECC introduced in this study?

11.4 Towards a typology of emerging churches and its relationship with the four streams of the Emerging Church

By all accounts the Stetzer-McKnight typology seems compatible with the metaphor of the four streams the ECC presented in this study. The two models inform us of different aspects of local emerging churches: the Stetzer-McKnight typology tells us of how these communities approach *culture* as well as their relationship with *evangelical Protestant church tradition and theology* (i.e. Relevants express a more critical approach to culture whilst being less deconstructive in terms of inherited ecclesial

practices and theology, and Revisionist express a more open and receptive attitude towards post-modern culture whilst being more deconstructive and reformist in regard to evangelical Protestant tradition). The four streams of the ECC presented in this study, on the other hand, informs us of what aspects of *emerging Christianity* are expressed within a local context. When combined it can be illustrated in the following way:

**Engagement with post-modern culture and relationship to evangelical Protestant tradition
(The Stetzer-McKnight Typology)**

| | | Relevants (to) | Reconstructionists (with) | Revisionists (as) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| | | | | |
| Engagement with the ECC (The Four Streams of the ECC) | Emergent theology | | | |
| | Alternative worship | | | |
| | Neo-monastic | | | |
| | Missional | | | |

Figure 11. Diagram of engagement with the ECC, post-modern culture, and evangelical Protestant tradition

Granted, some emerging churches, as they are categorised within the Stetzer-McKnight Typology may have a preferred leaning towards (or away from) some of the four streams of the ECC. For example, it is more likely to find Revisionists that tend to lean close to the emergent theological stream compared with Relevant groups, which tend to be more theologically conservative. Also, some combinations within this diagram might be more common than other combinations. With that being said, the diagram allows for a great variety of local emerging church expressions, depending on 1) which of the streams of “Lake Emerging” they are close to, and 2) their relationship with evangelical Protestant tradition, and 3) how they engage with post-modern culture.

11.5 Categorising the case studies

How, then, may we categorise the case studies according to the table above (figure 12)? At this point we do well remind ourselves that, in the words of Doornenbal, any categories are merely “labels of convenience” and that the “purpose of [the typology] is not, of course, to put people in boxes, nor to pass judgement on individuals and

their personal faith or integrity.”⁵⁹¹ With that being said, Tribe seems comfortable within a traditional Pentecostal/Charismatic theological paradigm (e.g. emphasising personal conversion, holiness, manifestations of the Spirit through signs and wonders, etc) whilst expressing a decidedly deconstructive and experimentative ecclesiology. Tribe scored relatively high on the Emergent Theology category during the preliminary online survey, however the interview data revealed that this stream was perhaps less evident than initially expected. Whilst expressing openness and humility in regard to how faith and Christian belief is expressed within the community (as well as towards non-Christians), the interviews revealed little that would warrant such categorisation. On the other hand, Oikos seeks to reshape Christian community within a postmodern and post-Christendom cultural context by drawing from Eastern orthodox theology and practice, the Church Fathers, Christian monastic traditions, feminist thought, and a more distinct post-foundationalist posture in regard to faith and doctrine. Compared with Tribe, Oikos pursued a more expressed commitment to theological discourse and a more critical stance towards evangelical Protestant doctrinal tradition, for example through their discussion events *Oikos utforskar* [Oikos Explores] where they address issues ranging from non-violence, feminist theology, biblical hermeneutics, etc. It is my observation that H2O and Underground Church can be placed somewhere in the middle of these two groups. Ed Mackenzie writes that “the difference between these approaches [i.e. Relevantists, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists] means that emerging churches differ in the way they contextualize the gospel.”⁵⁹² This, I believe, becomes even more apparent when adding McKnight’s categories, that emerging churches either minister *to*, *with* or *as* postmoderns. Neither of the groups simply minister *to* their specific contexts but engage in a much deeper process of contextualisation. It is my observation that Oikos can be placed within the Revisionist category, ministering *as* postmoderns to their specific context, and the remaining three may be labelled as reconstructionist emerging churches, ministering *with* postmoderns. With that being said, it is my understanding that the reconstructionist category seems to be a relatively broad group, where some communities lean closer to either the Relevantist or the Revisionist ends of the spectrum. I have attempted to illustrate this in the figure below.

⁵⁹¹ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 47.

⁵⁹² Ed Mackenzie, “Mission and the Emerging Church: Pauline Reflections on a New Kind of Missiology,” *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 3 (July 2012), 317. C.f. Gregg R. Allison, “An evaluation of emerging churches on the basis of the Contextualization Spectrum (C1-C6),” *The annual meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society* (17 November 2006), Washington, D.C.; and Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*, 28.

**Engagement with post-modern culture and relationship to evangelical Protestant tradition
(The Stetzer-McKnight Typology)**

| | | Relevants (to) | Reconstructionists (with) | | | Revisionists (as) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----|-------------------|
| | | | Tribe | Underground Church | H2O | Oikos |
| Engagement with the ECC (The Four Streams of the ECC) | Emergent theology | | | X | X | X |
| | Alternative worship | | X | | | X |
| | Neo-monastic | | | | | X |
| | Missional | | X | X | X | X |

Figure 12. Diagram of the case studies' engagement with the ECC, post-modern culture, and evangelical Protestant tradition

What becomes apparent when placing the case studies within this diagram is, first, that it manages to capture the diversity of the Emerging Church phenomenon in a systematic way, and second, that it highlights what seems to be the two main influences of the ECC in Sweden; the Emergent Theological stream and the Missional stream. Oikos, then, may be categorised as a Revisionist emerging church, whilst the remaining three may be classified as Reconstructionist emerging churches that draw from different aspects of emerging Christianity; Tribe from the Alternative Worship/Missional streams, and Underground Church and H2O from the Emergent Theology/Missional streams. All four groups are motivated by a need for ecclesiological deconstruction and reconstruction, but they differ to what extent they contextualise their forms and practices. Similarly, all four groups share a postmodern sensibility and critique of evangelical Protestant theology, but they differ as to what extent they engage in such a critique.

Chapter 12. A Relational Ecclesiology: Openness, Innovation, and the Deconstruction of Boundaries

The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a comparative analysis of the case studies with the aim of identifying any shared ecclesial characteristics. I will also discuss my findings in the light of similar empirical studies of emerging churches conducted in other parts of the world. In the chapter I argue that, differences aside, the groups seem to share a number of convictions that shape their ecclesial hermeneutic: *Relational ecclesiology*, *Openness and inclusion*, as well as *Innovation and deconstruction*. I also argue that Wittgenstein's concept of *family resemblance* can provide us with an analytical framework to better understand the diverse nature of emerging churches. Rather than defining emerging churches by a single - or a few - characteristics, then, the phenomenon can be understood as a "family" that incorporate a number of overlapping characteristics. The chapter will end with a critical discussion where I identify a number of issues of particular concern: *Blurring of boundaries*, *Organisational weaknesses*, *Sustainability and longevity*, as well as a *Lack of diversity*.

12.1 Ecclesiological convictions

In previous chapter we established that although the groups diverge in some areas, they also share common traits and characteristics in others. The diversity is of little surprise as the Emerging Church phenomenon has become known to be "very diverse", and the term represents "a wide variety of persons and groups".⁵⁹³ We have also established that the groups selected to part of this study may be categorised as different types of emerging churches (See discussion in Section 11.5). If we were to apply similar categories - when defining denominational ecclesial boundaries (e.g. Pentecostal, Lutherans, Roman Catholic, or Anglican traditions), we might arrive at the conclusion that the groups part of this study are different animals altogether with few significant commonalities (e.g. there is no shared statement of faith, doctrine, liturgy, ecclesial structure, or similar). However, emerging Christianity cannot be properly understood if we view the phenomena within traditional denominational categories and boundaries. As a conversation that express characteristics akin to that of a new social movement, "emerging church" serves both as an identity marker for those involved in the conversation and a rallying point for Christians who seek to respond to the challenges posed by the changing cultural landscape in Western society by engaging in ecclesiological, missiological, spiritual, and theological experimentation and innovation (See discussion in Section 4.4). When searching for shared ecclesiological characteristics, then, alternative categories are needed. For example, Doornenbal describes emerging churches as "dynamic and flexible (or 'liquid'), contextual and mission-minded, creative and focused on relationships and

⁵⁹³ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 3, 36.

community.”⁵⁹⁴ Doornenbal’s account echoes the findings in this study.

Although the term “mind-set” is helpful for understanding the shared categories of emerging churches, I believe that it fails to wholly communicate what we can observe when studying the ECC and various local expressions of the phenomenon. Mind-set points towards a shared attitude, disposition, or mood - categories that are not inaccurate per se, but the shared traits of emerging churches seem to be far more robust than what the term implies. *My observation is that emerging churches seem to adopt a particular kind of ecclesiological hermeneutic, informed by a specific set of convictions.* This set of convictions are not denominationally dependent (although they might perhaps thrive better in certain milieus than other), which is why we can observe expressions of the ECC within a number of different ecclesial and denominational traditions.

My understanding of the term convictions is informed by the work of James McClendon and James Smith, who maintained that convictions not only guide us “but identify us and make us what we are.”⁵⁹⁵ They also wrote:

A conviction (as we use the term) means a persistent belief such as if X (a person or community) has a conviction, it will not easily be relinquished and it cannot be relinquished without making X a significantly different person (or community) than before.⁵⁹⁶

Convictions are shaped by both reason and emotion, and in the words of Peter Smith “they differ from other beliefs, like opinions, that can be more easily discarded and questioned.”⁵⁹⁷ This account, at least in part, for the tension that can exist between people and groups who associate with the ECC and traditional (often evangelical and conservative) churches. Rather than addressing superficial changes of the Western church in order to make it “trendy” and “relevant” to people who are far from the church and the Christian faith, emerging churches are concerned with deeply held convictions about the nature of the church and what it means to be a Christian in post-modern and post-Christendom cultures. In that sense, the controversy that has surrounded the ECC after the turn of the millennium can be understood as *a conflict of competing or diverging convictions*. It can also, in part, explain why people who rally around the term “emerging church” can experience that they have more in common with each other - although they come from different denominational traditions - than with people who are part of their particular church tradition or denomination.

Moreover, convictions often relate to each other and interact in dynamic ways. McClendon and Smith refer to this as “convictional sets”, and point out that “the justification of any one conviction is not likely to be achieved without regarding its relation to other convictions embraced by the same community or the same

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁹⁵ James Wm. McClendon, and James M. Smith, *Convictions - Defusing Religious Relativism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994) , 5.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁹⁷ Peter E. Smith, “The Enthralment of violence in Mennonite church discipline: An analysis of convictions in terms of peace and ecclesial practices,” (PhD diss., University of Wales/International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 37.

believer.”⁵⁹⁸ Therefore, the ecclesiological characteristics, or convictions, presented in this chapter ought to be understood as interrelated, creating an ecclesiological lens through which the groups understand themselves. The material presented in this chapter is not necessarily an exhaustive list of convictions, but they are principal themes observable both in this particular study as well as similar studies of emerging churches conducted in other parts of the world. It also should be said that, in the words of McClendon and Smith, “not every member of a convictional community ... share *all* the important or central or defining convictions of a community.”⁵⁹⁹ The convictions are nevertheless shaping the “actual life and practices of the community [and] often these are guarded by its teachers, or elders, or authoritative leadership cadres.”⁶⁰⁰ Without this particular set of convictions the communities would be significantly different. This study, then, reveal a specific set of convictions characterising the emerging churches which are part of this research project and which in turn shape a specific ecclesial hermeneutic through which these groups understand themselves and the contexts they are part of, namely: *Relational ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion, and Innovation and experimentation.*

12.1.1 Relational Ecclesiology

The groups selected to be part of this study all expressed a clear commitment to a relational understanding of the church. As one leader of Tribe expressed, “to us relationships build community, and community is church.” He continued to say:

Tribe is about relationships, about being real, about being centred on Jesus and love all people we meet. To us, church is not an organisation, a building or a meeting. It is simply a group of people that have chosen to put Jesus above all things and thank him in all things.⁶⁰¹

For Oikos, this is expressed in multiple ways: by living in shared households or in close geographical proximity, shaping the communal life and worship around the dinner table, and in emphasising the importance of sharing everyday life as followers of Jesus, and how decisions are made in the group (i.e. through consensus). Also, the primary connecting points between people in the wider community of Hammarkullen and Oikos are developed through everyday relationships, rather than through worship services or church programs. This conviction is also expressed in the critique of the traditional free church format, where - according to the participants - Christian community predominately is something that happens during “fellowship time” after the Sunday worship service. The participants from H2O explained that “90% of what happens as part of the life of the group happens under the ‘surface’, through relationships”, rather than as part of planned programs and events.⁶⁰² In that sense, there are very few external elements that hold the group together, besides

⁵⁹⁸ James Wm. McClendon, and James M. Smith, *Convictions*, 91.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Emphasis original.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

⁶⁰² H2O Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

individual relationships within H2O, and relationships with neighbours, friends, co-workers, etc. To the leadership team of H2O, the concept of expressing spirituality on a daily basis is significant to the life of the group, emphasising that spirituality and faith is to be expressed “where life happens”. Similarly, to both Tribe and H2O, Underground Church functions as a relational network, bound together by friendships and a mutual vision of being a Christian witness within the alternative music subcultures of Gothenburg.

This ecclesiological theme is observed in a number of studies of local emerging churches in other parts of the world. Doornenbal notes that within the ECC,

there is not much interest in normative biblical or historical models, nor on ‘holy’ or hierarchical institution(s). The movement’s interpretation of church does not focus primarily on the vertical dimension ... but on the horizontal and more directly experiential dimension: people, relationships, community.⁶⁰³

In his study of eight emerging church congregations in the United States, Tony Jones concluded that “Many congregations in the emerging church movement are instinctively using the very relational ecclesiology that Moltmann proposes.”⁶⁰⁴ Jones’ definition of a relational ecclesiology echoes the ecclesiological hermeneutic which seems to shape and inform the groups participating in this study: “the church is understood as a network of relationships, primarily the relationship of people who constitute the church have to God through Christ, and the relationship that they have to one another in Christ.”⁶⁰⁵ Moreover, to Jones

a relational ecclesiology can be understood in light of the doctrine of reconciliation ... the work of the human beings who constitute the church is to foster further reconciliation between God and humankind and between fellow human beings.⁶⁰⁶

In his study Jones observed a particular set of theological commitments and related ecclesial practices: Sacraments of Life (i.e. sacralise the world and desacralise the church); Relationality (i.e. egalitarian and democratic approaches to church governance); Public friendship (i.e. Inter-religious and intra-church relations built on the language of trust); and lastly, Corporate Interpretation (i.e. dialogical patterns of preaching and teaching).⁶⁰⁷ These ecclesial practices resonate to a large extent with the findings in this study as well.

The relational theme is also observed in Darren Cronshaw’s doctoral dissertation from 2008, where he studied four emerging church congregations in Melbourne, Australia. Cronshaw observed that:

strong community is an intrinsic goal of many emerging churches and part of their missional strategy ... The four case studies all expressed a desire for authentic community

⁶⁰³ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 50-51.

⁶⁰⁴ Tony Jones, *Church is Flat*, 50. Tony Jones writes on p. 159, “Moltmann means that the church is defined by its relationships: to God’s trinitarian history, to other doctrines, and to other institutions and movements in the world.”

⁶⁰⁵ Tony Jones, *Church is Flat*, 160.

⁶⁰⁶ Tony Jones, *Church is Flat*, 161.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

as part of their experience of church, and they all say that community is part of their mission.⁶⁰⁸

Similarly to the case studies which are part of this study, these groups expressed a desire to form a community that extends beyond the Sunday worship gatherings and challenged what they perceived to be a consumer mind set among many Christians who expect the church to provide religious goods and services. The groups strived to blur the boundaries of church community, being more concerned with encouraging “people in the broader community to grow in faith, whether or not they ever join the church.”⁶⁰⁹ Here we can observe a divergence between emerging Christianity and evangelical Protestantism that includes a different understanding of the goals and purposes of the church. With that being said, Cronshaw also found that some of the groups participating in his study did not necessarily live up to “the rhetoric of community and belonging” when compared to more traditional churches when taking into account the results of the National Church Life Survey in Australia.⁶¹⁰ There are unfortunately no similar data from a Swedish context to compare with here, but it highlights the need to be aware of any hyperbole when discussing the future of the church in post-Christendom culture: Particular when we juxtapose emerging and alternative forms of Christian community to inherited churches. With that being said, we can establish that community and relationships are central to the self-understanding and identity of emerging church congregations. In his exploration of “the cultural domain of emerging church values, mission and descriptives” of 181 emerging churches in the USA in 2005, Aaron O. Flores observed that ‘community’ was the primary expressed value of these congregations; ‘community’, ‘relationships’, ‘connecting’, and ‘authentic community’ were all part of the primary cultural domain for mission statements; and ‘community’ scored highest for the emerging church descriptive.⁶¹¹ This does not necessarily inform us of actual practices of emerging church congregations, but it does tell us something of their ecclesiological hermeneutical framework and vision.

In their study from 2014, Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel observed that emerging churches express a congregational faith that relies on relationships, regular gatherings and involvement.⁶¹² The authors write that relationships “were a strong and consistent theme in our conversation with Emerging Christians.”⁶¹³ Anthropologist James Bielo echoes these findings:

Relationality is a key term ... when emerging evangelicals talk about “authentic relationships” they are referencing a desired moral community in which mutual dependence is lived in the everyday ... the emerging evangelical posture towards authenticity is part of a broader cultural critique aimed at the U.S. Conservative Christian subculture and the modern era in which that subculture emerged.”⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁸ Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 182.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 215, 295.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.* 184, 199.

⁶¹¹ Aaron O. Flores, “An Exploration of the Emerging Church in the United States: The Missiological Intent and Potential Implications for the Future,” (MA diss., Vanguard University, April 2005).

⁶¹² Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 35.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶¹⁴ James S. Bielo, “Belief, Reconversion, and Authenticity among U.S. Emerging Evangelicals,” *Journal of*

A similar critique towards traditional and inherited church culture was also expressed in the interview material included in this study. Relationality is then both a pull-factor towards a Christian community that better resemble the ecclesial vision that emerging Christians see as faithful to the Christian faith; and as a push-factor away from what they perceive as a flawed ecclesial model of evangelical Protestantism revolving too much around the Sunday worship service, as well as drawing distinct boundaries between the congregation of believers and surrounding society. A relational ecclesiology, then, is a foundational conviction that inform and shape the ecclesiological hermeneutic of emerging churches and people that associate with the emerging Christianity.

12.1.2 Openness and Inclusion

The relational ecclesiology addressed above, where emerging Christians strive towards the blurring of boundaries between the church and the wider community in society is intimately tied to the commitment to openness towards, and the inclusion of the outsider. In their study of emerging churches in the United Kingdom and North America from 2005, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger describe this as the desire to *welcome the stranger*, “changing hospitality from a Christian extra to a central practice”.⁶¹⁵ Similar to other studies, the groups presented as part of this research project expressed little or no desire to draw clear and distinct boundaries between who is in and who is outside of the faith community. Two of the core values of Oikos, for instance, are hospitality and openness, which they express both to other churches and to Christians part of Hammarkullen, as well as to those who belong to other religions. When creating spaces for spiritual explorations H2O is “very careful to be open to each other’s interpretations of the Bible and faith”, and the leadership stressed that it is crucial “to give people the feeling that they are welcome even though we don’t agree with them”, as well as avoiding being “pushy” about the Christian faith.⁶¹⁶ Underground Church similarly expressed that the group is “a safe environment and you are never afraid to bring up issues that you perhaps would not have done elsewhere”⁶¹⁷ and “we are very careful to be open to each other’s interpretations of the Bible and faith.”⁶¹⁸ When hosting the music club nights, Tribe allows a wide basis in terms of who they give access to the stage. Also, joining the group often involves a process where belief and behaviour supersede the necessity of belonging to the community. This dynamic of belonging before believing and behaving (in terms of Christian lifestyle) can be observed in the other three groups as well. This does not, however, imply that Christian faith and behaviour was unimportant to those who took part in the interviews, rather that hospitality, a grace filled approach to the outsider and patience are significant and transformative

the Society of Psychological Anthropology 40, no. 3 (2012), 259.

⁶¹⁵ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 120.

⁶¹⁶ H2O Participant 1, 24 May 2010.

⁶¹⁷ Underground Church Participant 4, 7 April 2011.

⁶¹⁸ Underground Church Participant 3, 7 April 2011.

ingredients as they engage with people who yet see themselves as Christians.

Similar to the relational ecclesiology addressed above, the convictional themes of openness and inclusiveness can be observed in studies of emerging congregations in other parts of the world. It also resonates with the Emergent Theological stream that has come to influence the ECC since the early 1990's; embracing a humble epistemology, criticising the perceived "us-and-them" mentality of the evangelical Protestantism, and emphasising Christian faith as journey and process (See Section 5.1). For instance, in his study of the Emerging Church, Lloyd Chia observed that these emerging churches are "geared towards an ethic of inclusion" and seem to fit what he describes as "loosely-bounded religious groups", which are more orientated towards culture and less concerned with organisational structures.⁶¹⁹ Cronshaw noted in his study from 2008 that

The four case studies all expressed a desire for authentic community as part of their experience of church, and they all say that community is part of their mission. They have thought deeply about how to be a supportive community and to embrace people from outside of the church into community life - helping them to belong before they believe.⁶²⁰

In their study from 2014, Marti and Ganiel concluded that emerging churches can be understood as "pluralist congregations", defined as "social spaces that permits, even foster, direct interaction between people with religiously contradictory perspectives and value systems."⁶²¹ Similar to the groups studied here, Marti and Ganiel also observed that to emerging Christians the experience of multiple church traditions is a vital component to personal spiritual growth, and they tend to express diversity and pluralism during the gatherings (i.e. blending different denominational traditions) as well as coming from a diversity of ecclesial backgrounds.⁶²² In his study Lloyd Chia noted that emerging Christians avoid the "deterministic modernistic impulse to place people in neat boxes", rather they draw "broad and inclusive maps" whilst attempting to create

borderlands ... where they can encounter and have productive relationships with diverse 'others', be they religious others, or groups typically marginalised along the lines of race, class, gender or sexual orientation. ... They do this because they feel that Christianity must change in ways that accommodate the reality of difference and heterogeneity in the social world.⁶²³

Scott Bader-Saye refers to this openness as a "search for the *via media*".⁶²⁴ Rejecting the liberal-conservative divide, Bader-Saye observed that emerging Christians share a similar vision of the postliberal tradition, attempting to embody a "faith in the postmodern world that goes beyond the old labels of conservative and liberal." He continued:

⁶¹⁹ Lloyd Chia, "Emerging," 20, 54.

⁶²⁰ Darren Cronshaw, "Shaping," 182.

⁶²¹ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 34.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁶²³ Lloyd Chia, "Emerging," 152, 184.

⁶²⁴ Scott Bader-Saye, "Improvising," 18.

In this way the postliberals and the emerging post-evangelicals have much in common, not because they are finding a compromise (a little of this and a little of that) but because they are rejecting the old dichotomy altogether and trying to rethink Christian discipleship through the re-engagement with the Church's deep tradition.⁶²⁵

Critics of the ECC may argue that the ecclesial convictions of emerging Christians risk resulting in a lack of distinctiveness in relation to wider society, making the Christian life lived in community almost indistinguishable to the world. Proponents may argue in turn that the ecclesial vision of emerging churches better resemble the kind of community that Jesus gathered in the Gospel narratives. Without getting involved with this particular discussion in any greater detail at this point, it is worth noting that this subject is not simply a matter of how Christians ought to live together in community, but also how Christians as ecclesia are to relate to and engage with their neighbours, stranger and wider society. As will be argued throughout this thesis, the ecclesiological convictions of emerging churches inform their missionary posture in society in important ways.

12.1.3 Innovation and Deconstruction

Darren Cronshaw writes that "Emerging churches are Christian communities that are expressing new forms of mission and innovation for a post-Christendom context."⁶²⁶ Similarly, Robert Doornenbal noted in his study that the ECC is "a decentralised network of frequently-disillusioned yet hopeful Christians claiming to be intentionally rethinking and re-imagining Christianity in a postmodern world."⁶²⁷ According to Doornenbal, emerging Christians fit Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller's idea of "Innovators", a sociological label defined by a desire to embrace postmodernity and adopt an approach to faith and spirituality that must adapt and change in order to respond to shifts in culture.⁶²⁸ Innovators display four basic patterns: 1) their worship tends to be visual and experimental, 2) priority is given to situating themselves to serve the community around them, 3) they adopt an 'organic' approach to community, and 4) they "creatively use history, traditions and rituals of different Christian traditions, in some cases even going outside Christian tradition for a more physically and visually oriented practice."⁶²⁹ Jones made a similar observations in his study, noting that emerging Christians identify with what Richard Florida refers to as the "Creative Class". The Creative Class, Jones explained, contributes by creating meaning and produce new forms or designs that are "readily transferable and widely useful" and "this is exactly what the church leaders described [in this study] have attempted to do when experimenting with new ecclesial forms,

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Darren Cronshaw (2008), p. 1. C.f. Ed Stetzer, "The Emergent/Emerging Church: A Missiological Perspective," *The Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 51, no. 2 (Fall 2008), 77., and Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 111.

⁶²⁷ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 37-38.; quoting Cory E. Lebanow, *Evangelicalism*.

⁶²⁸ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 38.; C.f. Richard Flory, and Donald E. Miller, *Finding Faith: The Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008)

⁶²⁹ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 39.

be it leadership, preaching, or the Lord's Supper."⁶³⁰ These observations resonate with the findings in this research, where we can observe that all four expressions of emerging church were motivated by a need for ecclesial innovation as well as the deconstruction of existing models of church in the light of the challenges posed by post-Christendom society.

Innovation and deconstruction, then, is a fundamental aspect of the convictional set shaping the ecclesial hermeneutic of emerging churches. They resemble what Moreau refer to as *pathfinders*. He writes:

They hold their own faith traditions more lightly than other models and are willing to experiment in a variety of directions. They are less concerned about the actual methods than about the ways initiators are oriented toward (or lean into) contextualizing. Methods are largely neutral - generating new and better methods is a neutral result of an orientation toward flexibility and experimentation. ... As a result, pathfinders are more likely than other types of initiators to use local non-Christian religious forms in creative ways to enable greater impact for Christ.⁶³¹

At the heart of emerging Christianity is a protest against what is perceived as either unhelpful or downright destructive elements of evangelical Protestant doctrine, ecclesial forms and culture. In their study from 2014 Marti and Ganiel argue that deconstruction is a fundamental characteristic of emerging Christians and Emerging Church communities. Building on the work of sociologists Stephan Fuchs and Steven Ward, they write that deconstruction "represents an opportunity for actors to 'irritate, if not overthrow' an overarching regime" by exposing its conditional and arbitrary status.⁶³² They continue:

For Emerging Christians, the Christian institutions they experienced had little "wiggle-room" for belief and practice. Their entire religious orientation as an Emerging Christian necessarily resides in relation to conventional Christianity. Yet Emerging Christians strive for a renegotiation of Christianity precisely because they want to stay within the broader tradition while creating more room to navigate within it.⁶³³

Marti and Ganiel observe five areas of deconstruction among emerging Christians: 1) They consistently characterise themselves as anti-institutional⁶³⁴, 2) their approach to Christian doctrine is shaped by a concern for social justice and a form of ecumenism that transcends theological and ecclesiological boundaries, 3) they actively change existing power structures by including young adults into leadership, 4) experimentation and innovation are considered to be key values, and 5) they seek to "create a new kind of 'neutral religious space' that is church-ish without being

⁶³⁰ Tony Jones, *Church is Flat*, 43.; C.f. Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002)

⁶³¹ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academics, 2012), 264.

⁶³² Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 26.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁴ Marti and Ganiel provide a number of examples, such as deliberately limiting the power and influence of the clergy, allowing church programs and activities to end before they become institutionalised, deliberately disrupting normally taken-for-granted religious ideas and practices, and emphasising inclusivity rather than religious borders. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 27.

church-y.”⁶³⁵ This list echoes to a large extent the observations made in this study, although I chose to categorise them in the following way: *Ecclesial structures*, *Belonging*, *Decision making*, and *Forms of worship*.

1) Ecclesial structures

The four groups part of this study do not adopt a similar ecclesial model, rather what they share is the motivation to deconstruct and move beyond existing traditional ecclesial models in Sweden. Oikos draws inspiration from historic monasticism in order to structure the daily life of the community, by adopting vows, weekly rhythms of prayer and shared practices. H2O is primarily based on a networked structure, which they describe as “spaces for spiritual explorations” and purposefully avoids a traditional model with the Sunday service at the centre. Tribe similarly bases its life as Christian community on the smaller groups, with the aim to integrate the church and everyday life in a more holistic way. Underground Church, Tribe and H2O all primarily gather in what Marti and Ganiel refer to as “neutral religious spaces”, whether it be cafés, pubs, clubs and similar contexts.

2) Belonging

Similar to organisational and ecclesial structures of emerging churches, the groups have each taken a different approach to membership and how they belong within the community. What they do have in common, is that all four groups have moved away from the traditional free church model of membership, embracing a more organic approach based on relationships (e.g. H2O, Tribe and Underground Church), or a highly intentional form of belonging based on annual vows and shared practices (i.e. Oikos). The critique is that church membership, as it is structured in the majority of churches in Sweden, is unhelpful for creating a Christian community that better resembles the ecclesial vision one can find in the New Testament. The groups here seek to deconstruct traditional ways of joining the Christian community, by shifting the focus away from the Sunday worship gathering as the primary point of contact to a more relational approach based on everyday life during the week.

3) Decision making

The groups included in this study have moved away from traditional forms of decision making (e.g. the church meeting that resembles secular organisations with a democratic voting system, a board of trustees, minutes, protocols, etc.) to decision making processes that are more intuitive and integrated into the everyday life of the community. For instance, most of the decisions made by the leadership of Tribe are made when the community gathers to pray. Those who are part of the group are encouraged to listen to the will of God and share ideas that emerge from that process. The role of the leadership here is not so much to make executive decisions, but to

⁶³⁵ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 27-29.

facilitate the decision making process in the group and to guard the values of the community. Oikos, on the other hand, has adopted a clear consensus model for how decision making is done in the community, safeguarding that everyone who wish to be heard are in fact being heard.

4) Forms of worship

Those groups that had adopted some form of corporate worship were also geared towards deconstructing traditional Protestant liturgical practices. This includes both the physical space (e.g. gathering in religiously neutral places such as cafés and clubs, worship in the round, etc) as well as adopting a highly contextual and eclectic approach⁶³⁶ (e.g. incorporating secular elements from club culture, adopting orthodox liturgies, mixing art and poetry, dialogical preaching, using profane elements when celebrating communion, etc).

Marti and Ganiel write that “emerging Christians ultimately see conservative Christianity’s establishment of cultural boundaries as homogenizing - denying the diversity and complexity that exists both within the secular and spiritual realms.”⁶³⁷ My observation here is that emerging churches are concerned with *deconstructing boundaries*: first, the boundary between lay persons and those who are ordained - by adopting flat leadership structures; second, by finding alternative ways of decision making; third, by blurring the boundary between the Sunday worship service and how to live out their everyday lives. They do this by emphasising genuine and authentic relationships, and by adopting an integrated spirituality that encompasses all areas of life. Fourth, by blurring the boundary between the sacred and the secular by gathering in religiously neutral spaces and incorporating secular elements in corporate worship. They have also sought to overcome the perceived “us-and-them” mentality dominant in evangelical Protestant church culture that too rigidly distinguishes between those who are part of the Christian community and those who are not. This concern for deconstructing boundaries carries missiological implications, which will be addressed further in subsequent chapters.

12.2 The Emerging Church and ‘Family Resemblance’

I have established that emerging Christianity is a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon. At the same time the study also shows that we can observe shared convictions (i.e. a convictional set) that shape the ecclesial hermeneutic of emerging congregations. Not all emerging churches adopt what can be understood as alternative worship practices, but many do. Not all emerging churches embrace a postmodern critique of evangelical Protestant theology, but many share what can be understood as postmodern sensibilities, which in turn inform their critique of the inherited church. Not all emerging churches adopt flat leadership structures with

⁶³⁶ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 127. refer to this as “liturgical eclecticism”.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

non-paid staff, but many do (in particular smaller communities and groups with no denominational ties). Not all emerging churches adopt rules and weekly rhythms inspired by monasticism, gather in cafés or clubs, adopt dialogical methods of preaching, or get involved with social and political activism. But enough emerging congregations embody these practices that we can conclude that they are closely associated with the movement.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance' (*Familienähnlichkeit* in German) may provide us with an analytical framework to better understand the diverse and multifaceted nature of the ECC.⁶³⁸ In his treatise *Philosophical Investigations*, first published in 1953, Wittgenstein discussed the meaning and use of language. In his book Wittgenstein argued that words are not defined by a single precise feature, but by a combination of related features. The main example he used in the book are 'games', asking what the common feature is between board-games, card-games, ball-games, athletic-games, etc.⁶³⁹ Not all games are played for pleasure, nor do they require skill, are played for money, involve chance and so on - still the different kinds of games overlap in character with other kinds of games. Wittgenstein wrote that:

if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to all, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. ... We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small.⁶⁴⁰

Wittgenstein continued:

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblance"; for the various resemblances between members of a family - build, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth - overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: 'games' form a family.⁶⁴¹

I propose that the idea of family resemblance is helpful when discussing the Emerging Church phenomenon as well as local emerging churches. Rather than being defined by a single - or a few - features, the ECC constitutes a "family" that incorporate a number of overlapping features and characteristics. Above I present three characteristics that form a convictional set which are integral to this study (as well as for emerging congregations which are part of similar studies conducted in other parts of the world). My conclusion is that these convictions are foundational features of the emerging churches - but they are not *the* defining features of emerging churches. We need to leave room for contextual differences as well as other overlapping features that was not as clearly expressed in this study, but perhaps would have been had we chosen to include other groups in this research project.

⁶³⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblance' has been mentioned elsewhere when discussing the ECC. C.f. Matt Jenson, and David E. White. *The Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 97.

⁶³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations, 4th edition* (Chichester: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009), 36.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance has been used elsewhere when discussing complex and multifaceted concepts. For instance, John Hick adopts the theory when discussing the nature of religion, arguing that each religion "is similar in important respects to some others in the family, though not in all respects to any or in any respect to all."⁶⁴² With that being said, Hick argues that we still need a starting point when discussing religion - we simply do not start anywhere when discussing the phenomenon "but have some general agreed notion of where to look."⁶⁴³ To Hick, this starting point is Paul Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern" when discussing the phenomenon of religion. Whether or not we agree with Hick, the idea that we "have some general agreed notion of where to look" when discussing the Emerging Church phenomenon is helpful, whilst at the same time allowing for diversity in the "family". On the basis of this study it is my understanding that this family likeness includes a critique of evangelical Protestant church culture, the four streams of the Emerging Church introduced in chapter 5 (Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-monasticism, and Missional), a contextual approach to ecclesiology and theology, a relational ecclesiology, openness and inclusion, as well as innovation and deconstruction. These are key features that help us both to identify and better understand local emerging congregations as well as the wider emerging church conversation as an international grassroots phenomenon.

12.3 Critical Discussion

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed critically before I summarise the findings of this chapter. When we study expressions of emerging church we need to be wary of hyperbole that does not correspond with reality in the lives of these communities. In our critique we also need to keep in mind that these groups are young (some only have existed for a couple of years when this study began); it is not always easy to distinguish whether or not the issues that warrants critique are the results of an ECC ecclesiological paradigm, or simply because they are young churches and at a stage where structure, organisation and theology it is still being shaped and articulated. It is not my intention to be overly critical of or stifle ecclesial innovation, rather I believe that a critical dimension is necessary not only for academic stringency but is necessary for the ECC to move forward, mature, and encourage further creativity and experimentation within post-Christendom cultures.

12.3.1 Blurring of boundaries

This study establishes that some of the core ecclesiological convictions of emerging churches are openness, inclusion and the deconstruction of boundaries. These may

⁶⁴² John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2004) , 4.

⁶⁴³ Hick writes that "no one would look to a teapot or a post office for an example of religion. We must and do have some general agreed notion of where to look." John Hick, *Interpretation*, 4.

be internal boundaries within the faith community (e.g. leadership structures, relationship to other believers, a secular-sacred divide, etc), or external boundaries between the church and the broader community. In regard to the latter, Cronshaw noted in his study from 2008 that this does not come without tension⁶⁴⁴, and Marti and Ganiel observed a “lack of boundaries” in their study of emerging churches.⁶⁴⁵ We need to ask ourselves if emerging churches, in their commitment to deconstruct what they perceive to be unhelpful or even harmful boundaries between the church and the world, risk losing Christian distinctiveness towards wider society. I found that this was a relatively underdeveloped subject among the groups participating in this study. Whilst emphasising an inclusive and open approach, the path to Christian maturity and discipleship seemed at times like an implicit and intuitive process. This does not imply that the groups had an “anything goes” mind set, but Ed Stetzer warns of the risk of “over-contextualization [that] skews the necessary boundaries and, more often than not, give way to syncretism and a loss of the uniqueness of Jesus, the Christ.”⁶⁴⁶ When experimenting with boundaries and adopting a “belong before you believe” approach to Christian community one also has to offer a clear alternative to the traditional paradigm (which could be described as “believe and behave before you belong”) that lead to mature followers of Jesus.

12.3.2 Organisational weaknesses

In their study Marti and Ganiel noted that “another consequence of the focus on informal relationships is the lack of a clear organisational structure.”⁶⁴⁷ Although this does not apply to all the groups that are part of this study⁶⁴⁸, we need to acknowledge that an organic approach to organisation (e.g. an emphasis on everyday relationships with no formal membership or leadership structures) sometimes can appear chaotic and inhibit the development to a mature community of followers of Jesus. Ambiguity in the organisation risks undermining accountability of the leadership, pastoral care and the inclusion of individuals with perhaps not as strong capacity for developing and nurturing relationships in the everyday life. An organic and relational approach to Christian community demands a great deal of those who are involved in the group. As Cronshaw observed in his study, the rhetoric of emerging churches does not always match reality; for example that they were not necessarily better at creating a sense of belonging to the community when compared with traditional churches.⁶⁴⁹ One issue is that the rhetoric within the groups emphasise organic relationships and community without actually being able to shape a culture where people experience belonging, care and friendship - whilst at the same time deconstructing traditional ecclesial structures - the results could be problematic and in some cases damaging to the individual and the group as a whole.

⁶⁴⁴ Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 216.

⁶⁴⁵ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 51.

⁶⁴⁶ Ed Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church,” 94.

⁶⁴⁷ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 53.

⁶⁴⁸ I.e. Oikos, which has a clear membership structure.

⁶⁴⁹ Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 184.

The fluid organisational structures of emerging churches seem in particular to inform leadership culture and decision making processes. In his study Cronshaw noted that “some of their decision process are identified as being haphazard”⁶⁵⁰, and Marti and Ganiel observed that “in short, the ambiguity of structure in emerging congregations, under a supposed egalitarianism, leads to a type of oligarchy that concentrates influence and decision making to an elite few.”⁶⁵¹ The haphazard nature of decision making can be observed in this study as well (the exception being Oikos, which has developed a detailed consensus model for decision making in the community). There are potential advantages to this type of organic structure, such as the ability to quickly adapt to contextual changes in the community, as well as resisting institutionalisation. There are also potential drawbacks, such as insufficient accountability structures and an unhealthy concentration of power to a small group of people.

12.3.3 Sustainability and Longevity

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger observe in their study from 2005 that “sustainability is a struggle for a number of groups” part of the ECC.⁶⁵² Similarly, Michael Moynagh writes that “how to sustain new contextual churches has risen to the agenda as increasing numbers have brought it to birth. Sceptics wonder if these new types of church are durable.”⁶⁵³ The question of sustainability and longevity is raised in this research project as well, as two of the four groups selected have closed down during the course of this study. Exactly why these groups closed down is beyond the scope of the dissertation and to my knowledge little empirical research has been done specifically in this area in regard to emerging churches. In their study of emerging churches in the United Kingdom and the USA from 2011, Gray-Reeves and Perham write,

On our journey to emergent congregations we noted a consistent lack of concern from leaders about the sustainability and longevity of this movement and of the congregations that they led. If the institutional church is overly concerned with survival, it may be that the emerging church is not concerned enough.⁶⁵⁴

I acknowledge the tension that can exist between, on the one hand, an organic and entrepreneurial church culture that seeks to avoid institutionalisation, and on the other hand, the need for stability in order to form a Christian community that is

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 297.

⁶⁵¹ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 121-22.

⁶⁵² Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 173.; Steve Taylor makes a similar observation from a New Zealand perspective. He writes that “Most early groups existed on the edges of churches and denominations ... Over time, durability and sustainability proved problematic, and a number of these communities ceased to exist.” Steve Taylor, “Emerging Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand,” in *The Gospel after Christendom - New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions*, ed. Ryan K. Bolger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). Kindle edition, LOC 1091.

⁶⁵³ Michael Moynagh, *Every Context*, LOC 10752.

⁶⁵⁴ Mary Gray-Reeves, and Michael Perham, *The Hospitality of God - Emerging Worship for a Missional Church* (New York, NY: Seabird Books, 2011), 126.

durable and lasts over time. However, as Gray-Reeves and Perham observed, sustainability is not necessarily an expressed concern for emerging churches. Whether or not this is a problem depends on the perspective. From a denominational perspective this lack of concern can both seem problematic and unsettling. From the perspective of emerging churches, it becomes an instrument for deconstructing a captivity with control and survival within a traditional church culture. However, the issue with sustainability and longevity can also be a sign of an underdeveloped ecclesiology.⁶⁵⁵ For instance, we must ask ourselves whether the blurring of boundaries and an ambiguous organisational structure has had negative consequences on the groups that closed down during the course of this study. Could a more robust ecclesiological foundation and identity have helped these groups navigate the fine balance between innovation and sustainability? Further research is needed in order to answer that question with certainty. Marti and Ganiel write that “although the long-term sustainability of such groups is uncertain... [they] stimulate an experimental, entrepreneurial dynamic.”⁶⁵⁶ Innovation and experimentation always comes with a certain risk of failure, and it can also be argued that the risks involved are risks we need to be willing to accept if we are to respond to the challenges facing the church in post-Christendom cultures in fruitful ways.⁶⁵⁷ Perhaps we do well by viewing the ECC as a “research and development department” of evangelical Protestantism with no guaranteed success, but rather with the *potential* of providing insight into what a church in post-Christendom culture could look like. This does not justify an underdeveloped ecclesiology, but it challenges the inherited church to provide room for potential failure or no immediate success in their support of church planting projects and emerging church initiatives.

12.3.4 Lack of diversity

Although emerging churches are diverse, what Marti and Ganiel refer to as “pluralist congregations”,⁶⁵⁸ the observation is still that many of these groups tend to be homogenous in terms of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.⁶⁵⁹ Cronshaw notes in his study of emerging congregations in Melbourne, Australia, that some of these groups in fact “have less diversity than average church figures.”⁶⁶⁰ Marti and Ganiel make a similar observation, that “the movement is based on mostly white, urban/suburban and middle-class constituents”.⁶⁶¹ Although no data exist to make a similar comparison with traditional and established churches in Sweden, the groups incorporated in this study did display a similar lack of diversity as observed in the studies mentioned above. Lloyd Chia writes, “the ideal state of inclusiveness and

⁶⁵⁵ Ed Stetzer, “The Emergent/Emerging Church,” 94.; and Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 72.

⁶⁵⁶ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 28.

⁶⁵⁷ For a more in-depth discussion about emerging churches and mission as innovation, see Chapter 14.

⁶⁵⁸ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 34.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 39

⁶⁶⁰ Darren Cronshaw (2008), p. 202

⁶⁶¹ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 212 n.79.; The authors also note that very few people part of these congregations come from atheistic or agnostic backgrounds. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 39-40.

diversity the movement seeks may perhaps not be so easily accomplished".⁶⁶² Chia continues by asking that maybe "the questions and problems with 'modern' Christianity that the Emerging Church Movement is addressing, perhaps has little or no resonance with [ethnic minorities and marginalised groups]".⁶⁶³ When discussing mission in Sweden today, this is an important issue; in particular for urban areas that are characterised by both multiculturalism and segregation. Does the Emerging Church as a phenomenon merely attract a certain segment of the population that is invested "in a postmodern 'deconstructive' critique of their institutions"⁶⁶⁴, or is it able to provide a broader missiological response to the challenges that churches face in urban society? We also need to ask ourselves if emerging churches, in their commitment to contextualisation, by default tend to become culturally homogenous groups?

12.4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the case studies from an ecclesiological perspective and provide an analytical foundation for our missiological examination in subsequent chapters. In previous chapter I have established that although the groups differ in some aspects - such as organisational structure, models for leadership and membership, and cultural contexts - they also share several characteristics (such as size, relating to a specific local or cultural context, identifying with being alternative Christian communities, and striving towards a "low maintenance" mind set regarding ecclesial forms and programs).

In this the chapter I establish that emerging churches seem to adopt a particular kind of ecclesiological hermeneutic, informed by a specific set of convictions: *Relational Ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion, as well as Innovation and deconstruction*. Rather than make superficial changes in order to make church "trendy" and "relevant", emerging churches are driven by deeply held convictions about the nature of the church and what it means to be faithful to the Christian faith in post-Christendom and postmodern cultures. The convictional set of emerging churches are interrelated and overlap in some respects, motivated by a desire to *deconstruct unhelpful or destructive boundaries* - both within the church as well as between the church and broader society - that have come to shape evangelical Protestant church culture. The theme of deconstructing boundaries will be addressed further in subsequent chapters.

Furthermore, in this chapter I put forward that Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" is helpful for understanding the heterogeneous nature of the Emerging Church phenomenon. Emerging churches are diverse, covering a range of ecclesial expressions, theological convictions and practices. In that sense the emerging Christianity may be understood as a "family" characterised by a number of overlapping features and characteristics. Borrowing the words of John Hick,

⁶⁶² Lloyd Chia, "Emerging," 254.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

emerging churches, then, are “similar in important respects to some others in the family, though not in all respects to any or in any respect to all.”⁶⁶⁵ This does not imply that we are completely at loss when searching for expressions of emerging church. On the basis of this study it is my understanding that this family likeness includes a critique of evangelical Protestant church culture, the four streams of the Emerging Church introduced in Chapter 5 (Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neomonasticism, and Missional), a contextual approach to ecclesiology and theology, a relational ecclesiology, openness and inclusion, as well as innovation and deconstruction. These are key features that help us both to identify and better understand local emerging congregations as well as the wider emerging church conversation as an international grassroots phenomenon.

The chapter is concluded by a discussion addressing a number of issues that warrant further critical inquiry. Firstly, I note that the ecclesial hermeneutic of emerging churches risks blurring the boundaries between the Christian community and broader society. The ECC rightly call into question an overly dualistic view of the church and the world - the church’s rightful place is as an active agent *within* society, not separate outside of society - but a contextual approach to theology and church still adequately needs to take into account the distinctiveness of the church and Christian faith. This observation raises important missiological questions, such as the appropriate boundaries for contextualisation, which will be addressed in more detail later in the text.

Moreover, the study reveals a potential organisational weakness of emerging churches, in particular affecting leadership and the decision making processes. Although the study did not reveal any immediate concerns, structural ambiguity risks undermining accountability in leadership, pastoral care within the community and the inclusion of people with perhaps not as strong capacity for developing relationships in a highly organic and fluid organisation. We can also observe issues with sustainability and longevity among emerging churches. This is to some extent not surprising when taking into account the highly innovative and experimentative nature of these communities, but we need to ask ourselves if a lack in durability at least in part can be explained by the blurring of boundaries and the fluid nature of these groups. Not all emerging churches experience issues in sustainability, and whether or not this is a problem depends on one’s perspective, but this has to be taken into account when we search for appropriate ways for the church to respond to the challenges posed by post-Christendom society. The church needs to encourage risk taking and experimentation, but this calls for further discussion and inquiry if the end goal is to articulate an ecclesiological and missiological framework that is sustainable and reproducible.

Lastly, the study notes a lack of diversity among emerging churches - an observation that is echoed in similar studies in other parts of the world. These groups do indeed display diversity in terms of practices, denominational backgrounds, and theological beliefs. But they also tend to lack in diversity in regard to socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. This is a significant issue and a potential problem when

⁶⁶⁵ John Hick, *Interpretation*, 4.

discussing mission in urban society, as a missiological framework for such contexts need to adequately take into account the realities of multiculturalism and segregation.

Chapter 13. Mission as a Witnessing Presence

The objective of this dissertation is to explore and analyse how the ECC, as an international grassroots phenomenon within evangelical Protestantism, is expressed in Sweden and how these communities may contribute to shape the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in today's culture. In previous chapter we established that the emerging churches which are presented as part of this study express shared convictions that in turn inform their ecclesial hermeneutic: *Relational ecclesiology*, *Openness and inclusion*, as well as *Innovation and deconstruction*. Emerging churches are motivated by the *deconstruction of unhelpful or destructive boundaries* - both within the church as well as between the church and broader society. In this and subsequent chapters I will examine some of the missiological consequences of this ecclesiological hermeneutic and how it shapes the emerging churches' missionary engagement.

13.1 Initial missiological observations

As already noted, the four groups included as part of this study scored high within the missional stream of the ECC during the preliminary survey. The responses indicated that they at least to some extent identify with a missional understand of church: e.g. acknowledging shifts in Western cultures and the need to respond to these shifts with a mission mind set; emphasising the church's identity as being sent by God into the world; as well as being motivated by the need to contextualise ecclesial forms, methods and theology. The interview material supported this preliminary result, as well as brought to attention additional features shared by all or most of the groups:

- A highly relational approach, embracing a "belong before you believe" mind set.
- They expressed little concern for "bringing people to church" or getting people to come to the Sunday church service; instead they emphasised the need for ordinary believers to follow Jesus and live out their faith in their everyday lives.
- Neither of the groups expressed any specific concern for the idea of extending the church numerically, rather they spoke of other concerns, such as making disciples, serving the community, overcoming cultural barriers, reconciliation, and acting as signs of the Kingdom of God in their contexts. The groups showed little interest in numerical growth in terms of membership (some groups outright questioned quantitative categories for measuring success in mission).
- They often gathered in "third places" outside the traditional church building (e.g. cafés, clubs, peoples' homes, parties, music festivals, etc).
- Serving and hospitality were prominent themes that emerged as the groups

spoke about their missionary engagement with society.

With that being said, the interview material also revealed individual differences. Tribe placed strong emphasis on the importance for people to *encounter God in miraculous and supernatural ways* - influenced by Pentecostal and Charismatic spirituality. The missionary focus here seems to rest on liberating people from bondage and setting them free to enjoy life as God's children and as disciples of Jesus. Although the interview participants believed that proclaiming the Gospel was of importance, an even stronger emphasis was placed on people experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit, as well as a experiencing a loving, hospitable and serving Christian community.

In the case of H2O, the concept of *providing spaces for the exploration of faith and spirituality* shaped their understanding of their missionary task. Rather than bringing the Gospel to the non-Christian, they strived to act as facilitators, relying on God as the active agent meeting with the individual in a safe and hospitable environment. Here they seem to favour a more "hands-off approach", valuing the importance of dialogue and building long-term relationships to people, rather than traditional proclamatory evangelism. The interview data also revealed an understanding of mission as being a witness to the Gospel by practically serving neighbours, friends, and the wider community. The participants from H2O also spoke of their missionary task in categories such as encouraging and challenging people to cross cultural, demographical and geographical boundaries with the aim to connect people from different backgrounds. Integration was a theme that was mentioned frequently during the interviews.

Underground Church stands out in their missionary approach, as they expressed a notable *ambivalence to the subcultures they seek to reach with the Gospel*, not always sharing the same positive mind set to culture as the other three groups. Although they cherished and celebrated the alternative subcultures they were part of and engaged with, there was also an understanding that those subcultures sometimes expressed values and encouraged lifestyles contrary to the Gospel. To the participants, mission was frequently expressed as being a witness to the Christian faith, strongly emphasising dialogue in favour of explicit proclamation of the Gospel. Rather than trying to convert people, they first and foremost wanted to give witness to an alternative understanding of Christians, in a cultural context where the church often is viewed in negative terms.

Oikos emphasised *mission ad intra*,⁶⁶⁶ explaining that "the only mission field that Oikos has is our own lives".⁶⁶⁷ The primary task for people who are part of Oikos, then, is to grow in Christlikeness and become better disciples. Social engagement and being signposts to the Kingdom of God is a natural fruit of that discipleship. When describing how this is expressed in their local community, the participants referred to particular practices, such as reconciliation work, peace-making, partnering with

⁶⁶⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants in Context - A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004) , 56.

⁶⁶⁷ Oikos participant 3, 8 June 2010.

local agents such as schools, non-profits and churches, and being a hospitable community. In the light of the interview material Oikos seems to resonate with what Steven Bevans and Robert Schroeder refers to as a 'Type C theology', where mission

is not so much the proclamation of a message or a system of doctrines. It is the proclamation of the saving power of Jesus Christ through a life of liberating witness. It is a life lived in a community of freedom and witnessed to by that life in community.⁶⁶⁸

In the previous chapter, I argued that Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance' may be applied to the Emerging Church phenomenon, offering an analytical framework for understanding emerging churches in terms of their ecclesiological similarities and differences. Similarly, Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance' can also be applied from a missiological perspective. Emerging churches do not necessarily adopt the same missionary practices (although they sometimes do), rather they seem to share a family likeness in their underlying missiological convictions concerning the church's missionary task in the world, which will be explored in more detail below.

13.2 Deconstructing evangelism

As established above, the Emerging Church phenomenon can be understood as a conversation expressing characteristics akin to that of a new social movement (See discussion in Section 4.4). As a discourse it is framed around a critique of conservative evangelical Protestant tradition, calling for renewal in the light of the challenges posed by postmodernity and the emergence of a post-Christendom culture. This critique includes epistemological and ecclesiological assumptions, as well as how the church in the West partakes in their missionary calling in the word. Here, the motivation to deconstruct unhelpful or destructive boundaries, addressed in detail above, carries important missiological implications. Not only do emerging churches question what is perceived as an "us-and-them" mentality within evangelical Protestantism, but they also seek to move beyond unhelpful evangelistic practices that contribute to this mentality; for example, by reducing people as "evangelistic projects" to be converted or encouraging contentious attitudes towards non-Christians. Emerging churches also criticise simplistic evangelistic formulas, where the Christian faith is reduced to a few bullet points or doctrines to be accepted in order for the individual to be saved.⁶⁶⁹ Here we note that the missiological convictions of emerging churches are intimately linked to the ecclesiological convictions of authentic relationships, openness and inclusion. Geraldo Marti and Gladys Ganiel noted in their study:

Emerging Christians contrast their approaches to what they see as the aggressive and inauthentic evangelism methods of evangelicals and seeker megachurches, often expressing a great sense of relief that they no longer feel pressured to engage in such practices.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants*, 65.

⁶⁶⁹ E.g. the "Four point Gospel", or "The Sinner's Prayer"

⁶⁷⁰ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 135.

Some of the groups which participated in this study were more vocal in their critique of traditional evangelistic practices than others, but the study revealed an almost complete absence of traditional modes of evangelism; such as evangelistic courses, door-to-door outreach, street evangelism, handing out Bible tracts, events with proclamatory preaching as the entry point to the church, and similar.⁶⁷¹ This observation echoes studies of emerging churches in other parts of the world.⁶⁷² Although this is not representative of the findings in this study, some researchers suggest that the Emerging Church phenomenon in its more radical forms express what can be referred to as “anti-conversionalism”.⁶⁷³ This viewpoint is not expressed in the interview material, rather, several participants expressed a hope for the people they meet to become Christians and followers of Jesus (although how this was expressed varied between the groups). The critique of traditional evangelism, then, cannot be interpreted as a rejection of the need for people to experience the forgiveness and saving grace of God through Jesus Christ. Rather, there are other issues at play here, which will be addressed below.

13.2.1 Moving beyond traditional evangelism

The emerging Christians participating in Marti and Ganiel’s study of emerging congregations expressed that mission is “simply being church ... a church so compelling that others cannot help but be attracted to it”, and that “Sharing faith does not mean trying to convince others that you are right ... it means living the right way.”⁶⁷⁴ The authors also write:

In sum, Emerging Christians hold a range of positions on the extent to which the purpose of their lives should be trying to convert others to Christianity. Some clearly see the ECM as a missional movement, designed to draw in the unchurched and dechurched, with the ultimate aim to adapting Christianity to local modern and postmodern contexts ... Yet others shy away from terms like ‘evangelism’ and ‘mission’, preferring the language of ‘witness’ and, they claim, deliberately not trying too hard to convince others to join them.⁶⁷⁵

Neither of the participants in this study downright rejected the idea of evangelism (See the comment about “anti-conversionalism” above). Rather, what is of concern is *how* the Christian faith is shared, and whether or not verbal proclamation has priority over non-verbal proclamation of the Gospel. During the interview several participants expressed a desire to not appear “preachy” or “pushy” to non-Christians in the communication of the Gospel. Instead, the participants valued the habit of listening, being in dialogue with people, and nurturing authenticity in relationships. James Bielo writes,

⁶⁷¹ However, there are also exceptions, such as Underground Church handing out ‘Metal Bibles’ at music festivals (See Section 9.3 for details).

⁶⁷² James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, Kindle LOC 331. C.f. Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 176.

⁶⁷³ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 141. Peter Rollins is mentioned here as an example of this position within the ECC.

⁶⁷⁴ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 141.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

The most direct shorthand accepted as an index for the problems of conservative-style evangelism is “relationships.” Emerging Evangelicals treat as a taken-for-granted truth the idea that no successful evangelizing can occur without personalized, trusting, and lasting relational commitments. They are certainly not the first Evangelicals to talk about “relational evangelism” ... but in their view established efforts to cultivate relationships with “nonbelievers” suffer from two debilitating problems. First, those efforts maintain the expectation that the unconverted should “come to” Christians rather than Christians “going to” the unconverted. Second, those efforts attempt to foster relationships through programmatic church events rather than through “organic” friendships. For Emerging Evangelicals, the only way to create and sustain relationships with those they want to “reach” is to mimic the acculturating foreign missionary: settle into a locale and learn the intricacies of a place and its people.⁶⁷⁶

13.2.2 Witnessing Presence

The study found that non-verbal proclamation of the Gospel seemed to be more common than verbal communication, although how this non-verbal communication was expressed varied between the groups. The missionary approach adopted by emerging churches which are part of this study, then, resonates with Stephen Bevans and Robert Schroeder’s understanding of *witness*, which they refer to as “lifestyle and presence” (in evangelical circles called “lifestyle evangelism”).⁶⁷⁷ For the purpose of this study I choose to call this particular approach *mission as a witnessing presence*, which includes two particular aspects; first, an emphasis on the intentional presence of the faith community embedded in a particular context, and second, an emphasis on the life of the community and individuals as the sign to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, over - but not necessarily excluding - explicit verbal proclamation of the Gospel.

One member of Oikos explained that,

We are the church and the church is present wherever we are, we are the body of Christ in that context. Our calling is to be signs of the Kingdom of God in those places. It is about being present where people hang out and meet them there.⁶⁷⁸

From the perspective of Oikos, mission can be described as the church being embedded in the immediate context, working in partnership with local agencies, and acting as signs to the Kingdom of God as a worshipping, hospitable and serving community.

Similarly, the concept of a witnessing presence captures the missionary approach of H2O. By providing spaces for spiritual exploration characterised by dialogue and openness, the group does two things; firstly, they act as facilitators, allowing the person to engage with and experience God on their own terms, and secondly, they testify to what they perceive as significant Gospel values, such as hospitality, authentic relationships and a grace filled attitude towards the non-Christian. By giving witness to these things, they hope to encourage curiosity of the Christian faith

⁶⁷⁶ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, LOC 2331.

⁶⁷⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants*, 353.

⁶⁷⁸ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

and allowing the person to experience God through spiritual exploration in dialogue with a loving community of faith. Also, by practically serving the wider community, for example through projects such as *Serve the City*, H2O seeks to witness to the nature of God, and by doing that striving to overcome peoples' distrust of the church. One participant explained, "we want Serve the City to act as a sermon, sort of, or an act of worship". The person explained further, "we see ourselves like an arrow ... a movement pointing towards Jesus, the Cross ... We want to show and point towards Jesus."⁶⁷⁹

The theme of witnessing presence was also clearly expressed by the members of Underground Church. By being present within the alternative cultural contexts they hope to overcome preconceived ideas, and at times hostility, towards Christians and the church. To many who are part of Underground Church, traditional proclamatory evangelism methods are seen as counterproductive. Rather, their missionary approach may be summarised as non-confrontational and relational witnessing through dialogue by being present in various third places, such as music clubs, parties, festivals and similar events. As one person explained, "we try to sow seeds and try to create interest for the Christian faith through dialogue."⁶⁸⁰

Although Tribe appeared more evangelistically driven compared with the other groups, the participants still emphasised that they tried to avoid being seen as "preachy" in their interactions with the bands and guest visiting the Friday night music clubs. Non-proclamatory communication of the Gospel still dominated their missionary approach; for example, prayer for healing, words of prophecy, acts of service, building authentic relationships, and living as an open and hospitable community of believers. As far as this study is concerned, Tribe seemed to place stronger emphasis on people *experiencing* the presence of God and a tangible loving Christian community, rather than the necessity of hearing the Gospel verbally proclaimed in a particular way.

13.3 The 'how' in mission matters

Bevens and Schroeder note that "what remains the driving force behind mission in evangelical theology is the centrality of Christ and the proclamation of his name".⁶⁸¹ In their commitment to reform evangelical Protestantism, emerging churches are sometimes accused of abandoning orthodox Christian faith by embracing a postmodern mind-set, and as a result, adopting a syncretistic and pluralistic theology and practices.⁶⁸² Views that question the need for conversion to Jesus, as well as problematising the uniqueness of the Christian faith can be found within the ECC.⁶⁸³ However, it would be an erroneous to apply this position to the conversation as a whole. Jesus Christ is central to emerging churches,⁶⁸⁴ expressing a low Christology

⁶⁷⁹ H2O Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁶⁸⁰ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁶⁸¹ Stephen B. Bevens, and Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants*, 326.

⁶⁸² C.f. Don A. Carson, *Becoming*.

⁶⁸³ C.f. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 144.

⁶⁸⁴ C.f. Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 47.; The authors place "Identifying with

that emphasise the life of Jesus in the Gospels and practical discipleship, rather than the high Christology of traditional Protestantism.⁶⁸⁵ There is no evidence in the interview material that indicated that the groups downplayed the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus. What was of less importance to the participants was a need to differentiate between who was saved and who was not saved, or who belonged to or did not belong to the faith community.⁶⁸⁶ Here we can see how the ecclesiological convictions of emerging churches to deconstruct boundaries influence their missionary approach.

In a pluralistic cultural context where exclusive or strong stances on truth and faith can be seen as suspect and an affront, a softer approach to mission that emphasise long-term witness and presence through service, dialogue and the possibility for people to experience God through a loving Christian community is favourable to emerging churches. To some of the groups which are part of this study, this was a relatively conscious process, while to other groups it seemed to be expressed in a more intuitive way. Bold truth claims and proclamation can then be perceived as problematic as they risk alienating people shaped by a postmodern worldview and sensibilities. As openness, inclusion and hospitality are deeply held ecclesiological convictions, anything that undermines these convictions are viewed as unhelpful. In short, many - if not most - emerging churches no longer believe in proclamatory evangelism as the primary means of mission. Rather, they tend to adopt a missionary approach akin to *mission as a witnessing presence*, placing greater emphasis on the life of the community and the individual as a signpost to Jesus and the Kingdom of God. To emerging churches, then, *demonstrating* the Kingdom of God seem to take priority over the *announcement* of the Kingdom of God, as the demonstration of the Christian faith is perceived as more accessible to people living in a post-Christian and post-modern culture.

However, it would be a mistake to understand the missionary approach of emerging churches as simply the result of pragmatic considerations. The World Council of Churches' publication *Together Towards Life* (2005) states that "authentic Christian witness is not only *what* we do in mission, but *how* we live out our mission."⁶⁸⁷ This concern is shared by the emerging churches part of this study; authenticity in relationships, hospitality, openness, and servant mindset are not merely means for the Gospel to be communicated (i.e. as a result of strategic or pragmatic considerations), but emerges from deeply held convictions concerning the nature of authentic Christian mission, and *how* Christians and churches ought to engage with the world. According to these convictions, Christian mission should never be done in such a way that the methods betray the deeply held ecclesiological convictions embedded in the faith community. With this mindset, the end never justifies the means. To the evangelical observer, this might be interpreted as a

Jesus" as one of the primary characteristics of emerging churches.

⁶⁸⁵ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants*, 38f.

⁶⁸⁶ C.f. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 141.

⁶⁸⁷ *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in a Changing Landscape* (The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, September 2005), 12. Emphasis original.

rejection of evangelism - or even rejecting the centrality of Christ - whilst for emerging churches it means that evangelism should not be done by any means possible, as the models we adopt might betray the very Gospel we seek to communicate to the world. This observation can partly explain some of the tension that exist between evangelical Protestant tradition and emerging Christianity.

13.4 Embracing the idea of holistic mission

A further expressed conviction by emerging churches is the desire to embrace an authentic and holistic Christian faith that put an emphasis on orthopraxis embedded in context. This is often contrasted with a cerebral understanding of the Christian faith that put significant value and emphasis on doctrines and reduces evangelism as information about Jesus that is to be communicated in intelligible and relevant ways to the unbeliever. Again, we may question whether this is a fair portrayal of evangelical Protestant missionary practice, but it is nevertheless a strong motivating factor for emerging Christianity. Marti and Ganiel write:

The idea of authentic faith as action, and of the location of that faith outside the walls of the church and in the community, contributes to an overall sense of holism among Emerging Christians. Indeed, many self-consciously strive to live holistically, seeing this as integral to nurturing their own religious journeys.⁶⁸⁸

This is also a prominent theme in Darren Cronshaw's study of emerging churches in Melbourne, Australia. Cronshaw writes, "Each of the churches have a stated commitment to holistic mission, although with their community service programs they tend to be stronger in mercy than evangelism."⁶⁸⁹ Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs made similar observations in their interviews with emerging church leaders in North America and the United Kingdom, concluding that emerging Christians strive toward a "holistic spirituality" and "a socially engaged way of life".⁶⁹⁰ Summarising this particular view, they write, "the gospel is not restricted to a message giving an individual assurance about eternal destiny ... it is much more, being concerned as much with life before death as with life after death."⁶⁹¹ Similar positions can be observed in the interview material in this study.

There are a number of comments to be made here. First, we may note that valuing a holistic approach to mission is not new nor unique to emerging Christianity. The relationship between mission as evangelism and mission as social involvement has been discussed extensively throughout the latter part of the 20th century, at times resulting in positions that have been charged with neglecting evangelism altogether.⁶⁹² In fact, there have been significant developments in mission theology

⁶⁸⁸ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 158.

⁶⁸⁹ Darren Cronshaw, "Shaping," 295.

⁶⁹⁰ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 142.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁹² A position largely associated with the formal ecumenical movement, and the source for much of the contention between conciliar Protestantism and Evangelicalism in the 1960s and 1970s. C.f. J. Andrew

during the decades before and after the turn of the millennium, echoing the critique of emerging Christians towards a one sided and reductionistic approach to evangelism, and in favour of a more holistic understanding of Christian mission.⁶⁹³ James Bielo writes:

In truth, there is nothing new about Progressive Evangelicalism ... In November 1973, 40 Evangelical leaders signed and publicly released 'The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Concern': a brief confessional that addressed social justice, materialism, and 'a national pathology of war and violence.'⁶⁹⁴

Today there is a general consensus that faithful Christian mission includes holistic witness, incorporating personal as well as communal dimensions, verbal proclamation as well as a concern for justice, reconciliation and care for the creation. For instance, the WCC publication *Together Towards Life* (2005) put emphasis Christian mission as a holistic activity,

What is clear is that by the Spirit we participate in the mission of love that is at the heart of the life of the Trinity is results in Christian witness which unceasingly proclaims the salvific power of God through Jesus Christ and constantly affirms God's dynamic involvement, through the Holy Spirit, in the whole created world.⁶⁹⁵

Similarly, *The Cape Town Commitment* quotes *The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission*,

It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.⁶⁹⁶

That holistic mission is not unique to the ECC is not a problem per se (a holistic approach to mission does not become less significant because the issue has been raised in other contexts than the ECC). However, in their critique of evangelical mission practices and theology, the significant contributions of evangelical theologians at the end of the 20th century in articulating a holistic missionary theology remains, to my understanding, for the most part unacknowledged. From a different perspective, also, emerging Christianity seems to be more rooted in evangelical theological tradition than their critics perhaps would like to admit.⁶⁹⁷

Kirk, *Mission*, 59. See also the involvement of J. C. Hoekendijk in the ecumenical movement in the 1950's and 1960's, and the so called 'worldly theology' that emphasised mission as *shalom*, rejected a ecclesiocentric understanding of mission in favour of an emphasis on the Kingdom of God and the world as being the primary place for God's actions. Bert Hoedemaker, "The Legacy of J. C. Hoekendijk," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19, no. 4 (1995), 166-70.

⁶⁹³ E.g. The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 and the many subsequent follow up conferences and publications that engaged with relationship between evangelism and social action.

⁶⁹⁴ James S. Bielo, "Emerging Church," 228.

⁶⁹⁵ *Together Towards Life*, Declaration 18.

⁶⁹⁶ "The Cape Town Commitment - A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," *The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization* (16-25 October 2010), Cape Town. Declaration 10: We Love the Mission of God.

⁶⁹⁷ For example, see Michael Clawson, "Misión Integral and Progressive Evangelicalism: The Latin American influence on the North American Emerging Church," *Religions* 3, no. 3 (August 2012).

Within Emerging Church discourse the idea of holistic mission and Christian lifestyle seem at times predominately equated with engaging with social justice issues, peace-making, reconciliation work, environmental activism, hospitality, acts of service, and similar practices. Also, this is at times spoken of in tension with more traditional forms of evangelism and the verbal proclamation of the Gospel.⁶⁹⁸ A similar implicit stance could be observed in some of the interview material in this study. It is my understanding that Christian mission involves a *prophetic* witness in the world, not merely Christian presence. Bevans writes:

At its deepest level ... mission is about the respectful, gentle, dialogical, and yet faithful speaking forth - in word and deed - of God's love revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Everything flows from this prophetic activity and commitment.⁶⁹⁹

The Cape Town Commitment (2010) similarly states:

As disciples of Christ we are called to be people of truth. (1) We must live the truth. To live the truth is to be the face of Jesus, through whom the glory of the gospel is revealed to blinded minds. People will see truth in the faces of those who live their lives for Jesus, in faithfulness and love. (2) We must proclaim the truth. Spoken proclamation of the truth of the gospel remains paramount in our mission. This cannot be separated from living out the truth. Works and words must go together.⁷⁰⁰

The term 'holistic' implies an integrated, or whole, view of mission. Holistic Christian mission includes both *diakonia* and *kerygma*. It includes both the lived witness of the Christian community in acts of service, hospitality and justice, *and* the verbal proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus and the kingdom of God. In minimising the role of evangelism or rejecting the importance of proclamation in the witness of the church, this exposes a potential weakness (or possible reductionism) in the missionary approach of emerging Christianity. It is difficult to articulate a genuinely *holistic* mission theology if the evangelistic endeavour of the church is downplayed or set in opposition to the social dimension of the church's missionary task in this world. This does not, however, say anything about *appropriate* evangelistic practices in a post-Christian and post-Christendom culture.

13.5 Emerging churches and the Christian witness in today's culture

Emerging churches bring to attention two issues in regard to evangelism and witness in today's culture: first, there are evangelistic practices that have been developed by the church in the West that are not only unhelpful, but also risks damaging the Christian witness in this world; and second, as culture has shifted (and with that peoples' lifestyles, world-views, and epistemology), the church is facing the crucial

⁶⁹⁸ For instance, placing orthopraxy (right living) as a priority over against orthodoxy (right belief) and the verbal proclamation of faith. C.f. Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*.

⁶⁹⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, eds. *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publication, 2011), 104-05.

⁷⁰⁰ "Cape Town Commitment." Part II, Declaration 1: Truth and the person of Christ.

task of rearticulating its evangelistic message as well as reforming its evangelistic practices and methods. The first issue is addressed beyond the ECC. For instance, missiologist Andrew Kirk make note of a number of reservations that can be made regarding evangelism; e.g. marketing the Gospel as a commodity “which can be sold on the market by more imaginative packaging and more aggressive retailing”;⁷⁰¹ a too narrow focus on personal conversion at the expense of the communal and social dimensions of the Gospel; the close association of evangelism with the imperial expansion of Western cultures and nations; as well as that the central aim of the Great Commission is not to “make converts” but to “make disciples”.⁷⁰² The latter issue poses perhaps a greater challenge to the church, as few Christian contexts in Sweden, as well as in Europe as a whole, can account for significant evangelistic results in terms of new believers and followers of Jesus.

13.5.1 Mission as listening

There are a number of lessons that can be learnt from the groups which were part of this study. On a more general note this includes their willingness to innovate (addressed in more detail in chapter 14), as well as the practice of taking context seriously and engage in a genuine *listening* to culture. Quoting Cardinal Francis George, Bevans and Schroeder write that “the first task of evangelisation is listening.”⁷⁰³ *Together Towards Life* (2005) similarly states, “Evangelism entails not only proclamation of our deepest convictions, but also listening to others and being challenged and enriched by others”.⁷⁰⁴ As churches in Western society, I suggest, we are perhaps more shaped by a mind-set of coming with ready solutions and presenting answers to the spiritual needs of people. In regard to the church’s witness in a “post-culture” (whether we define this as post-modernity, post-Christendom, or post-Christian), then, we may learn from emerging churches by their posture of deep listening to context, with an awareness that a local Christian community never can presume to know what the answers will be for the people around them. This challenge standardised evangelistic programs and events, as it calls for a greater flexibility and adaptability of a local church.

To the four groups which are part of this study this posture resulted in relatively different methods and practices: H2O had identified that people in their context needed time and space to explore spirituality on their own terms, allowing them to ask questions in a non-judgemental environment. As a result, the team created a number of different spaces for spiritual exploration, and they guarded the values of openness and permission vigorously (even to the point that they were wary of inviting already Christians to the meetings). In the case of Underground Church, the group were aware of that deep-seated negative attitudes and preconceived ideas towards Christians and the church that existed within their mission context. The

⁷⁰¹ J. Andrew Kirk, *Mission*, 58.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁰³ Stephen B. Bevans, and Roger P. Schroeder., *Constants*, 360.

⁷⁰⁴ *Together Towards Life*. Declaration 95.

primary goal for their witness, then, was to change the narrative and affect the negative way Christians and the church was viewed by the people they met. They were also under no illusion that those people would be willing to come to church or attend their gatherings. Instead the primary mission strategy became attending parties, clubs, and music events. The members of Oikos that participated in this study emphasised that they never came to the area of Hammarkullen with the idea that they were bringing something to the people who lived there. Rather, the participants hoped that the context would shape them, allowing them to grow and become better Christians. Being situated in a context characterised by marginalisation and social vulnerability, the idea of partnering on equal terms with organisations and people living there became paramount; doing mission *with*, rather than *for* or *to the* people living in the area.⁷⁰⁵ To Tribe, whose vision was to shape a Christian community that emerged from within youth culture; experiencing the Holy Spirit, relationships, permission giving, availability, and trust were important values expressed in their witness to the young people they met with during the Friday night music clubs. Borrowing the words from Bevans, this posture of listening may be described as “mission as dialogue”, a “ministry of presence” or “mission-in-reverse”. Bevans writes, “we need to be evangelized by the people before we can evangelize them; we need to allow the people among whom we work to be our teachers before we presume to teach them.”⁷⁰⁶

13.5.2 Learning from emerging churches

There are a number of challenges that the churches in Sweden face in their witness to non-Christians in today’s culture. What is apparent is that there is no “silver bullet” to be found, nor is the belief feasible that one single movement or context will be able to answer all our challenges. With that being said, the question is what we may learn from emerging churches here? From this study I identify five challenges that the churches in Sweden are facing in the light of a changing cultural and religious landscape. Some challenges are external to the church, whilst some challenges are internal and call for renewal and reconfiguration. By no means an exhaustive account, I identify the following areas:

1. *The memory of Christendom culture*

This area (as well as the subsequent two points in this list) has been addressed in detail in Chapter 1. It is reasonable to claim that Swedish society today is a post-Christendom culture, however, the memory of Christendom still remains to some extent both within the church and in society in general. This, of course, will fade with every new generation, but at this time it still seems to pose internal and external challenges to the church in its evangelistic endeavours and Christian witness. Internally, the church is faced with the challenge to reimagine its identity and

⁷⁰⁵ C.f. David J. Bosch, *Transforming*, 446.

⁷⁰⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, *Contextual Theology*, 103-04.

function, shifting away from a place of power and normative privilege. In a pluralistic society, the church needs to earn its right to speak. Externally, sociological studies show that the church still can be associated with institutional power and control.⁷⁰⁷ As example, in his book *Katedralens hemlighet* (2010) Mattias Martinsson poses the question if not atheism in Sweden to some extent can be interpreted an expression of anti-clerical sentiments in society, rather than a rejection of religion in general and the Christian faith in particular.⁷⁰⁸ Although Christians and churches at times are reminded of their lack of normative privilege in today's society, the memory still can still remain for the people they meet, which affects their receptiveness to the Gospel and the Christian witness.

2. *The atheistic critique of religion and the Christian faith*

Whilst post-modernity has shifted society towards categories such as personal narrative, experience, and emotions, the heritage of the atheistic critique of the Enlightenment still remains today. In Sweden this debate has changed during the last decades, from the rhetoric of classical atheism (where the work of Ingemar Hedenius in the 1950's has been formative within the Swedish context), to the New Atheism after the turn of the millennium.⁷⁰⁹ In the light of the discussion of mission in post-modernity, many times centred on the need for meaningful experiences and community among post-modern people, the church needs to remind itself that the atheistic critique of religion as illogical and unscientific still is present among many people in Sweden, and at times warrant more traditional apologetic approaches. As Thurfjell writes

religion becomes a generalised category that bases itself on a type of Christianity that post-Christian secular Swedes are done with. Religion is something that we have freed ourselves from, something that exists in our past and now belong to other people [than ourselves].⁷¹⁰

3. *The perceived irrelevance of religion to peoples' lives*

The third area is intimately associated with the previous point but with an important difference; a person might not perceive religion as illogical or unscientific, but still view the Christian faith (and religion in general) as having no relevance whatsoever to the person's life. This has been addressed above and I refer the reader to the more detailed discussion in Chapter 1 regarding a post-Christian culture. It is nevertheless an external challenge that is difficult for the church to affect, besides adopting a posture of deep listening to its immediate context. Without sounding too defeatist, the church is faced with the challenge of coming to terms with the fact that sometimes, regardless of the quality of our programs, depth of community life, or innovative forms and practices, people simply might not be interested in the Christian faith. As Stefan Paas writes, many evangelical missionary proposals

⁷⁰⁷ For a more detailed discussion, see Section 1.2.4.

⁷⁰⁸ Mattias Martinsson, *Katedralen*, 69.

⁷⁰⁹ For a detailed account of this shift, see for example David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket*.

⁷¹⁰ David Thurfjell, *Det gudlösa folket*, 111. My translation.

major on post-Christendom, celebrating that the religious market is finally free (but without really escaping a Christendom mindset); or they focus on post-modernism, emphasizing that “church” must be done differently now ... But there is little reflection on the very crisis of faith itself, or on the decreasing demand for serious, world-formative religion among Europeans. Many Europeans agree that Christendom, with its religious coercion, was a bad thing, and they agree that rationalism and hyper-individualism have not always brought what they promised. But this does not mean that they are necessarily open to a religious (or Christian) approach to these issues. The large majority decides to remain free from traditional religion, connecting with “light” and “immanent” forms of spirituality instead. And a growing minority declares itself irreligious throughout.⁷¹¹

What does mission and Christian witness look like in such a situation? What criteria for success in mission can we apply when this is the case?

4. The challenges of consumer culture

Secularisation and the breakdown of Christendom culture has dramatically altered the standing of the church and the Christian faith in society. People are no longer obligated nor expected to be members of a church or participate in its rituals. In fact, people who do so are out of the norm in society. Paas writes that this situation is at the core of secularisation, where the church “has become a separate sector, catering to religious needs only. ... In other words, people will go to church if and only if they have a need that can be satisfied only by a religious event.”⁷¹² Consumer culture has significant ramifications both for the church’s witness in society, as well as for the formation of Christian community. As Paas writes,

[people] go to church like they go to a restaurant. Their quest can be very serious and deeply personal, but they will feel trapped and “inauthentic” whenever they are expected to submit their own desires and values to external authorities and moral expectations.⁷¹³

Secularisation and the effects of consumer culture, then, pose significant challenges to the church’s ability in establishing Christian community in mission. A mission endeavour, a church plant, or similar might in fact reach a large number of people, even introduce them to Jesus and baptise them, but in a consumer culture this does not guarantee the growth of a sustainable and long-term Christian community.

5. The church’s own understanding of evangelism and witness

This issue is predominately an internal issue for the church, which involves unhelpful assumptions of what evangelism and Christian witness is. This has already been addressed in detail in this chapter, and one does not need to agree with the most radical and deconstructive critique of emerging churches to acknowledge that this is

⁷¹¹ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 189.

⁷¹² Stefan Paas, “Mission among Individual Consumers,” in *The Gospel after Christendom - New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions*, ed. Ryan K. Bolger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). Kindle edition, LOC 3828.

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*, LOC 3886.

an issue worthy attention when addressing mission, witness and evangelism in today's society. If I turn to my own experience from eighteen years of Christian ministry, the idea of evangelism can carry with it negative associations for people, as well as feelings of guilt, unattainable expectations, and unhelpful or inappropriate practices. The external challenges that the church is facing today are numerous, but it would be unhelpful to assume that this take precedence or overshadow the internal challenges that the church is facing today in these areas.

It would be expecting too much to assume that the Emerging Church phenomenon and local emerging churches would provide robust answers to all five areas presented here. For instance, although allowing space for doubt and questioning is a prominent theme within emerging Christianity, in my understanding little attention is given in the conversation to provide answers and respond to the atheistic critique of religion and faith that still exist in Western society. What perhaps is akin to more traditional apologetics (e.g. the issue of faith versus science, evidence for the existence of God, etc) is less prominent here, when compared with responses to the challenges posed by post-modernity. Also, emerging churches seem to at times operate under similar premises as traditional church growth thinking and evangelical assumptions; that if we only get our methods right, then people will respond in positive ways to the Gospel. Here emerging churches seem to share the same challenges of consumer culture, as well as the perceived irrelevance of religion that that is prevalent in society.

In what areas, then, may we learn from emerging churches? It is my understanding that their strength rests on the first and the last themes raised above. First, emerging Christians are acutely aware of the legacy of Christendom culture, and that it at times can awaken feeling of nostalgia as well as creating cultural blind spots within established and institutional churches in their missionary activities. Emerging churches seek to reimagine what evangelism and Christian witness might look like from a position of marginalisation, minority, as well as lack of power and normative privilege. Interestingly, emerging Christianity share the same anti-clerical posture, critique and scepticism towards institutions that we can observe in today's culture. Second, as we have already addressed above, emerging churches are concerned with deconstructing unhelpful, and at times damaging, evangelistic practices that sometimes exist within evangelical Protestant tradition. Again, critiquing the evangelistic methods of the church should not be interpreted as a rejection of evangelism. In fact, the majority of the emerging churches which are part of this study expressed a clear desire for non-Christians to become followers of Jesus. This does not mean that their evangelistic methods were exceptionally successful, but what we may learn from these groups is a listening posture to context (See discussion above), a willingness to innovate, and not assuming that previous methods (even successful ones) are appropriate in current situation.

13.5.3 Evangelism as midwifery

What the ECC brings to attention in their critique of evangelical Protestant methods and mind-sets, is a need to develop an alternative imagery (or metaphor) for the church's evangelistic activities and witness in today's society. An imagery, then, that does not postulate a position of normative privilege, presume that we know the spiritual needs of people, nor rests on the assumption that religious faith is regarded as even remotely relevant to the individual. Here it is my understanding that evangelism is more than merely communicating information to a person, or conveying truth, but involves a process of aiding an individual to take (however small) steps towards acknowledging the lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives and aligning their life in accordance with that reality. Here emerging churches remind us that the practice of listening is not only an important but essential missionary practice in today's culture. Following this then, rather than viewing the role of the evangelist as the communicator of truth, a conveyer of information, or a defender of Christian faith, perhaps a more suitable metaphor today is evangelism as 'midwifery'?⁷¹⁴ The role of the midwife, in this metaphor, is not less proactive when compared with traditional images of evangelism, but serve a maieutic function as the Holy Spirit gives birth to faith in Jesus Christ within a person. A maieutic function, or midwife pedagogy (i.e. the 'art of delivery') involves the practice of listening and asking questions, rather than primarily communicating knowledge or providing ready answers.⁷¹⁵ Michael Frost and Christiana Rice, who use the imagery of the midwife extensively in their book *To Alter the World* (2017), write:

Midwives don't actually give birth to anything. They simply assist. We believe God is birthing redemptive realities in our world, and we are summoned to assist in the miracle of new life. The metaphor of the relationship between the midwife and the birthing mother depicts the Spirit of God as the one who carries life, delivers life and sustains life.⁷¹⁶

Describing the role of the midwife, they continue:

She is not a manager of labour and delivery. Rather, she is the opener of doors, the one who releases, the nurturer. She is the strong anchor when there is fear and pain; the skilled friend who is in tune with the rhythms of birth, the mountain tops and chasms, the striving and the triumph.⁷¹⁷

As with any metaphor, there are limitations to this imagery. But it might nevertheless provide a new language and stimulate creativity for the church and individual Christians as they seek to reimagine Christian witness, mission and evangelism in a post-Christian, post-Christendom, post-modern culture.

⁷¹⁴ C.f. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of contextual theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 58.

⁷¹⁵ Theresia Olsson Neve, "Capturing and Analysing Emotions to Support Organisational Learning: The Affect Based Learning Matrix," (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2006), 38.

⁷¹⁶ Michael Frost, and Christiana Rice, *To Alter the World - Partnering with God to rebirth our Communities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017) Kindle edition, 64.

⁷¹⁷ Sheila Kitzinger, quoted in Michael Frost, and Christiana Rice, *Alter the World*, 65.

Chapter 14. Mission as Innovation

The case study data and examination of the wider ECC phenomenon leads me to conclude that the ecclesiological convictions of emerging churches are instrumental in shaping how they understand their missionary calling in the world. For instance, in the previous chapter we established how the commitment to deconstruct unhelpful or deconstructive boundaries - within the church as well as between the church and broader society - formed the basis of their critique of traditional evangelistic practices, leading them to adopt a missionary approach of a witnessing presence in their specific contexts. Similarly, then, this chapter will establish how the ecclesial convictions of innovation and deconstruction serve a similar purpose, arguing that alongside the idea of mission as witnessing presence (addressed above), emerging churches adopt a missionary approach that could be described as 'mission as innovation'.

14.1 Sweden as a 'mission field'

Chapter 1 established that Sweden today is affected by a number of shifts in society that not only impact the church from a structural and organisational perspective, but also shape the place of religion in society, as well as the spirituality, belief systems, world views, lifestyles, and priorities for people. For the most part religion plays a marginal - if not non-existent - part in the lives of Swedish people. In the instances where people actually are religious, they are, by comparison quite different when compared with how religiosity has been expressed in the past in Sweden. During the second half of the 20th century Sweden has become an increasingly pluralistic, multicultural and multi-religious society. In some parts of society, in particular urban multicultural areas, it can be appropriate to speak of a post-secular society where religion has become both a public matter and plays a significant function in the life of the individual. If we disregard the high numbers that belong to the traditional church in terms of formal membership, and only take into account those who view their religious beliefs as important to them and frequently participate in the communal life of the church, we can establish that Christianity is a minority phenomenon in Sweden. Emerging Christians insist that this ought to affect how the churches understand Sweden as context as well as their role and place in society.

There are of course differences between Sweden, a country that has been shaped by the presence of the Christian faith for more than a millennium, and countries in other parts of the world where the gospel and the church are relatively recent phenomena. With that being said, it could be argued that Sweden today can be understood as a *mission field*, where the Christian story and the gospel of Jesus Christ predominately are unknown.⁷¹⁸ The idea that Western culture can be understood as a

⁷¹⁸ Jan Eckerdal, *Kyrka i mission - Att gestalta kristen tro i efterkristen tid* (Stockholm: Verbum AB, 2017), 113. The idea of Sweden as a 'mission field' is also a theme that has been picked up by several mainstream denominations in recent years; e.g. *Vidare*, an project focusing on mission and church

mission context is by no means new. For instance, Lesslie Newbigin (1909 - 1998) developed this idea in his writings, calling for a missionary response to post-Enlightenment western culture, which he understood as “the most resistant to the Gospel of all the cultures which compete for power in our global city.”⁷¹⁹ In his seminal text *Foolishness to the Greeks* (1986), Newbigin wrote:

It would seem, therefore, that there is no higher priority for the research work of missiologists than to ask the question of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and this modern Western culture. Or, to put the matter in a slightly different way, can our experience of missionaries in the cross-cultural transmission of the gospel and the work of theologians who have worked on the question of gospel and culture within the limits of our modern Western culture be usefully brought together to throw light on the central issue I have posed?⁷²⁰

What we see, then, in the advent of emerging Christianity are Christians and local communities of faith that seek to respond to Newbigin’s challenge, by adopting a missionary mind set and identity at home rather than only in mission contexts overseas.

There are several reasons for why it would be appropriate to accept Newbigin’s position when addressing Sweden as context:

- A steady numerical decline of churches and Christians, as well as a steady decline in participation in traditionally Christian practices (e.g. church attendance, baptisms, church weddings, confirmation classes, etc.)
- An increasingly religiously pluralistic and multi-cultural society, where religious beliefs are changing in favour of alternatives rather than traditional Christian confession and doctrine.
- A resistance towards and critique of Christianity as an institution and belief system.

Statistical data of religiosity, church attendance, and the place of the Christian faith in Sweden make it justifiable to assume that churches have found it difficult to respond to and cope with the cultural shifts that have taken place in society during the 20th century and decades after the turn of the millennium. This reality has led emerging churches to adopt a highly critical stance towards the traditional church, as well as deeply innovative and deconstructive approaches to their ecclesiological and missiological practices.

planting in Sweden, supported by The Uniting Church of Sweden, The Evangelical Free Church, The Salvation Army, The Swedish Mission Alliance, The Swedish Evangelical Mission, The Seventh-Day Adventists, OM, Gå ut mission, and Vineyard Sweden. The website states, “Sweden is a mission field and many people do not have a Christian community in their geographical or cultural context.” “FAQ.” Vidare, accessed 23 April, 2019, <http://vidare.nu/faq/>.

⁷¹⁹ Leslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 177-89. This theme has been addressed in detail above, see Chapter 5 and the Missional Stream of the ECC.

⁷²⁰ Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks - The Gospel and Western Culture* (London: SPCK, 1986), 3.

14.2 The place for innovation in mission in Sweden

“Innovation theory”, Paas writes, “often makes a distinction between short-term problems that can be solved using available remedies (adaptions), and long-term challenges for which solutions are still unknown (innovations).”⁷²¹ If we accept this, it seems reasonable to surmise that the challenges presented in contemporary society require predominately innovative responses from the church in Sweden, given the many uncertainties and unknowns that the cultural shifts in society pose to the Christian faith and its ecclesial organisations. Two recent studies of church planting efforts in Sweden since 2000 by the Swedish Evangelical Mission (2017), and Björn Asserhed (2020) reveal that one of the shared motivating factors for people who start new churches is to try new ways of being a Christian community and reach people with the Gospel.⁷²² However, the same studies also showed that few church plants and pioneering projects managed to achieve this; instead they found it difficult to break away from traditional mind-sets, forms, and practices. Furthermore, the data indicated that many of the initiatives struggled to reach new people with the Gospel and saw relatively few converts to the Christian faith. The studies also showed that even though they did manage to reach new people, it was difficult to get them to remain in the community.

The two recent studies may serve as examples of both the need for reimagining church and mission today, and the difficulty it may involve to actually achieve this vision. Although we have established a number of weaknesses in our study of the Emerging Church phenomenon, such as a lack of numerical growth (here traditional church plants and emerging churches seem to share a similar issue), as well as sustainability and longevity problems, one significant contribution to the discourse around mission in post-Christendom and post-modern culture is their innovative approach to ecclesiology and mission. Emerging churches could fulfil the function of a “Research and Development Department” of established churches, which are more prone to ask questions like “what kind of church do we need”, rather than “how many churches”.⁷²³ As with most research and development in secular industries, innovation is no guarantee for success, but it allows for continual learning and progress. Paas also points out that “innovation cannot be planned, but it can be stimulated by cross-fertilization between very different people who share some values, and who recognize each other as partners in a common quest.”⁷²⁴ What inherited churches can do is to *create permission giving environments* where such cross-fertilisation and innovation can take place for the purpose of mission, church

⁷²¹ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 224.

⁷²² Björn Asserhed, *Församling som mission - Berättelser från elva församlingsplanteringar i Sverige 2000-2020* (Vidare, February 2020), an interview based study of the experiences of 11 church plants from various denominations and movements in Sweden between 2000 and 2020, as well as an unpublished study by the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), which included interviews of 40 church plants part of SEM that started between 2007 and 2017. The SEM study was presented by Martin Alexandersson (national coordinator for church planting, SEM) at a symposium hosted by *Vidare* in Stockholm, 18 February 2020.

⁷²³ C.f. Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 38, 195.

⁷²⁴ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 230.

revitalising, and church planting.⁷²⁵

To emerging Christians, while the cultural shifts we are experiencing in society can be perceived as unsettling and involve uncertainty, and at times be painful for the church, it is can also become a place of hope, creativity, and opportunity. In his study of the ECC, Robert Doornenbal notes that the abundant use of metaphors among emerging Christians to describe these shifts, could be used as a heuristic instrument that “can help us discover new or different aspects of reality.”⁷²⁶ From this perspective, cultural change is not to be viewed as a threat, but may be understood a hermeneutical tool holding redemptive and liberating capacities. Ian M. Randall echoes this sentiment in the text *Mission in post-Christendom: Anabaptist and Free Church perspectives* (2007), quoting Douglas John Hall’s statement in *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (1995): “the challenge for the church is to see its relative ‘powerlessness’ as something that offers ‘a creative opportunity for change and renewal’.”⁷²⁷ Borrowing the words of Walter Brueggemann, Stuart Murray calls for an advocacy of ‘poetic ministry’, or ‘poetic imagination’, in order for the church to rediscover its place in post-Christendom. He writes,

Such poets are not mystical dreamers but exercise prophetic and apostolic roles. Post-Christendom, according to Alan Roxburgh, ‘requires leaders whose identity is formed by tradition rather than culture. It also requires leaders who listen to the voices on the edge. This is where the apostle, the prophet, and the poet are found. We need neglected apostolic and prophetic roles restored to the church - men and women with poetic and storytelling gifts, stirring our memories of who we are and inspiring creative and adventurous discipleship.’⁷²⁸

Continuing with Walter Brueggemann, then, theologically speaking we may understand this as a ministry of *prophetic imagination*. Brueggemann, using the Exodus and the Moses movement as context for his discussion, writes that prophetic imagination includes two aspects:

On the one hand, Moses intended the dismantling of the oppressive empire of Pharaoh; on the other hand, he intended the formation of a new community focused on the religion of God’s freedom and the politics of justice and compassion. The dismantling begins in the groans and complaints of the people; the energizing begins in the doxologies of the new community.⁷²⁹

For the purpose of this discussion, the structure that is dismantled here is not the “oppressive empire of Pharaoh”, but rather the institutional forms and philosophical assumptions of Christendom. We can observe this dynamic of dismantling and energising in the Emerging Church phenomenon, where emerging churches seek to

⁷²⁵ In his book, Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*. borrows from innovation theory by highlighting three ‘biotopes for renewal’: Free Havens, Laboratories, and Incubators.

⁷²⁶ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 129.; E.g. Here Doornenbal looks at Brian McLaren’s influential book *The Church on the Other Side* (2000), where we find metaphorical language such as transition zone, tectonic activity, threshold, surviving, time warps, new world, etc. Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 123.

⁷²⁷ Ian M. Randall, “Mission,” 230.

⁷²⁸ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 278.

⁷²⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd edition* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2001), 115. Emphasis original.

deconstruct ecclesial forms, practices and doctrines shaped by a Christendom paradigm, whilst reimagining themselves as Christian community in a diverse and pluralistic post-Christendom culture. This innovative approach to ecclesiology, mission and spirituality is a significant contribution to the theological and missiological discourse concerning the future of the church in Sweden.

14.3 Innovation through contextualisation

As an international discourse, the ECC has been influenced by the works of theologians and missiologists such as Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, Darrell Guder, Vincent Donovan, and Roland Allen.⁷³⁰ In the case of the case study data we can observe that they are committed to the idea that the Christian faith, community, spirituality, and mission has to be fleshed out, take root and be shaped from *within* a specific context, rather than being imported from the outside.⁷³¹ To emerging Christians, proximity is essential if the Gospel is to become intelligible and credible in today's postmodern and post-Christendom cultures. Adopting contextual approaches to Christian faith and community is the *modus operandi* of emerging churches, whether it be Christian theology (The Emergent Theological Stream), practices of liturgy and worship (The Alternative Worship Stream), an emphasis on the local community and responding to challenges of the urban poor and marginalised (The Neo-Monastic Stream), or a missional ecclesiology shaped by an innovative and experimentative mind set (The Missional Stream).⁷³² Similar observations have been made in other studies of emerging churches in other parts of the world.⁷³³ Darren Cronshaw notes that

The literature, and emerging churches which have adopted EMC thinking, emphasise that innovation is essential for contemporary Western post-Christendom society. They see the missionary position of the church in the West as situated between its cultural context and the gospel, which calls for innovation. There are elements of the gospel and church which should remain unchanged, but the forms in which they are expressed call for innovation

⁷³⁰ C.f. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 136.; James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals*, LOC 320.; Darren Cronshaw, "Shaping," 38.; Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger (2005), p. 49; Mark Driscoll, "Pastoral perspective," 88.; Ben Edson, "An Exploration into the Missiology of the Emerging Church in the UK through the Narrative of Sanctus1," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian faith* 6, no. 1 (2006), 32.

⁷³¹ I understand context as a complex concept, which comprise a number of realities: The experience of a person's or group's *personal life* (e.g. success, failure, deaths, moments of tragedy and joy, relationships, etc); a person's or a community's *social location* (e.g. male or female, rich or poor, at the centre or at the margins of power, ethnicity, etc); the reality of *social change*; as well as *culture*. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 5-6. I also believe that Robert Schreiter's definition of culture is helpful here, understood as including three dimensions of human experience: 1) Culture is *ideational*, providing a grid by which the world can be interpreted and lived out; 2) culture is *performance*, meaning that every culture has rituals by which the worldview can be expressed and by which the members of said culture can be bound together; and 3) culture is *material*, which includes aspects such as language, food, clothing, music, art, and the like. C.f. Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 29.

⁷³² See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion on the Four Streams of the Emerging Church.

⁷³³ C.f. Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*.; Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*.; Terrance S. Steele, "The Missiology of Emerging Church in Portland, Oregon," (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, May 2012).; Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*.; Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*.

for different contexts.⁷³⁴

In an attempt to summarise the vision of emerging Christianity, Kester Brewin writes: “rather than trying to import culture into church and make it ‘cool’, we need instead to become ‘wombs of the divine’ and completely rebirth the Church into a host culture.”⁷³⁵ In his book *emergingchurch.intro* (2004), Michael Moynagh similarly took the view that emerging churches do

not parachute a set model of church on to people: it is church from below. It starts not with a preconceived notion of church, but with the desire to express church in the culture of the group involved. It is church shaped by context, not by “This is how we have always done it.”⁷³⁶

The call for culturally authentic expressions of church, incarnational mission, and the cultural embodiment of faith are echoed across the Emerging Church spectrum. In Western societies characterised by church decline and the marginalisation of the Christian faith, many emerging Christians identify with the role of the missionary. It is not assumed that inherited and traditional forms, practices, language, and spirituality makes sense to people today; instead they adopt innovative and deconstructive practices to make Christian faith and community intelligible and accessible to people in meaningful and deep ways. Here my observation is that contextualisation plays a significant part. In fact, *contextualisation seems to be one of the most significant ways that emerging churches innovate and deconstruct traditional forms and practices.*

The contextual approaches among emerging churches may differ, and a more comprehensive discussion around this theme will be left for the chapter 15. At this point it is sufficient to note that, some emerging churches adopt more traditional evangelical approaches to contextualisation, whilst other emerging Christians are motivated to go further, pushing the boundaries of what can be considered acceptable contextual practices within post-modern and post-Christendom cultures without falling into the trap of syncretism. In our discussion regarding different types of emerging churches, and the Stetzer-McKnight Typology in particular (See chapter 11 above), we established that the ECC can be understood as a spectrum of views, where contextual forms and practices is one differentiating factor when comparing individual communities. Here, the ECC echoes the international missiological debates of the 1960’s and 1970’s concerning the nature and boundaries of Christian mission. John Drane writes:

The emerging church reminds us that the debates over Gospel and culture are far from over, and in fact may just be beginning. The categories set out by Richard Niebuhr are no longer adequate for a post-modern, post-Christian, and post-secular culture. In the last 20 years, missiologists have introduced the language of contextualisation, arguing that the incarnational nature of the Gospel requires that it assume a different form in different cultural circumstances. Emerging church people (like the majority of the population) just

⁷³⁴ Darren Cronshaw, “Shaping,” 253-54.

⁷³⁵ Kester Brewin, *Complex Christ*, 70.

⁷³⁶ Michael Moynagh, *emergingchurch.intro*, 11.

take the culture for granted.⁷³⁷

To the four groups which are part of this study, cultural sensitivity and authenticity are integral components to congregational life and mission: Tribe in relation to youth and club culture; Underground Church in relation to the alternative music scene in Gothenburg; and H2O in their embracing of a fluid and networked structure and ministry approach, emphasising dialogue, process and openness as they seek to engage with postmodern culture. Oikos stands out in this regard, seemingly engaging in a double contextualisation; both in terms of the local multicultural context of Hammarkullen (e.g. expressed in their commitment to reconciliation, social justice, peace-making and building relational bridges to people who part of other cultures and faith communities) as well as postmodern culture (e.g. expressed in their eclectic mind-set and ecclesial practices, embracing feminist critique, flat leadership structures, as well as openness and dialogue). One participant explained that those who are part of Oikos seek

to embody the Gospel in their everyday lives, it has to be incarnated and born from within every new time and culture. Theology is a conversation about the Bible, God and the Church, and it is a work in progress, something which is expressed in our community. We are shifting from a unified society marked by the Christian faith, to a pluralistic society. How we as Christians can live in the world, in our society, in our local community are questions we try to find an answer to.⁷³⁸

This mind set was echoed by the other groups as well. For instance, one participant from H2O reflected on the contextual approach of their church in the following way, stating that

If a group in Papua New Guinea comes to [faith in] Jesus, are they to sing Vineyard songs? Or are they to write their own songs or develop their own forms of worship? If people come to faith in Jesus in Angered, are they to sing Vineyard songs? Or are they to develop their own forms to worship Jesus? I really don't want to shape anything for their sake, just give enough inspiration and help so that they start to develop [forms of worship] themselves. I believe that this will make it easier to reach out to their friends, contacts, families, etc.⁷³⁹

Emerging churches, then, may not only serve as incubators for innovation and experimentation to traditional churches and established denominations, but potentially may serve as important places for learning what contextualisation might look like within a Swedish context. Emerging churches bring to attention skills and practices that the church in the West has previously used to equip and train missionaries with for the purpose of overseas ministry but may now serve as an important component in the church's endeavour to innovate new expressions of faith, community, and mission at home.

⁷³⁷ John Drane, "Editorial," 7.

⁷³⁸ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

⁷³⁹ H2O Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

14.4 What do we mean by Contextualisation?

Contextualisation as a missiological theme began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s and is - in brief - concerned with the dynamic process of attempting "to understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular context."⁷⁴⁰ Although Shoki Coe and Aharoan Sapsezian, at the time directors of the Theological Education Fund of the WCC, are credited with coining the term in 1972, the overall theme had been developing in Roman Catholic circles after the Vatican Council II and through the emergence of liberation theologies in Latin America. We can also note developments within the Protestant tradition in the wake of conciliar ecumenical debates concerning the nature of Christian mission, and the relationship between the church, society, and the Kingdom of God.⁷⁴¹ In the post-colonial world that emerged after World War II, new questions began to be asked by the "new churches" in the southern hemisphere and among marginalised peoples of Europe and North America. Robert J. Schreiter notes that "a new Christian identity" started to develop that was sensitive to three areas in particular: context, procedure, and history.⁷⁴² Rather than taking theology for granted or applying received theology to a local context, these developments called for a careful examination of the context itself, attentive not only to cultural aspects such as language, rituals, beliefs and worldview, but also issues of power, social change, injustice and conflict.⁷⁴³

David Bosch writes, "Contextual theologies claim that they constitute an epistemological break when compared with traditional theologies."⁷⁴⁴ The old paradigm, according to advocates of contextual theologies, meant that "theology was conducted *from above* as an elitist enterprise ... [and] its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) was *philosophy*, and its main interlocutor the *educated non-believer*", whilst "contextual theology is theology '*from below*,' 'from the underside of history,' its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) is the *social sciences*, and its main interlocutor the *poor* or the *culturally marginalized*".⁷⁴⁵ In *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002), Bevans echoes this viewpoint that with the introduction of contextualisation in contemporary theological discourse we now understand "the nature of theology in a new way."⁷⁴⁶ Instead of primarily being concerned with two theological sources, Scripture and Tradition, we now recognise present human experience and context as a third valid source for theological reflection and inquiry. Doing contextual theology, then, means taking two things into account: First, "the faith experience of the *past* that is recorded in scriptures and kept alive ... in tradition", and second, "the experience of the present, the *context*."⁷⁴⁷

At the time the term quickly began to be promoted among conciliar ecumenicals,

⁷⁴⁰ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 3.

⁷⁴¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 2.; and A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 34.

⁷⁴² Robert J. Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, 2-3.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming*, 433.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis original.

⁷⁴⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 3.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5. Emphasis original.

whilst evangelicals remained suspicious, associating it with the shift in focus from evangelism to the struggle for social justice and the call to “let the world set the agenda”, promulgated within WCC circles in the 1960’s. With that being said, by the end of the 1970’s “the term would find a home in ecumenical circles *and* evangelical discussion and thinking, though with very different understandings.”⁷⁴⁸ The underlying tensions were: different hermeneutical perspectives, understanding of God’s revelation, and the authority of Scripture and tradition over against context and human experience. This is relevant to our discussion, as a similar tension can be observed when studying the developments of the ECC and the critique of emerging Christianity among conservative evangelicals. In this case, however, the dividing line does not separate ecumenical Protestantism and evangelicalism, but has created a partition within evangelical tradition itself. David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, outlining the boundaries for evangelical contextual theology, write

Biblical authority, limitarianism, Great Commission mission, world evangelization, the necessity of conversion - such are the points of departure for the church’s mission to the world and they must be the foundation for any discussion of contextualization of the gospel.⁷⁴⁹

The positive view of culture among many emerging Christians, with ecclesiological convictions such as openness and inclusion, the adoption of porous boundaries between church and society, along with their deconstructive and innovative approach to the Christian faith has become a concern within conservative evangelical circles.⁷⁵⁰ The disagreement is not whether contextualisation is a necessary or positive aspect of genuine Christian mission, but how one understands the boundaries for orthodox Christian faith and practice. This is not to say that the evangelical understanding of contextual theology is homogenous, but rather that it has historically been guided by a number of chief concerns. It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a full and in depth account of the developments in evangelical contextual theology, but if scholars such as Bruce J. Nicholls, David J. Hesselgrave, and Paul G. Hiebert represent a more conservative or critical approach, then Charles H. Kraft, an influential and prominent evangelical missiologist, can represent the more progressive side of evangelical thinking and practice. Kraft builds, for example, his contextual model on the assumption that revelation is a dynamic process (rather than static information content) as well as the position that religious cultural structures are neutral; what is of concern is the *meaning* that people construct and attach to these structures, not the structures in and of themselves.⁷⁵¹ We can note a correspondence between Kraft and the ECC here, but not all evangelicals would agree with his position.

Historically speaking contextualisation, then, is a relatively recent theme in the

⁷⁴⁸ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 34-35. Emphasis original.

⁷⁴⁹ David J. Hesselgrave, and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 52.

⁷⁵⁰ This tension is, for example, addressed in Chapter 11 above where I discuss The Stetzer-McKnight Typology.

⁷⁵¹ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 59, 89.

development of theological discourse. And although it today may be considered commonplace in academic inquiry and discussion, it is perhaps less so in the day to day lives of local Christian communities in Sweden. Church Growth Theory, together with “seeker sensitive” churches like Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago, USA, introduced an awareness of social context, the use of language, and the need for churches to address life situations of ordinary people in relevant ways.⁷⁵² With the ECC we can observe the advent of an even deeper engagement with context in more radical and deconstructive ways. To emerging churches, then, contextualisation is not merely a way to become more “relevant” to people, but to critically examine our understanding of what church can be within contemporary society.

14.5 An alternative score card

The issue of innovation in mission and church planting in Sweden leaves us with the question of what kind of categories best can be applied when evaluating our efforts, and what can constitute as successes in the church’s missionary endeavours? From the perspective of Church Growth Theory (CGT), it could be argued that the emerging churches which are part of this study lack the results we look for today in terms of mission and church planting. In terms of quantitative results, three of the four groups saw little growth in terms of seeing new people become Christians.⁷⁵³ In fact, the interview material revealed that numerical growth was of little or no concern for the groups. This does not, however, mean that the participants did not want to see new people becoming Christians, but that numerical growth for the sake of growing the *community* bigger had little priority. This could be considered a complete contradiction to CGT, which has influenced a large part of church planting and church development thinking in Sweden to date. According to Stefan Paas, CGT is built on three premises: First, the purpose of mission is growth; second, church planting is the best method for church growth, and third, we should plant many new churches.⁷⁵⁴ From the perspective of CGT, then, where quantitative growth is the primary motivator and purpose for mission, emerging churches could be considered a failure: they lack any substantial growth in terms of new believers, and they lack sustainability and longevity. Although, as already has been noted in this study, these are issues that need to be addressed for the future of emerging Christianity in Sweden, we may also question both the theological and pragmatic premises of CGT. Is growth the *only*

⁷⁵² C.f. Paul G. Hiebert, “An Evaluation of Church Growth,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2016). For a more detailed discussion on Church Growth Theory see Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*. Paas writes, “Church Growth Theory (CGT) originated in the 1950s, as a response to the challenge of rapid world evangelization, and on the basis of Donald McGavran’s reflection on people movements in India and Africa”, and it has since then come to influence most of the Protestant thinking around church in North America Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 113. For a presentation of Willow Creek Community Church and the Willow Creek Association, see <https://willowcreek.com/Member>.

⁷⁵³ In fact, in the chapters presenting the results of the case studies (Chapters 7-10) we noted that numerical growth was of little or no concern for the groups. This does not imply that the participants did not want to see new people become Christians and begin to follow Jesus, but numerical growth of the *community* had little priority.

⁷⁵⁴ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 113-14.

purpose for mission? The eschatological vision of the Bible is that all peoples and all nations will bow before Jesus Christ, and Paas describes this “as the ultimate purpose of mission.”⁷⁵⁵ Paas continues,

The ruling desire of CGT - a church that fills the world - does not seem to motivate the New Testament very much. Time and again, Jesus and the apostles speak of the church as “salt,” “light,” a “pilgrim people,” a “colony of heaven,” the “first fruits,” a “little flock,” “resident aliens,” and so forth. The New Testament images of the church do not convey a community that is destined to somehow rule the world or include it, but a community that leads a precarious life within the world.⁷⁵⁶

Jesus never promises the disciples success in terms of numerical growth, rather he tells them the world will insult and persecute them (Matthew 5). The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13, and Mark 4) tells us that, even if we spread the word of the gospel as far and as wide as possible, there will always be people that reject the message of Jesus. Paas points out that the “fierce pragmatism” of the CGT and its obsession with numerical growth risks reducing people to objects to be converted as well as “neglecting other dimensions of growth, such as discipleship.”⁷⁵⁷ One issue here, which affects our discussion about success in mission from an evangelical perspective, is that questioning CGT can be interpreted as the rejection of the idea of growing churches, or the multiplication of new Christian communities. Paul G. Hiebert writes,

Church Growth theories are presented as facts, and not open to debate and revision. One is either “for” or “against” the movement. To raise serious questions about parts of it is interpreted as a rejection of the whole of the movement’s findings. A second reason it is hard to critique the CGM is that its goals are good. It calls us back to evangelism and church planting. To question its methods is often seen as questioning its goals.⁷⁵⁸

There is nothing in the interview material that would support the idea that the groups which were part of this study rejected growth in terms of bringing people into faith in Jesus, or growing churches, and neither did they seem to reject the idea of the planting of new Christian communities. In fact, Tribe was strongly motivated by the idea to see more followers of Jesus within the youth cultures of Stockholm; H2O expressed a clear commitment for the people they met to not only encounter God as a spiritual experience, but to become followers of Jesus - who in turn made new followers of Jesus, and, ultimately established new Christians communities themselves. One of the main purposes for Underground Church’s existence was for people who were part of the alternative subcultures of Gothenburg to know Jesus. But, again, this was not necessarily connected with the idea of growing their communities bigger as an end goal in itself. Nor was growth the only way to measure success. One participant from Oikos explained:

Of course there is a vision of people getting to know Christ and God. For people to know

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁷⁵⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, “Evaluation,” 78.

that he is searching for them and already is present in their lives. And clearly I believe in the Oikos' way of functioning as church. But at the same time, if people find a faith [in God] there are also other churches that can receive them.⁷⁵⁹

The interview material here points to a radically different score card in relation to how to measure success in mission, and on a deeper level, a different ecclesiological telos compared with evangelical Protestant church culture, which partly is influenced by the late 20th century church growth paradigm. Paas notes a similar distinction in *Church Planting in the Secular West* (2016), where emerging Christians criticise the institutionalisation and rationalisation of evangelical churches, and where

Modernity is stereotypically characterized by an obsession with technique and science, by addiction to certainty and absolute knowledge, by model-thinking and rationalistic strategies, and by analysis as its favorite form of thought. Post-moderns, on the other hand, are reluctant to accept encompassing theories, claims for absolute truths, black-and-white distinctions, and the submission of people to structures and systems. They focus on mystery, relationships, multisensory communication, bottom-up networking, and personal authenticity. Consequently, those who have been impressed by the post-modern take on the crisis of Christianity generally advocate strategies that focus on de-institutionalization (creating a "movement"), solidarity with the poor and marginalized, and the selective restoration of ancient "embodied" liturgical practices.⁷⁶⁰

Church planting and the creation of new and emerging expressions of Christian community within the changing cultural landscape in Sweden may serve as laboratories of renewal for the established church.⁷⁶¹ The metaphor of scientific discovery and experimentation is in fact an appropriate metaphor to our discussion. The first step in natural scientific method when encountering a previously unexplored field of study is to test all available known methods; if those fail, the next step is to employ previously unexplored approaches, which may also involve creating for science completely new and previously unknown methods. It seems reasonable to argue that the church in Sweden is experiencing a similar situation; the deep shifts in society have created a previously unknown cultural situation for the church, and as our available ecclesiological forms and missiological methods seem to produce little tangible results, the church is faced with a pioneering situation that requires - in a Swedish context - altogether new methods and models. In this situation learning from both the failure and successes of emerging and new Christian communities can be regarded as a success in itself, as well as creating learning environments to train and equip the next generation of pioneers, qualitative growth in discipleship, and obedience to God's calling. The studies have also uncovered new questions that need to be asked in the light of the changing cultural and religious landscape in Sweden, encouraging a culture of risk taking and permission to try new ideas within traditional churches and denominational structures. With that being said, this does not invalidate the place of CGT in mission and church planting. It is my assumption that both paradigms have the potential of not only functioning side by side as parallel processes within the church, but may in fact thrive in a symbiotic relationship, where

⁷⁵⁹ Oikos participant 2, 8 June 2010.

⁷⁶⁰ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 187-88.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

CGT holds emerging Christianity to account with an emphasis strategy, growth, and evaluation, and emerging churches asks deeper ecclesiological and missiological questions much needed in today's mission context.

Chapter 15. Mission as The Pursuit of Cultural Proximity

In the light of what we have uncovered in chapter 12, the groups which are part of this study resemble what Keith Jones refers to as “gathering churches”. These kinds of churches, Jones writes, are porous communities that “have an ecclesiology which is focused on the committed core as the ‘church’, but have an open attitude to those who are seekers, or ‘catechumens’, as the early church came to describe them.”⁷⁶² Jones continues,

Whilst the edges of the Church might be porous, allowing people to come close and sample the life of the community, the attractiveness of the koinonia experienced will undoubtedly rest on there being a core of those in the Church who are very committed to each other.⁷⁶³

Rather than establishing absolute boundaries between the church and society, emerging churches value authenticity, presence and a *pursuit of proximity* that can be expressed in a number of ways: by emphasising the need for genuine and authentic everyday relationships (relational proximity), by valuing local presence (geographical proximity), as well as contextually appropriate forms of church and mission (cultural proximity). The interview material revealed a conviction that proximity is essential if the Gospel is to become intelligible and credible in today’s post-modern and post-Christendom cultures.

In previous chapters I have critically examined the case study data in light of ecclesiological and missiological considerations: In Chapter 12 I established that emerging churches share a number of convictions that shape their ecclesial hermeneutic: *Relational ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion*, as well as *Innovation and deconstruction*. This convictional set, then, is expressed in a desire to *deconstruct unhelpful or destructive boundaries* - both within the church and between the church and broader society - that have come to shape evangelical Protestant church culture. In subsequent chapters I explored how these ecclesiological characteristics shape and inform emerging churches from a missiological perspective. Two themes so far have been addressed: mission as a witnessing presence (chapter 13), and mission as innovation (chapter 14). In these previous chapters I also introduced two concepts deduced from the missiological approaches of emerging churches, which in turn can contribute towards articulating a missiological framework for churches in Sweden in contemporary society: evangelism as midwifery, as well as prophetic imagination.

This chapter explores a third missiological theme, emerging from the ecclesiological convictions of the groups which are part of this study: mission as

⁷⁶² Keith G. Jones, “Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional Koinonia,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 4, no. 2 (January 2004), 8. C.f. Parush R. Parushev, “Gathered, Gathering, Porous - Reflections on the nature of baptistic community,” *Baptistic Theologies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 35-52.

⁷⁶³ Keith G. Jones, “Towards,” 8.; C.f. Lloyd Chia, “Emerging,” 131.

cultural proximity⁷⁶⁴, and the contextual approaches adopted by the emerging churches which are part of this study. For this purpose I will use as starting point the categories presented in Stephen Bevans' widely read book *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002).⁷⁶⁵ My reasons for this are twofold: First, although a Roman Catholic theologian, Bevans' work has been widely read well beyond his theological tradition, and his models of contextual theology are today the most commonly used categories adopted by missiologists, including evangelical scholars.⁷⁶⁶ Second, Bevans models have already been used when discussing the contextual practices of emerging churches.⁷⁶⁷ With that being said, contributions by other scholars will at times be included in the discussion for the purpose of deepening the analysis. The chapter also includes a critical examination of the contextual approaches of emerging churches from an evangelical perspective. This discussion is concluded by a presentation of an emerging *critical* model of contextualisation, which is constructed by a synthesis of traditional evangelical contextual method - inherently critical of context - and an emerging contextual method, which is critical to received Christian tradition, whilst at the same time being decidedly positive and receptive to culture and human experience.

15.1 Models of Contextual Theology

Since the introduction of the term in the 1970s many attempts have been made to present models and approaches that outline how the church engages in contextual theological reflection and practice.⁷⁶⁸ Some of these models are prescriptive in character and are written from the viewpoint of a particular theological perspective, such as evangelical theology, liberation theology, Asian theology, feminist theology, etc. Other accounts are descriptive, attempting to map out approaches from a number of different, and at times opposing, theological traditions and viewpoints. As already noted above, for the purpose of this study and analysis of the case study material, I have chosen to primarily use Stephen Bevans' categories presented in *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002).⁷⁶⁹

In his book Bevans presents two basic theological orientations that have particular relevance for how we approach and articulate our contextual theology. The first orientation Bevans refers to as "creation-centred", which views context and human experience as essentially good. The world is certainly not perfect or without sin according to this approach, but Bevans writes

⁷⁶⁴ This chapter addresses cultural proximity in particular. The idea of relational proximity corresponds with the relational ecclesiology explored in chapter 12 above.

⁷⁶⁵ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*.

⁷⁶⁶ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 28, 37.

⁷⁶⁷ C.f. Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*.

⁷⁶⁸ It is beyond the scope of this study to present a comprehensive account, but from an evangelical perspective see the works of Charles H. Kraft, Harvie M. Conn, Paul G. Hiebert, Bruce J. Nicholls, Bruce C. E. Fleming, Charles Van Engen, David J. Hesselgrave, Dean Gilliland, A. Scott Moreau, and Marc Cortez; also, the models presented by Stephen B. Bevans and Robert J. Schreiter have been widely used well beyond Roman Catholic circles.

⁷⁶⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*.

A creation-centered orientation sees the world, creation, as sacramental: the world is a place where God reveals Godself; revelation does not happen in set-apart, particularly holy places, in strange, unworldly circumstances, or in words that are spoken in stilted voice; it comes in daily life, in ordinary words, through ordinary people ... Creation-centered theology approaches life with an analogical, not a dialectical, spirit or imagination and sees a continuity between human existence and divine revelation.⁷⁷⁰

The second orientation, a “redemption-centred theology”, is guided by the conviction

that culture and human experience are either in need of a radical transformation or in need of total replacement ... Rather than being a vehicle for God’s presence, the world distorts God’s reality and rebels against it. Rather than a culture being already holy with the presence of God, Christ must be brought to a culture for that culture to have any saving meaning whatsoever.⁷⁷¹

The categories Bevans presents here are useful for a discussion of the contextual approaches of emerging churches on a fundamental level. We may note here that these categories describe *orientation*, and although Bevans does not explicitly describe the two orientations in this way, for the purpose of this study I will apply them as a *dynamic spectrum* rather than static categories, illustrated as follows (figure 13):

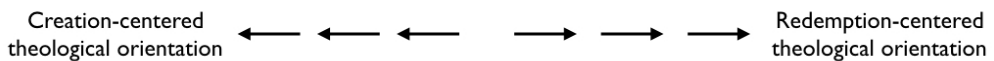


Figure 13. Illustration of the Creation-centred and Redemption-centred theological orientation as dynamic spectrum⁷⁷²

Using the categories in this way, one can either lean more towards one end of the spectrum or the other, which according to Bevans “will have many ramifications in terms of the contextualization of theology”.⁷⁷³

Bevans maps out six models in his book: Translation, Anthropological, Praxis, Synthetic, Transcendental, and Countercultural (See figure 14 below). The models are categorised on the basis of how they relate to four main themes significant to contextual theology: theological method, basic theological orientation, criteria for orthodoxy, and cultural identity and change.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., 21-22.

⁷⁷² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 21-22.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁷⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models.*, p. 16; C.f. A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 37.

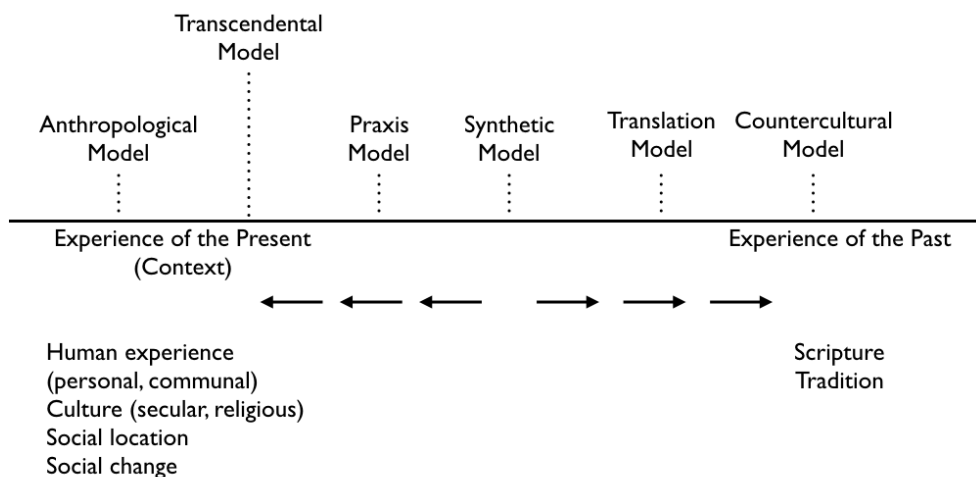


Figure 14. Bevans' Map of Models of Contextual Theology⁷⁷⁵

Bevans' map outlines how the six contextual models relate to two ends of a spectrum; experience of the *present* (context) and experience of the past (Scripture and tradition). Bevans explains that each model "presents a different way of theologising that takes a particular context seriously, and so each represents a distinct theological starting point and distinct theological presuppositions."⁷⁷⁶ At one end of the spectrum we have the anthropological model (sometimes referred to as the indigenisation model or ethnographic model)⁷⁷⁷, whose chief concern "is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith."⁷⁷⁸ Being at the far left of the spectrum where human experience, culture, and social change serve as the primary source for God's revelation, context is approached as essentially good. At the other end of the spectrum we find the translation as well as the counter-cultural models. Translation implies taking the supracultural message of the gospel (similar to a 'kernel'), "translating the *meaning* of doctrines into another cultural context - and this translation might make those doctrines look and sound quite different from their original formulation."⁷⁷⁹ An underlying assumption of the translation model is that the Gospel always brings something completely new to a particular context, and not everything in the receiving culture is automatically good.⁷⁸⁰ The counter-cultural model goes even further in this regard, expressing a radical ambiguity and insufficiency of human context. The task of the church, according to the counter-cultural model, is to be an alternative, or contrast, community in the world, and works

⁷⁷⁵ Adapted from Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 32.

⁷⁷⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 31.

⁷⁷⁷ C.f. A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 39.

⁷⁷⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 54.

⁷⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 39. Emphasis mine. Many thinkers and practitioners who utilise this model have been influenced by Charles H. Kraft's idiomatic approach, often referred to as "dynamic equivalence".

⁷⁸⁰ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 40-43.

on the basic premise that the gospel always presents a challenge to human experience.⁷⁸¹

Before we continue our inquiry, I will make a few comments on how we are to approach Bevans' map of contextual theology. First, we need to bear in mind that a model is an artificial construction and a simplification meant to help us handle concepts that in reality are a great deal more complex.⁷⁸² We might recognise ourselves in one particular model, even though not all conditions apply to us. We might also recognise the validity of aspects of other models, even though one model in particular applies to compared to other models. Furthermore, we do well by not viewing the models in too static categories or valuing one model above the others (at least that is not how Bevans make us of the model)⁷⁸³. Instead we can approach this model as process (i.e. we can move from one model to the other as we engage with the context, and our theology and practices develop). In the light of this we should not expect the emerging churches part of this study fit in too neatly in one specific model, whilst expressing no shared features with any other model.

15.2 Emerging churches and culture

In the light of Bevans' models, it is of value to examine how emerging churches relate to culture and human experience. For example, can we say anything here regarding their orientation towards either a creation-centred or redemption-centred theology? Understanding more of how emerging churches view culture provides important insights into their contextual practices.

A useful theoretical concept which addresses this is the idea of *transforming secular space*. The theme was identified by Ryan K. Bolger and Eddie Gibbs in their study *Emerging Churches* (2005), as one of three core characteristics of emerging churches:

Emerging churches tear down the church practices that foster a mind-set, namely, that there are secular spaces, times, or activities. To emerging churches, all of life must be made sacred. ... there are no longer any bad places, bad people, or bad times. All can be made holy. All can be given to God in worship. All modern dualism can be overcome.⁷⁸⁴

Underlying this theme is the critique of what is perceived as a dualistic mind-set within evangelical Protestant church culture; e.g. the division between the natural and supernatural, individual and community, mind and body, public and private, belief and action, as well as a secular-sacred understanding of the world. Emerging Christians view the sacred-secular divide as a product of modernity that, in the words of James Bielo, "fails to take seriously both the lordship of Jesus Christ over the entire world and the kingdom living that lordship justifies and invites."⁷⁸⁵ Instead they engage in a process of sacralisation by "making all life sacred". As one leader from

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 120-22.

⁷⁸² Ibid., 29.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 139-40.

⁷⁸⁴ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 66-67.

⁷⁸⁵ James S. Bielo, "Emerging Church," 26.; C.f. Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 65-88.

Tribe said, reflecting on the experiences of gathering as a worshipping community at a café during normal opening hours:

Several people in our community were of the opinion that, “these things you only do in a church”. They didn’t know what to do at the café, couldn’t relax. Be open to be prayed for and open up about what is going on in their lives. But we saw a change in them [after some time]. Now they are open to these things, regardless of where they are. We broke down the wall of what is Christian and not Christian, the idea that we do certain things in one place and not the other. That life with God is everywhere, all the time. That was the biggest fruit of that, it shaped our way of thinking.⁷⁸⁶

Within the wider ECC this mind set is perhaps most clearly expressed in the Alternative Worship movement that emerged during the 1990’s in the United Kingdom and then spread to places such as New Zealand and the United States in the years before the turn of the millennium,⁷⁸⁷ shaping both ECC as an international grassroots conversation, as well as the missionary practices of local emerging congregations. The rejection of the secular-sacred divide and the deconstruction of boundaries between church and wider society affects the way emerging churches interact and engage with the world; instead of adopting a defensive and reactive stance towards culture, emerging Christians seek to engage culture as insiders, acknowledging that all of life can be put under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and all of life can, at least to some extent, help us grow in our faith and deepen our understanding of God. Quoting Jonny Baker, founder of the alternative worship community Grace in London, UK, Bolger and Gibbs write,

God is encountered in the stuff of everyday life, not outside it. So worship makes two moves: It brings the real world into church, and it enables God to be encountered back in the real world. This is a direct challenge to an experience of a church as a world apart, unrelated to the rest of life.⁷⁸⁸

Marti and Ganiel noted in their study that this longing to overcome the secular-sacred divide is expressed in a number of ways among emerging Christians; for example by intentionally using secular meeting spaces, emphasising the importance of orthopraxy and the way that they live their lives outside of church gathering, developing a more integrated theology of work and vocation, and rejecting inauthentic approaches to evangelism.⁷⁸⁹ This is echoed in the findings in this study; e.g. the blending of church and club culture, the use of secular meeting spaces, the use of secular music and artistic expressions, adopting spiritual practices that integrate everyday life and Christian faith. The interview participants expressed no need nor no desire to separate between worldly and spiritual categories. Also, their commitment to deconstruct boundaries between church and society has been addressed in detail above (See chapter 12). All four groups expressed a commitment for faith and Christian community to emerge from *within* culture, resonating with the idea of transforming rather than replacing secular culture - or secular space - with the

⁷⁸⁶ Tribe participant 1, 24 September 2010.

⁷⁸⁷ For a detailed discussion on the Alternative Worship movement, see Section 5.2 above.

⁷⁸⁸ Eddie Gibbs, and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 75.

⁷⁸⁹ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 130-135, 158.

Gospel.

The participants at times expressed an ambivalence towards their contexts, whether it be the negative aspects of youth culture, the messiness of young peoples' lives, segregation in society, socio economic issues, violence, and marginalisation, or attitudes and lifestyles anti-ethical to Christian values in alternative subcultures. With that being said, it was not the case that the groups were unaware of negative and problematic elements in their specific contexts, but this did not affect a predominately positive view of culture. In fact, the participants expressed a notable openness to their context, and made very little distinction between what could be considered Christian or a "worldly". As one leader of Tribe explained:

The girl that shows up with a punk rock attitude, I want her to stay punk but to love Jesus. To have her heart changed. ... I would say that in terms of music and culture, and we have punks here and all these different expressions, there is nothing that really goes against Christian beliefs. These are all creative expressions, a kind of identity that is expressed aesthetically. Of course, there are values that create a tension [with the Christian faith] and we need to deal with that. When we gathered as skate church and were part of that culture, we encountered a context that was quite exclusive. Very selfish and exclusive. A great deal of alcohol. They kind of look up to a bad boy attitude. But we came there and served them.⁷⁹⁰

Several of the groups also expressed that they could learn from their context and deepen their understanding of Christian faith and community. As one participant from Oikos explained,

We are here to meet God in people and meet people with the love of Jesus. So, it's a dual thing, Christian mission is exciting in that way. We come here to be a hope in Christ and meet people with God, point to God's love and care. But in that meeting we also encounter God, that is how we see it. And that is really exciting, it's a giving and receiving.⁷⁹¹

In the light of the case study material we can deduce a predominately positive view of culture, leaning towards a creation-centred theology.

15.3 Emerging churches and contextual methods

Chapter 14 established that one important feature in the missiological approach of emerging churches is innovation, or using a more theological terminology, mission as 'prophetic imagination'. In the chapter I also argued that adopting contextual practices seems to be one of the most important ways that emerging churches innovate and deconstruct church tradition. I also maintained that emerging churches, then, may not only serve as incubators for innovation and experimentation to inherited churches and established denominations, but potentially may serve as important places for learning what contextualisation may look like within a Swedish context. How, then, may we understand the contextual method(s) of the communities?

⁷⁹⁰ Tribe participant 2, 24 May 2011.

⁷⁹¹ Oikos participant 1, 26 April 2010.

In his study of emerging churches in the United States and the United Kingdom, Ian Mobsby writes:

The distinction between various ‘fresh expressions of church’, appears to relate to the method of contextual theology, (they do or do not employ), and also where the specific project aligns itself as a continuing part of Christendom or post-Christendom.⁷⁹²

Mobsby, who is an Anglican minister and founder of Moot Community in London, differentiates between church plants and pioneering projects that primarily are shaped by inherited church models, and emerging forms of church that engage with postmodern and post-Christendom cultures in contextually deep ways. With Bevans’ models as starting point, Mobsby argues that the first group utilise

a model of contextual theology more akin to a ‘translation’ model where the emphasis is on retaining Christian identity, (as handed down in the tradition) as more important than cultural identity. There is little awareness or acceptance that the church needs to be immersed in a particular culture in this model.⁷⁹³

These groups, Mobsby maintains, are more prone to hold on to a Christendom mind set of church and are less inclined to embrace new contextually shaped expressions of church.⁷⁹⁴ This is contrasted with

projects operating through a more ‘emerging’ form of engagement, [that appears] to be utilising a synthetic model of contextual theology for a distinctly postmodern context. This model attempts to listen to culture for basic patterns and structures, analyzing culture in order to discover its basic system of symbols. Out of such a “thick description” will basic themes for the local theology. At the same time, however, these themes need to be in dialogue with the basic themes in gospel and tradition, which has a mutually transforming effect.⁷⁹⁵

To Mobsby, then, there are three important distinguishing features of emerging churches; first, their readiness to move away from and deconstruct inherited forms of church, second, they are less concerned with retaining Christian identity (i.e. Christian tradition), compared with more inherited forms of church models, in favour of a more culturally authentic expression of church, and third, they tend to engage in a deep process of contextualisation, which according to his observations resonate with Bevans’ synthetic model. The first point is consistent with my own findings and already sufficiently addressed in chapter 12. What is relevant to our discussion here is Mobsby’s claim that emerging churches specifically adopt a synthetic model of contextualisation. This will be addressed in detail in this chapter, together with the issue of retaining Christian versus cultural identity, and how this relates to our case study data and Bevans’ models. To what extent can we agree with Mobsby’s conclusion in the light of the findings in this study, and in what ways can Bevans’ models help us to deepen our understanding of the contextual practices of the communities which are part of this study?

⁷⁹² Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*, 28.

⁷⁹³ Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*, 29.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-30.; Here Mobsby quotes Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 92-93.

15.3.1 Emerging churches and Bevans' Models of Contextual Theology

From a general perspective all four groups may be considered as deeply contextual forms of Christian communities shaped by post-modernity: They are highly relational, valuing openness and authenticity, they are motivated by the deconstruction of borders, anti-institutional, express eclectic mix-and-match spiritualities, preoccupied with identity formation, and they are entrepreneurial (which possibly can be interpreted as an expression of consumer culture). The question is if we can say anything more specific about these groups in terms of contextual approaches, highlighting their deeper similarities and differences? As presented above, Mobsby argues that there are clear and definite boundaries that define emerging churches, which specifically relate to their contextual method. My hesitation of applying a synthetic model as *the* defining characteristic of these kind of communities are twofold; one is concerned with methodology, and the other is concerned with what we can observe from the communities which are part of this study.

First, my primary critique of the synthetic model is that it is too vague and indistinguishable. One of the key assumptions of the model is an eclectic approach that draws from the other models in creative ways. There is nothing wrong with that assumption per se, but the way that Bevans envisions how we are to use his map of models of contextual theology almost renders the synthetic model pointless. Bevans encourages a "healthy pluralism" and maintains that we may apply different models at different stages of the process depending on contextual circumstances.⁷⁹⁶ I believe that this is a reasonable position which also reflects real life situations. Granted, this is perhaps not the same creative mix-and-match process that Bevans had in mind with the synthetic model. However, given that some elasticity is allowed in the other models, and that, as far as I understand Bevans, it is not uncommon to adopt different models at different stages in the contextualisation process, the synthetic model loses some of its distinctiveness. The examples that Bevans provides as synthetic models (i.e. Koyama and de Mesa) are case in point. Bevans writes,

While Koyama might be characterised as representing a more conservative use of the synthetic model, in many ways gravitating toward a translation model in his concern for the preservation of the experience of the past recorded in tradition and preserved in tradition, de Mesa might be illustrative of a more liberal use of the synthetic model, gravitating both toward the anthropological model in his concern for a positive appreciation of culture and toward the praxis model in his concern for a theology that comes out of a committed concern for the underside of society.⁷⁹⁷

The question is if this, in fact, does not resemble how the models are applied in real life; i.e. that we have a preference, or tend to gravitate towards one or the other models, whilst at the same time drawing from some of the other models as well? At

⁷⁹⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 139-40.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

least the case study data in this thesis seem to support this. We need to keep in mind, also, that Bevans' models of contextual theology are not intended as neat boxes to lock people in. Rather, each model is a dialogue partner with which we can mirror complex situations and conduct meaningful inquiry and examination.⁷⁹⁸

This leads me to my second hesitation, namely that the case study data presents a more complex picture than Mobsby suggests in his research. Mobsby's conclusion that emerging churches specifically apply the synthetic model, and by default exclude any other group that does not fit that categorisation, is perhaps convenient, but it does not necessarily reflect reality. At least not when examining the findings in this study. When discussing typologies of emerging churches above (See chapter 11) we established that any definition needs to contain boundaries that are "porous and vague."⁷⁹⁹ Also, Doornenbal rightly refers to the ECC as "a spectrum of views."⁸⁰⁰ We also noted when discussing the Stetzer-McKnight Typology above, that one factor that differentiates emerging churches from each other is contextual method; they either minister *to*, *with*, or *as* post-moderns. The case study material supports that diversity. One possible explanation is that emerging churches in Sweden differs here with the groups which were part of Mobsby's study. However, we have already established that there are significant similarities and overlap with the case study results and other studies in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, such as ecclesiological convictions and missiological concerns (See chapter 12). Another possible explanation would be that some of the groups which are part of this study should not be considered 'emerging churches', which is unlikely given the many other corresponding features with the phenomenon. A third possible explanation is that Mobsby's research has not uncovered the diversity that could exist when comparing different emerging churches, which has resulted in a blueprint, or idealised presentation of emerging Christianity.

15.3.2 The case studies and contextual method

Before going into a more detailed discussion about the contextual methods of the case studies I will highlight a few general observations: first, the groups seem relatively diverse in their contextual approaches, and second, no group expressed the concern of preserving Christian tradition, but rather emphasised the value of cultural authenticity. This latter observation corresponds with Mobsby's conclusion above. Third, the material exposed weaknesses with Bevans' map, which will be addressed in more detail below. The communities will be presented in no particular order, and the discussion will centre primarily on the underlying assumptions of their contextual approaches (for a more detailed account of specific practices, examples, and similar - see chapter 7 to 9 above). First, we may note a difference in how the groups approached the actual contextualisation process; Oikos as well as H2O appeared to be intentional in their contextual approach and provided both theoretical and

⁷⁹⁸ C.f. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 29.

⁷⁹⁹ Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads*, 46.

⁸⁰⁰ Robert Doornenbal (2012), p. 46; C.f. Jason Wollschleger (2012), p. 8

theological reasoning for why they were doing what they were doing. For Underground Church and Tribe this seemed to be more of an intuitive process. The starting point for both Underground Church and Tribe was the Gospel, and the question how that in best ways could be introduced and lived out in their specific contexts. When reflecting on the Friday night club nights and club culture in general, one leader from Tribe explained:

The main point isn't really the music club. That is a 'fishing net' that God has revealed to us to use. ... Tribe isn't a club, that is just a net to catch people into a relationship with Jesus. Nothing more than that."⁸⁰¹

When asked about their context, one participant from Underground Church explained,

In my opinion the culture becomes something superficial, because if you are a Christian you cannot embrace it all. Because we are to live in love and humility and all that, and it's just not compatible. ... The difference between the Christian faith and the world becomes a lot clearer if you are part of these alternative subcultures. You face a lot of egoism and a darker view of life, it becomes apparent in these kinds of circles. And the radical Christian message stands out a lot more [in these places].⁸⁰²

Similarly to Tribe, then, the alternative subcultures with their aesthetics, music, clothing, and symbolism simply are seen as a way to introduce people to the Christian faith. Cultural expressions are "on a superficial level, merely an interest."⁸⁰³ This resonates with the underlying assumption of the translation model, that "the contextual situation, ultimately, is the vehicle of the message."⁸⁰⁴ Another metaphor here is that of 'kernel' and 'husk', which to the translation model means that "there is the kernel of the gospel, which is surrounded in a disposable, nonessential cultural husk."⁸⁰⁵ Tribe, then, "dressed" the Christian faith and message in a radical way that connected with their particular context of youth culture, music, and a club environment. One leader explained that a great deal of their self-image as a group resonate with the ethos of the punk scene; "grass-root, diverse, active, no gap between producers and consumers, do it yourself, multi-channel, word of mouth, guerrilla, authentic emotions, not affected by outside influences."⁸⁰⁶ This "out of the box" mentality translated well the radical life that can be observed in Jesus Christ as it is portrayed in the Gospels, and the life that we are called to live as his disciples. To Underground Church this implied a similar process, e.g. translating the Christian faith in a language and imagery of being "alternative" to the world, different, the non-compromising prophetic language of the Old testament, the struggle between light and darkness, life and death, and similar categories that resonated with the alternative subcultures and lifestyles they associated with. Important to our discussion here is that neither of the two groups expressed a concern to preserve

⁸⁰¹ Tribe participant 3, 24 May 2011.

⁸⁰² Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁸⁰³ Underground Church Participant 1, 27 April 2010.

⁸⁰⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 41.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁰⁶ Tribe participant 2, 24 May 2011.

Christian tradition (which is an underlying assumption of the translation model), but they were motivated by a vision of culturally authentic expressions of Christian community. Still, the starting point of that was not culture itself, but the Scriptures. Although club and youth culture are seen as a “net” to catch people into a relationship with Jesus, the leaders of Tribe still envisioned an *authentic* expression of club and youth culture. One member of Underground Church reasoned in a similar way,

If we connect with a person and that person is interested in Jesus Christ and all that, we try to avoid doing what many churches do, to get them into the church [culture]. But if we do that they cannot continue to spread their faith among their friends, because they leave that world behind. And that is not our aim ... the focus is for people to stay [in their contexts].⁸⁰⁷

This reveals a weakness with Bevans’ map of the models of contextual theology, which relies on a two dimensional approach where at the one end we find an emphasis on context and human experience, which is a prime concern for the Anthropological model, and on the other end an emphasis on preserving Christian tradition, which is the concern of the translation as well as the counter-cultural models (See figure 14 in Section 15.1 above). This issue will be addressed in more detail below.

Furthermore, the counter-cultural method appeared to be the most prominent theme for Underground Church, more so than Tribe or any other group which were part of this study. The interviews expressed a clear awareness of the sometimes stark difference between elements of the alternative subcultures they were part of and connected with, and the Christian faith and the kind of lifestyle they were called to live as followers of Jesus. A great deal of attention is given to that when the groups gathered and discussed Christian faith. By no means anti-cultural (in fact, Underground Church expressed a desire for a culturally authentic expression of faith shapes by their cultural context), they shared a similar suspicion to culture that is outlined in Bevans’ counter-cultural model, and recognised their task to an alternative, or contrast, community in the world.⁸⁰⁸ Bevans, quoting George R. Hunsberger, states:

while practitioners of the countercultural model recognise that if the gospel is to be adequately communicated, it has to be done “in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them” and that “culture itself is not evil,” it needs to recognise nevertheless that, as a human product, “it bears the marks of the human propensity to resist and undercut the rule of the creator of the world.”⁸⁰⁹

With reference to H2O, there are two comments which illustrate the group’s contextual approach:

I really don’t want to come up with anything for them - just give enough inspiration and

⁸⁰⁷ Underground Church Participant 3, 7 April 2011.

⁸⁰⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 120-22.

⁸⁰⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 119.; c.f. George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin’s Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids, MI: W B Eerdmans, 1998), 154.

help so they can start developing as Christians.⁸¹⁰

People don't want to be controlled so as we say, we want to give people an opportunity for them to make their own decisions, their own experiences, rather than saying or preaching at them: "This is how it works" [or] "this is what you need to do". That is, I wouldn't say strategy, but our hope by providing these spaces to people; where they can experience their own spirituality in some ways, that it might lead them further, rather than preaching at them. I've heard a number of times, that [there were] preachers here in Västra Götaland ... who in legalistic ways preached at people, "This is how you need to do it, this is how it works". I don't know how many years ago this was, but they are still quoted, and the effect was that people left the church, "this is awful, I would never like to go to a church like this" So, this is what sticks in the minds of many people. ... So, we try to give another option, an alternative.⁸¹¹

What can be observed here is a contextual approach that takes its starting point in peoples' experiences and specific situations. It is a decidedly inductive hermeneutical approach that emphasises listening to the spiritual journey of the individual and allows the person to articulate their experiences and built from that. Although both Tribe and Underground Church expressed no concern in retaining Christian tradition, for H2O this is even more apparent in their contextual. They are, in fact, overtly hands-off in their approach, trusting the work of the Spirit of God that is akin to that of Vincent Donovan. Robert J. Schreiter writes, "Here the method is one of planting a seed of faith and allowing it to interact with the native soil, leading to a new flowering of Christianity".⁸¹² The difference here, however, is that H2O at times expressed the expectation that the seed already was present in the spiritual quest and journey of the individual. As one member of the team said:

Jesus said, nobody can come to the Father if not the Holy Spirit draws them ... so the question is, how can we filter out those people who have been prepared by the Spirit for their spiritual journey?⁸¹³ We don't know, we don't know [who they are], we have no idea. But we have to cast our nets into the water at many places; we have to cast big nets into the water, to find the few that are ready.

The contextual approach of H2O resonates with the underlying assumptions of the anthropological model, which takes its starting point in God's hidden presence in culture,⁸¹⁴ and whose task is to "examine the local setting for what it has to offer as a result of God's revelatory work within it".⁸¹⁵

Lastly, then, we turn our attention to the contextual approaches of Oikos. Interestingly, the case study material revealed that the group was engaged in a form of double-contextualisation; one in terms of the immediate geographical context of Hammarkullen, and a second, which can be described as a more general context, shaped by their background in middle-class Swedish Christian culture. In terms of the latter, they applied a counter-cultural mind set in the light of an individualistic and materialistic consumer culture, adopting practices such as a commitment to

⁸¹⁰ Preliminary electronic survey, conducted on Nov 16th 2009

⁸¹¹ H2O Participant 1, 24 May 2010.

⁸¹² Robert J. Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, 11.

⁸¹³ H2O Participant 1, 24 May 2010.

⁸¹⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 56.

⁸¹⁵ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 39.

shared practices, values, weekly rhythms, and living in shared households. They also, more so than any of the other groups, can be described as ministering *as* post-moderns, using the categories of the Stetzer-McKnight Typology above. One quote in particular illustrates this approach:

Our ways to worship, our views on sexuality, how we pray ... none of that is the way [in terms of truth], it is Jesus who is the way and we draw close to Jesus. And here can other people, other traditions, other religions help us. Everything that is good in another religion, and truth in another religion also has something to do with Jesus and is truth. And what which is good, whether or not it has a Christian label or a Buddhist label is good. ... We try to talk in those categories. ... We try to make use of that, find possible connections, critique where that is appropriate, both towards us and society. I don't think that we are that bothered, many of us, to be orthodox in our teachings. It depends on your background, what you consider to be orthodox. But it is ok to doubt, to question, and to ask questions.

This does not only resonate with a post-modern, post-foundationalist mind set, but it can also express a praxis oriented approach to contextualisation, where emphasis lie on right action (orthopraxy).⁸¹⁶ The contextual approach of Oikos is decidedly political, addressing social change and oppressive structures in society. It is, in fact, my observation is that it is the underlying assumptions of the praxis model that is most clearly expressed in the life and ministry of Oikos. Post-foundationalist theology, critical theory, and feminist thought serve as instruments in that endeavour, in that they deconstruct perceived oppressive and rigid structures and mind-sets. The praxis model is also expressed in their commitment to non-violence, serving the local community, a consensus model of decision making, and a non-hierarchical organisational structure. Oikos seems to view their immediate context as essentially good, even to the point that they acknowledge that they probably have more to learn from Hammarkullen than the reverse. Where Oikos is decidedly critical, are their experiences from middle-class church culture. From this perspective, it is not their immediate geographical context that they expect to change, but themselves in light of that context.

In summary then of this discussion, we may conclude that Mobsby seems correct in his assumption that the primary concern of emerging churches is not the preservation of Christian tradition, but the preservation of cultural identity. We do, however, need to question the claim that these communities adopt a specific model of contextualisation, namely the synthetic model. Although there are underlying assumptions that resonate with that model, my case study material reveals a more diverse reality, where the groups seem to adopt different contextual approaches. That observation is more in line with what has previously established about emerging Christianity; that it is a diverse phenomenon, covering a range of practices and views. In the light of the Stetzer-McKnight Typology, the discussion in this chapter regarding the contextual approach of emerging churches supports the conclusion that Oikos may be placed within the Revision category, Tribe and Underground Church can be defined as Reconstructionist emerging churches, and H2O somewhere in-between (albeit closer to the Reconstructionist category). There are also observations in this

⁸¹⁶ A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 40.

discussion that highlight issues with Bevans' map of models of contextual theology. Whilst Tribe seems to adopt a translation approach in their contextual practices, and Underground Church a translation/counter-cultural method, both communities expressed no commitment to the idea of preserving Christian tradition. In fact, the opposite can be said to be true, which leads me to the conclusion that Bevans' theoretical framework warrants correction.

15.3.3 A critical discussion of Bevans' 'Map of the Models of Contextual Theology'

For the purpose of the discussion in previous chapter, Bevans' map of models of contextualisation is a valuable framework for addressing and analysing the contextual practices of the groups which are part of this study. Each model serves as a useful heuristic lens with which we can critically examine the practices and assumptions of individuals and Christian communities. In our discussion above the models have deepened our understanding of the emerging churches which are part of this study, outlining both similarities as well as differences. However, our discussion has also established that Bevans' map may be in need of correction.

First, although the linear representation of Bevans' map is useful in certain respects, for instance by outlining how the different methods relate to one another, it can also create the assumption that we can place a particular group or individual neatly along the line, boxing them in as exclusive to a specific model. Although this would be convenient for our discussion, Bevans informs us that the reality of working with contextual theologies and practices usually is a more dynamic procedure where we often apply different models at different phases in the contextualisation process. This dynamic risk being lost, or becomes less apparent, when the models are presented as a linear map.

Second, the two dimensional character of the map, where Bevans juxtapositions context and human experience at one end of the spectrum with Christian tradition/Scripture at the other end of the scale (illustrated below in figure 15) - is less unhelpful for our discussion regarding the contextualisation approaches of the emerging churches which are part of this study. For instance, in the examples of Tribe and Underground Church we notice a discrepancy with this methodology; the two groups seemed to adopt contextual approaches that resonated with the translation and counter-cultural models respectively, whilst at the same time being more concerned with cultural authenticity rather than preserving Christian tradition.

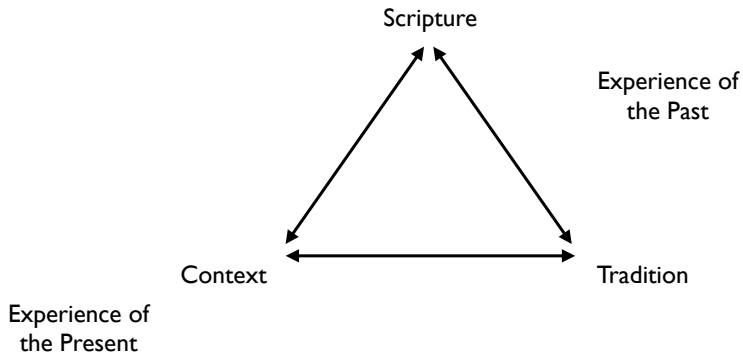


Figure 16. A modified illustration of the dynamic between Scripture and Tradition (Experience of the Past) and Context (Experience of the Present) in Contextual Theology

Using this representation, we may lean closer to any of the sides of the triangle, which also affects our assumptions and preferences in contextual ministry. In the case of the emerging churches which were part of this study, the case study material showed that they leant closer to the context/Scripture side of the triangle, rather than Christian tradition. This, of course, changes Bevans' map altogether, but it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a completely modified map that places the models within this three dimensional spectrum (if, in fact, that even is possible). The discussion, nevertheless, serves to illustrate the limitations of Bevans' map, particularly in regard to our examination of the case study data.

15.3.4 Contextual approaches and family traits of emerging churches

What we have established so far is that emerging churches value authenticity, presence and a pursuit of proximity (whether that is relational, geographical, and/or cultural proximity). They are deeply contextual expressions of Christian community, both from a more general perspective in regard to cultural assumptions of post-modernity (e.g. they are highly relational, valuing openness and authenticity, they are motivated by the deconstruction of borders, anti-institutional, express eclectic mix-and-match spiritualities, preoccupied with identity formation, and entrepreneurial, etc), but also specifically in regard to the contextual approaches presented in Bevans' map of models of contextual theology. To summarise: we may conclude that the groups which are part of this study express both similarities as well as differences in how they engage with their specific contexts. I have already presented above that Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance is helpful when discussing the similarities and differences of emerging churches (both from an ecclesiological as well as a missiological perspective). I surmise, here as well, that this approach is useful when addressing the contextual methods to these groups. Also, that this family likeness sets them apart from an evangelical Protestant contextual method (including those groups that adopt a translation model).

I propose on the basis of the findings in this study that one key point of difference between emerging Christianity and evangelical Protestantism is not merely a matter of diverging viewpoints concerning the validity of post-modern thought and post-modernity, but on a deeper level an expression of a diverging hermeneutic of culture and contextual method. There is, at least, one important underlying issue here: the relationship between form and message. The approach to culture among emerging Christians seems to resonate with Charles Kraft's position that cultural structures (religious cultural structures as well as secular cultural structures) are in and of themselves neutral; "it is the meaning that people attach to forms, their basic faith allegiance, which is not neutral".⁸¹⁸ Although Kraft here speaks from an evangelical perspective, this viewpoint is not necessarily accepted among mainstream and conservative evangelicalism. To emerging Christians this approach is expressed in the commitment to overcome the secular-sacred divide and to transform secular space, the understanding that all of life can be made holy and used for the glory of God and placed in God's presence - even cultural attributes that are foreign to traditional Christians customs, practices and expressions. This is not necessarily at odds with evangelical contextual methods, but some evangelicals avoid this approach altogether in order to safe-guard against syncretism.⁸¹⁹ This implies that emerging churches, even those who apply a translational method of contextualisation, are more ready to dress the Christian faith in a "husk" that looks very different from traditional Christianity. The contextual approach of emerging churches has birthed ecclesial forms and spiritual practices not normally associated with traditional evangelical Protestant culture and tradition, such as the liturgical use of candles and incense, meditation, yoga, metal and punk music, DJs, tattoos, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the use of secular meeting places such as pubs and clubs, etc. Similarly, rather than understanding postmodern epistemology or theological traditions other than evangelicalism as threats to Biblical truth and orthodoxy, many within the movement approach these as neutral dialogue partners that can help the Western church to deconstruct theologies, mind sets and practices too wedded to modernity and Christendom culture.

What, then, may we say about the family trait of emerging churches regarding contextual method and pursuit of cultural proximity?

- An explicit critique of Christian tradition
- A predominately positive view of culture, where emerging Christians tend to lean towards a creation-centred theology
- The position that cultural structures are in and of themselves neutral
- A concern for preserving cultural identity, over and against Christian identity
- An eclectic "both/and" approach, recognising both culture and Scripture as valid sources for contextualisation.

⁸¹⁸ C.f. A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 89.

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

15.3.5 Identifying a specifically *emerging* contribution to contextual theology

When applying Bevans' contextual models as analytical framework we have established that the emerging churches which are part of this study seem to adopt different contextual approaches. However, in our discussion we can also identify shared characteristics in how these groups engage with their contexts. We can also establish that, although Bevans' models are useful as heuristic lenses for our analysis, there are limitations to what these models can achieve for our discussion; e.g. the two-dimensional map that Bevans has developed does not seem to fully illustrate the underlying assumptions of these groups as they contextualise their ecclesial and missionary practices. More specifically, although the four groups seem to adopt different contextual approaches according to Bevans' theoretical framework, ranging from anthropological, translation, counter-cultural, and praxis models - two shared characteristics expressed by all four groups are, first, a concern to develop expressions of faith that are culturally authentic, and second, that their contextual approaches are informed by a critique towards traditional evangelical Protestant church culture and theology. I surmise, then, that these characteristics are akin to a family resemblance; although the groups differ in other aspects in their contextual methods we are in this way able to identify something that is specifically *emerging* in how they engage with their contexts.⁸²⁰

Regardless if the starting point is Scripture or human experience (and here we observed differences between the groups which were part of this study), the aim is not to preserve Christian tradition and identity, but rather for a culturally authentic expression of Christian faith and community to take form. In order for that to take place, emerging churches are committed to deconstructing unhelpful ecclesiological practices and theologies that are inherited from evangelical Protestant church tradition and culture. Contextualisation is an activity that involves some form of hermeneutical process; whether it be through the interpretation of culture, or interpreting Scripture or Christian tradition in the light of a particular context, etc. To emerging churches, then, contextualisation involves a specific hermeneutical process; a critical reading of existing ecclesiological and doctrinal traditions, and a deep listening to the cultural context which they seek to engage, with the aim for an authentic expression of Christian faith and community to emerge. In light of what we have uncovered so far in this study, I propose that a particular emerging contribution to contextual theology would at least involve the following elements:⁸²¹

1. *Critical auditing* of Christian tradition where the emerging churches seek to deconstruct unhelpful or destructive theological frameworks, practices and ecclesial forms.

⁸²⁰ For a more detailed discussion on family resemblance and emerging churches, see Section 12.4.

⁸²¹ Here I am indebted to Doug Gay and his articulation of a hermeneutical ecclesiology of emerging churches in his book *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology* (2011), following five phases of reflection: auditing, retrieval, unbundling, supplementing, and remixing.

2. *Exegesis of culture* where the emerging churches seek to listen to culture in a deep way.

3. *Sampling* of elements of culture as well as Christian faith and tradition in a creative way.⁸²²

4. A process of *remixing* elements of the Christian faith, forms and practices with culture, establishing a creative expression that is both contextual, and highly deconstructive in regard to the original sending ecclesial tradition.

To some emerging churches this is an intentional and well-articulated process, whilst to other communities it is expressed in a more intuitive way as they critique traditional church models and theology.

15.4 Learning from emerging churches' engagement with context

The strained relationship between the evangelical Protestant church culture and the ECC has already been addressed in this study. The discourse has pushed the boundaries for what may be considered viable contextual practices and beliefs to evangelicals, and the conversation has at times been taken as overly polemic, critical and ideological. The question at hand is, what can be learned from the contextual approach of emerging church as they pursue cultural proximity in Western postmodern and post-Christendom society?

The open and receptive approach to culture among emerging churches is both one of the strengths of these communities, as well as one of their weaknesses. What at times could be observed in the case study material is a lack of thorough critical engagement with their specific contexts, as their Christian faith and the Gospel encounter culture. There were, as we already have noted, exceptions. To Underground Church this was an important concern and something that often was addressed within the community. However, the at times weak critical engagement with culture can also be observed within the wider ECC. Too often, it seems, culture is simply taken for granted and viewed in predominately positive terms. There are a number of possible explanations for why this is the case. It could be the result of an overreaction to the traditionally critical and sceptical perspective on culture that can be found within evangelical Protestant tradition and conservative Christianity. It could also at times be interpreted as a form of "cultural romanticism"⁸²³ that idealises the receiving culture, or simply be the result of taking culture for granted, something that is idiosyncratic to a movement that is defined by taking culture and context seriously. Nevertheless, regardless of reason, the underdeveloped theology of culture

⁸²² The metaphor of sampling is here borrowed from pop culture, where a DJ extracts a piece of music or sound from its original setting and inserts it in a new musical context.

⁸²³ C.f. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 25.

that at times can be observed both in the case studies and emerging church literature is problematic as it risks diminishing the prophetic voice of the church.

15.4.1 The need for a critical engagement with culture

The critical dimension in contextualisation is important for a number of reasons. Without this dimension we run the risk of making the same mistakes today as emerging Christians criticise the traditional and inherited church in the West of making in the past; i.e. taking culture for granted and wedding itself too closely with modernity and Christendom culture. Our discussion on evangelism and witnessing presence above (See chapter 13) highlighted the need of some form of prophetic dimension in our contextual missionary endeavours, if it is to be faithful to the message of Jesus. In the words of Bevans,

Even if one would not fully espouse the “counter-cultural model” of contextual theology, there is indeed something in the Christian life and message that deeply challenges the status quo. The way Christians care for one another, their hospitality, their involvement in the world of politics and the arts, their moral stances - all can be gentle or not-so-gentle challenges to the world around them.⁸²⁴

Borrowing the words of Gerhard Lohfink, Bevans reminds us here of the need for the local church to be a “contrast community” that demonstrates to the world what the reign of God through Jesus Christ might look like.⁸²⁵ The Gospel will always challenge, transform and call to repentance some aspect of human culture and experience. In the words of Newbigin, “If it is truly revelation, it will involve contradiction, and call for conversion, for a radical *metanoia*, a U-turn of the mind.”⁸²⁶ A predominately positive view of culture, however, does not necessarily imply a lack of critical engagement. We can recognise that God reveals himself in the life of human beings and culture at the same time as acknowledging that God also both judges the world and seeks to transform and restore it. This echoes the “both/and” sentiment of emerging Christianity, but it also demands a robust theology of culture that takes the prophetic dimension of the Gospel seriously. With the Emerging Church conversation we are challenged to pursue proximity, but in our discussion here we are also reminded that such proximity can also be transformative.

Wilbert R. Shenk writes,

Missionary encounter with modern culture requires that we hold together the Basileia, as the content and goal, and Incarnation, as the essential strategy, as we listen carefully, respectfully, and compassionately to the modern world.⁸²⁷

This has several implications according to Shenk, one of which being that

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness*, 6. Emphasis original.

⁸²⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk, “The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge,” in *The Good News of The Kingdom*, ed. Charles Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Paul Pierson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993), 196.

the church's normal relationship to every culture is that of missionary encounter. The faithful church, living out God's reign, cannot feel completely at home in culture ... Incarnation signifies full identification, but it is incarnation in the service of disclosing God's love and will for human kind. This way is marked by the cross.⁸²⁸

Incarnational mission, then, requires the missionary to identify with and listen to the receiving culture as well as acknowledging that God was already at work in the world long before the missionary engaged context. Culture and human experience contain both redemptive analogies and signs of the Divine that may deepen our understanding and experience of God. It will also always be challenged by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Newbigin writes that,

We have to say both "God accepts human culture" and "God judges human culture." ... What is wrong is the absolutizing of one position against the other and the corresponding ex-communication of those who take the other role. What we need is the discernment to know, from day to day and from issue to issue, when the one stance is appropriate and when the other.⁸²⁹

What we are reminded of here is that an authentic cultural expression of church and Christian faith - which is a primary concern for emerging churches - is at the same time *both* authentic to context and human experience *and* restored, redeemed and transformed by the message of the Gospel. The prophetic voice of the church is not at odds with cultural authenticity; what is undermining cultural authenticity is an uncritical transfer of a specific cultural expression of Christianity into the host culture. Here, we can learn from the posture of emerging Christians, critically reflecting on our own ecclesial convictions, doctrinal traditions and cultural blind spots.

15.4.2 A Critical Emerging Approach to Contextualisation

Innovation does not merely mean the reimagining of existing ecclesial models and practices, but requires risk taking as well as the crossing into uncharted territory of what Christian community, mission and spirituality may look like. However, it is of significance that this encounter does not mean an uncritical acceptance of culture and human experience, but a critical process where the church also acts as a prophetic witness to the world. A missionary response in post-Christendom culture does not imply innovation simply for the sake of being creative, different or avant-garde, but for the sake of pursuing *transformative* proximity where the gospel of Jesus and the Kingdom of God brings redemption, repentance and restoration in the power of the Holy Spirit to a broken world. From this research project it is my conclusion that emerging churches have a great deal to offer the church in contemporary Swedish society, but without a clear critical, or prophetic, dimension these kind of communities run the risk of merely being Christian communities for "recovering Christians", attracting individuals disillusioned with traditional evangelical

⁸²⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Culture," 198.

⁸²⁹ Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 195-96.

Protestant church culture, and as a result, having little missional impact.⁸³⁰ However, when this prophetic dimension *is* present, emerging churches echoes the mind-set of the Apostle Paul, calling the church to “be all things to all people” (1 Corinthians 9) in order for followers of Jesus and communities of believers to emerge within a pluralistic and multifaceted post-Christendom society.

If emerging churches can teach churches in the West one thing, it is that authentic cultural expressions of Christian community require that we also critically address our own traditions and practices. This, in my understanding, is a weakness in evangelical contextual methods, which tends to take the sending Christian culture for granted. On the other hand, a critical component to culture is imperative if our contextual models are to be received by evangelical Protestant theological tradition.⁸³¹ Here, I propose, we may learn from both emerging churches and evangelical contextual methods. What I present here, subsequently, is in essence a synthesis of Paul Hiebert’s model of Critical Contextualisation (representing a more traditional evangelical approach to contextualisation) with the contextual hermeneutic of the emerging churches presented in this chapter. Despite epistemological differences to emerging Christianity, Hiebert’s model is useful to us for at least two reasons; firstly, it includes a clear critical component towards culture, and secondly, his model is perhaps the most widely used contextual approach among evangelicals.⁸³²

Hiebert’s model begins with two exegetical components; firstly, a phenomenological study of the local culture, and secondly, a study of the Scriptures in order “to translate the biblical message into cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of another culture.”⁸³³ But according to Hiebert, before new contextualised practices can be established

the people corporately [need] to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make decisions regarding their response to their new-found truths. The gospel is not simply information to be communicated. It is a message to which people must respond.⁸³⁴

Similarly, Dean S. Gilliland writes that

Critical contextualization calls us to take seriously these deep level beliefs and practices and to understand the meanings they convey. The idea, then, is to apply these familiar or modified forms to Christian living, worship and theology. When engaging the critical process, modifications of old forms are found and, hopefully, new forms will result. Appropriate Christianity is the expression of this critical process. When maximizing the use of forms that are precious to people, these forms must also convey the Christian meaning with minimum distortion to the message of the Bible.⁸³⁵

A comparison of Hiebert’s critical contextualisation with the hermeneutical approach

⁸³⁰ Gerardo Marti, and Gladys Ganiel, *Deconstructed*, 63.

⁸³¹ C.f. A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 357.

⁸³² A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualisation*, 228.

⁸³³ Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (July 1987), 109.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸³⁵ Dean S. Gilliland, “The Incarnation as Matrix for Appropriate Theologies,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005).

of the emerging churches may be illustrated as follows:

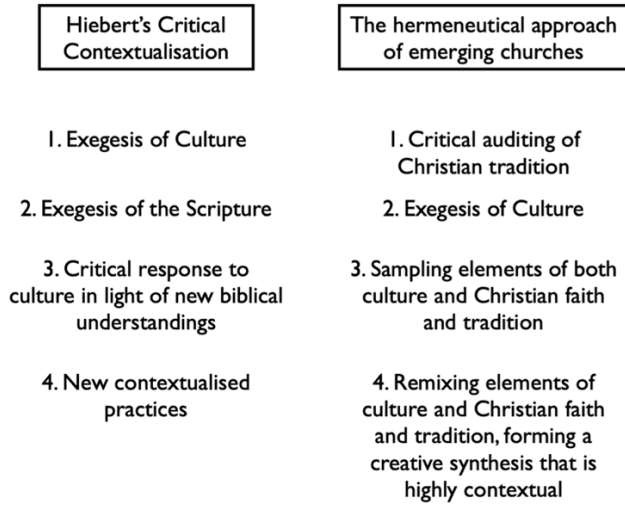


Figure 17. Comparison of Hiebert's Critical contextualisation with the hermeneutical approach of the Emerging Church

By combining Hiebert's model of Critical Contextualisation, then, with the hermeneutical approach of emerging churches I surmise that we are able to articulate a dialectical model consisting of a *trifocal lens* - a critical exegesis of and dialogue between Christian tradition, Scripture, as well as culture and human experience. This *critical auditing process* is followed by a *creative sampling process* with the aim of *remixing* elements of the Christian faith with culture, thus shaping a local expression that is at the same time authentic to culture and redeemed by the Gospel. The sampling process, then, is more similar to that of an artistic process or craftsmanship where one is weaving back and forth between multiple dialogue partners (i.e. the critical engagement with Christian tradition, Scripture, and Culture) rather than a mechanical or "paint by numbers" process with a given outcome. The model can be illustrated as follows (See figure 18):

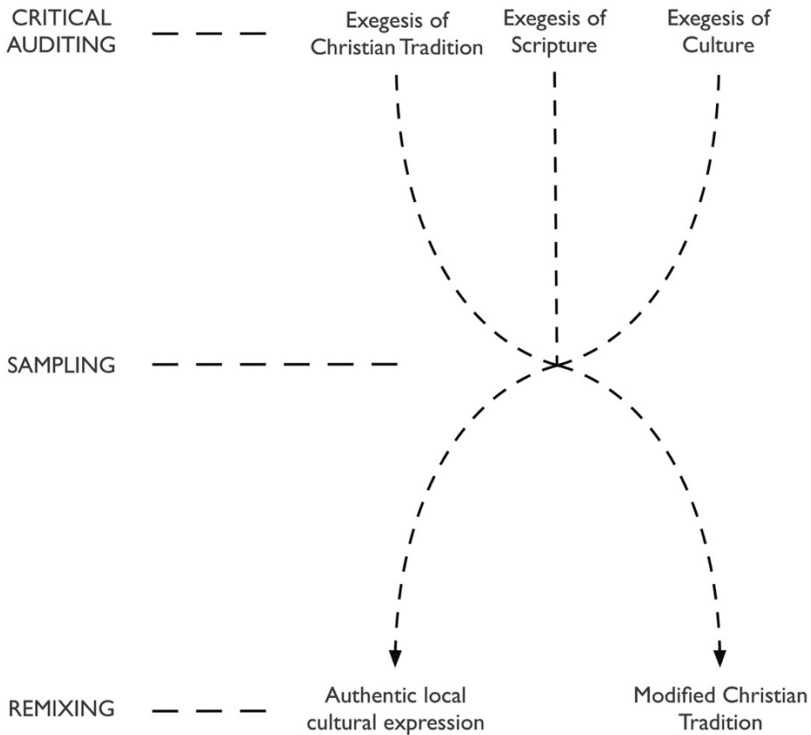


Figure 18. Illustration of the Emerging Critical Model utilising a trifocal lens consisting of a critical exegesis of culture, Scripture and Christian Tradition

The critical auditing process allows for two things to occur simultaneously:

1. A critical reflection of existing doctrinal traditions, ecclesial forms, missionary methods, and spiritual practices in the light of Scripture and contemporary culture, which in turn generate insights that require us to challenge or revise our previous held positions.
2. A critical exegesis of the local culture and human experience where we, a) allow for the Scriptures and Christian tradition to function as a prophetic property that identifies and calls to attention elements of culture in need of restoration, redemption and transformation, and b) engages in a deep listening to the local context in order to identify redemptive analogies and its basic system of symbols.

The result of the critical auditing and sampling process, where elements of the Christian faith and traditions are remixed with the local context, is twofold:

1. The emergence of an authentic local cultural expression of Christian faith, mission and community.

2. Christian tradition is modified. As Schreiter maintains that local theologies can both “remind us of parts of the tradition we have forgotten or have chosen to ignore ... [and the] experience of local communities can also remind us of the fallibility of parts of the tradition.”⁸³⁶ In the words of Bevans, the dialogue between the local context and Christian tradition have “a mutually transforming effect on both conversation partners.”⁸³⁷ I believe that this critical dialectical model achieve this.

The model gain insights from both emerging Christianity and traditional evangelical theology while at the same time allowing for a critical engagement with past beliefs, spiritual practices and ecclesial forms; developing a posture of listening to and learning from the local context; and recognising the prophetic, restorative and transformative properties of the Christian faith and the Gospel of Jesus. I maintain that this model is not only consistent with the underlying ethos of the Emerging Church conversation, but also refines it and thus making it a more viable approach to evangelical theological tradition.

⁸³⁶ Robert J. Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, 34-35.

⁸³⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 93.

Chapter 16. Summary and Conclusion: Contributions of emerging churches to shaping the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

- The Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 NIV

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore and analyse how the Emerging Church phenomenon is expressed in Sweden, and to ascertain in what ways these emerging churches may contribute to shaping the church's cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society. In order to do this the research has been guided by three objectives:

- 1. To examine the Emerging Church conversation from an international perspective.*
- 2. To conduct case studies of four emerging churches in Sweden.*
- 3. To identify and critically examine the ecclesiological and missiological themes that are observable in the case study material.*

The dissertation begins with a discussion of Sweden as a religious landscape and mission context. Four themes were explored here: secularisation and religious change; post-Christendom, the emergence of a post-Christian culture, and post-modernity. From this brief account we can surmise that Sweden is a multifaceted context where theories regarding secularisation, religious change, as well as the emergence of a post-secular, post-Christian and post-Christendom society all contribute to our understanding. Although Sweden principally is a secularised society, religion is becoming more visible in the media and in public debate. There are also urban multicultural areas that can be described as post-secular. Where religious beliefs have remained, those beliefs are for the most part changing. From a missiological perspective, this complex reality seems to demand a thoroughly contextualised approach to church and mission in Sweden today.

From the material presented in this introductory chapter we can also conclude that the church in Sweden is faced with a tremendous challenge, where the statistical data

points to a decline in church membership and attendance and a difficulty in navigating and responding to these changes in religion and cultural shifts positively. Here we need to be cautious of reductionist explanations and simplistic responses. There appears to be no “silver bullet”, and the research material shows that experimentation and attempts to pioneer new ways for the church implies no guarantees of success. What, then, may we learn from the emerging churches which are part of this study? This chapter seeks to summarise the findings and observations in this dissertation and answer the research questions that have directed this study. I will also comment on suggestions for further research

16.1 What is the background of the wider Emerging Church conversation?

In order to answer the question regarding the background of the wider ECC, I have explored some of the changes that were occurring within evangelical Protestant church culture at the end of the 20th century. Three specific contexts were included here: the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States. As far as the development of the ECC is concerned, other contexts could have been included in this study. For example, early on in the research process I also investigated the background of the Emerging Church phenomenon in New Zealand, which had been particularly influenced by the Alternative Worship movement in the 1990's, and I also came by stories and examples of emerging churches in Japan, Germany, and Brazil. Due to the need to limit the scope of my research these contexts could not be included in this dissertation. Nevertheless, from the discussion in chapter 4 we can conclude that since the end of the 1980's and beginning of the 1990's the ECC became a multifaceted international phenomenon that has developed in a number of predominately Western contexts parallel to one another. It is not until around the turn of the millennium that we really can begin to speak of an international conversation, as individuals, churches and networks started to interact in an intentional way by building relationships and exchanging ideas through communities on the internet, conferences, festivals, publication of books, and other printed resources.

Although each country presented in the discussion carry their own distinct flavours and particularities (e.g. alternative forms of worship in the United Kingdom, an emphasis on missional theology in Australia, and an engagement with postmodern epistemology and theology in the United States), the themes that are presented in each section of the chapter should not be taken as exclusive or unique for that particular context. Alternative forms of worship also emerged in Australia and the United States, and missional theology shaped the conversation across the Emerging Church discourse as a whole, as did engagement with post-modern epistemology and post-foundational theology. Taken as a whole, then, the themes and developments that are presented in this chapter accounts for some of the important factors that shaped the conditions out of which the ECC was born: The Ecumenical Movement and developments within the World Council of Churches which provided seedbed of permission and freedom to listen to traditions outside of

Protestantism; frustrations with evangelical Protestant tradition and culture, which were expressed in post-evangelical and post-charismatic sentiments; the experience of the hemorrhaging of young people from the church; the engagement with post-World War II missiology and postcolonial theology; and a critique of foundationalism and the discovery of post-modern epistemology.

As part of this discussion I also addressed the question whether the Emerging Church can be defined as a movement? The question has methodological significance for this study, as the idea of a movement affects what we expect to find when we search for emerging churches in Sweden (e.g. organisational and relational ties to the international Emerging Church phenomenon, specific leadership structures, doctrinal statements, etc.) Our examination of the developments of the ECC, however, leads us to surmise that the Emerging Church is best understood as a conversation that expresses characteristics of a new social movement. This is helpful here, as it gives us an interpretative framework to understand the diversity, relational and discursive character, and fluidity of emerging Christianity. Rather than defining clear boundaries of a movement, the term 'emerging church' then serves as a rallying point and an identity marker for Christians who seek to address the numerous challenges that evangelical Protestantism is facing in the light of the changing cultural landscape of Western society. Approaching the ECC in this way, we can expect to find emerging churches in Sweden that share the same ethos and theological vision as emerging churches in other parts of the world, although they do not relate to the ECC in an organisational or structural sense. The case study material supported this theory; although three of the four groups were at least to some extent familiar with the term (e.g. some of the leaders had read literature associated with the ECC, or attended a conference associated with the phenomenon), neither group had any real connection to the wider ECC in terms of relationships or networks.

16.2 What are the main characteristics of the wider Emerging Church conversation?

What we are concerned with here, in regard to this specific question, are the characteristics of the ECC as an international conversation or discourse, not the characteristics of local emerging churches. As emerging churches in other parts of the world appeared to be diverse, it seemed difficult to look for specific characteristics of these groups and then look for the same kind of communities in Sweden for my case study research (e.g. some had no leaders, other groups did; some used multi-media in worship, others did not; some had no preaching part of their services, whilst other groups did; some had no worship services at all, but many emerging churches do, etc.) Approaching the dissertation in this manner - starting with a general theory about the ECC - was important, as it gave me an opportunity to formulate a hypothesis of what kind of communities I was searching for before I sampled emerging churches in Sweden. My hypothesis was that any Christian groups that could be regarded as emerging churches in Sweden were also to express some of the characteristics of the wider international Emerging Church conversation.

In order to describe the characteristics of the ECC, then, I borrowed Scot McKnight's metaphor of different streams that flow into "Lake Emerging". This approach was useful, as any analytical tools we employ to investigate the characteristics of emerging Christianity need to allow for the complex and multifaceted characteristic of the phenomenon. However, when using the metaphor McKnight addressed the ECC specifically from a North American viewpoint⁸³⁸; I was interested in the ECC from a wider perspective. From my research into the international Emerging Church phenomenon, then, I identified four streams that each had come to shape and inform the conversation in important ways:

- *The Emergent Theological Stream*: The stream is post-foundational in outlook and engages with the philosophical and theological challenges posed by postmodern epistemology and culture.
- *The Alternative Worship Stream*: The attempt to create indigenous forms of Christian worship, which emerge from within postmodern culture and are rooted in church tradition, by creating an eclectic mix of contemporary cultural elements, and traditional and ancient Christian liturgies.
- *The Neo-Monastic Stream*: By adopting practices influenced by the monastic traditions, this stream seeks to develop ecclesial structures and spirituality that sustain Christian faith and life in a fast paced and pluralistic postmodern, urban and globalised society. This stream, perhaps more than any other of the four, has also contributed to the international Emerging Church discourse by highlighting the needs and missiological challenges of the poor and marginalised in society.
- *The Missional Stream*: The attempt to rethink ecclesiology and mission practices by emphasising the missionary nature of the church, as the people of God joining God in his mission in the world. Within this stream, we identify an emphasis on ecclesial forms and mission practices shaped by and emerging from within culture, rather than imported from outside the specific cultural context.

Each stream contributes in a unique way to the ECC as well as sharing characteristics with the other three streams. If we view each of the four categories as streams that flow into "Lake Emerging", we understand that local expressions of emerging Christianity will look different depending on where one "swims in the lake".

⁸³⁸ Scot McKnight, "Five Streams," 34-39.

16.3 What examples of emerging churches can be found in Sweden, and what can be learned about the groups which are part of this study regarding their backgrounds, community life, missionary practices, and communal worship?

As I began the case study research I was surprised by how difficult it proved to be to find examples of groups in Sweden which were experimenting with new ways of being Christian community and engaging in mission. Sweden is a country that for several decades had been characterised by a steady secularisation process, the marginalisation of the church, and declining church attendance and membership numbers. In such a context one would assume to find ecclesial experiments and attempts to counter these issues. At least that was my hypothesis. Besides the four groups included in this study, there were only a handful of other groups that fulfilled, or partly fulfilled, the criteria. There are a number of possible explanations for why this was the case; for example, methodological issues with the selection process, or it was a result of the limitations of the study. It is possible, had I widened the search criteria and included other parts of Sweden and not just Stockholm and Gothenburg, that more groups would have been identified. It is also possible that the ECC has been more influential in Sweden in terms of shaping a theological discourse around faith in postmodern culture, rather than resulting in actual groups and communities which seek to embody the ECC ethos in a structured way, for example by planting new churches and establishing missional communities.

Four emerging churches were studied as part of this research project: Three groups in Gothenburg - Oikos, H2O, and Underground Church; and one group in Stockholm - Tribe. At a first glance the four communities looked very different. Oikos being a self-identified neo-monastic community situated in a multicultural and socially vulnerable suburb that pray the Liturgy of the Hours, experiment with Eastern orthodox liturgy, and emphasise peace-making, social justice issues and community involvement. H2O is a church planting project led by a team of missionaries supported by an international mission agency, which experiment with spaces of spiritual exploration, and deliberately function as a networked structure building a faith community "from the outside in". Underground Church was a small group of Christians who came from diverse church backgrounds, drawn together by their common interest in alternative music, clothing and lifestyles, and the longing to be a Christian witness to people who are also part of the alternative music scene in Gothenburg. Tribe was a dynamic church in Stockholm made up of predominately young people, motivated by deconstructing traditional ecclesial practices with the aim of forming a Christian community that emerges out of youth and club culture.

As a part of this discussion I developed a typological tool to categorise the four groups which were part of this study. The first component was the Stetzer-McKnight Typology, which categorises emerging churches by looking at, first, their engagement with post-modern culture (emerging churches either minister *to*, *with*, or *as* post-

moderns), and second, by determining their relationship to evangelical Protestant traditions (Relevants, Reconstructionists, or Revisionists). The second component constituted the four streams of the Emerging Church, which addresses a community's engagement with emerging Christianity (Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-monastic, and Missional). The synthesis of the two components provided a typology that is both concise enough to say something substantial about each group, and also took into account the diversity of emerging churches. Using this typology, then, the four groups can be categorised in the following way (See Figure 19 below):

**Engagement with post-modern culture and relationship to evangelical Protestant tradition
(The Stetzer-McKnight Typology)**

| | | Relevants (to) | Reconstructionists (with) | | | Revisionists (as) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-----|-------------------|
| | | | Tribe | Underground Church | H2O | Oikos |
| Engagement with the ECC (The Four Streams of the ECC) | Emergent theology | | | X | X | X |
| | Alternative worship | | X | | | X |
| | Neo-monastic | | | | | X |
| | Missional | | X | X | X | X |

Figure 19. Diagram of the case studies and how they relate to the Stetzer-McKnight Typology and the four Streams of the Emerging Church conversation.

In our examination of the four groups we also made the following observations:

- The groups did not necessarily self-identify as a church in a traditional sense, rather they identified as a “complement” to other local churches (Oikos and Underground Church) or as a “missional community (H2O). Tribe was the only group that clearly stated that they were a church community, albeit of a less traditional category.
- All four groups were relatively small in size
- Neither of the groups expressed any specific concern for the idea of growing the church numerically, rather they spoke of other concerns, such as making disciples, serving the community, overcoming cultural barriers, reconciliation, and acting as signposts of the Kingdom of God in their contexts. The groups showed little interest in numerical growth in terms of membership (some groups outright questioned quantitative categories for measuring success in mission).

- They expressed little concern for “bringing people to church” or getting people to come to the Sunday church service; instead they emphasised the need for ordinary believers to follow Jesus and live out their faith in their everyday lives.
- The groups expressed a clear sense of relating to a specific local or cultural context, and all four groups emphasised the need of some form of contextualisation of the Christian faith and life.
- Three of the four groups started out of mission incentives (e.g. to reach a specific cultural context or network of people, create contextual missionary practices in the light of post-modern and post-Christendom cultural shifts, etc.) In fact, Oikos stood out here, emphasising that they started the community for the sake of its members (in order to become better Christians).
- The groups that practiced some form of communal worship all expressed innovation and experimentation as important values in the worship life of the communities.
- The groups tended to strive towards a “low maintenance” mind-set in terms of ecclesial forms and programs.
- The participants emphasised the importance of joining what is already happening in the wider community. They also stressed the importance of nurturing and building relationships in a more organic way, rather than being motivated by the need to start programs or arranging events of their own.
- The groups expressed a highly relational approach, embracing a “belong before you believe” mind set.
- The groups often gathered in “third places” outside the traditional church building (e.g. cafés, clubs, peoples’ homes, parties, music festivals, etc).
- Lastly, serving and hospitality were prominent themes that emerged as the groups spoke about their missionary engagement with society.

16.4 What shared ecclesiological and missiological themes may be identified from the emerging churches which are part of this study?

16.4.1 Shared ecclesiological convictions

Two concepts were particularly helpful in my analysis of the ecclesiological and missiological themes expressed by the groups which were part of this study: the idea of ‘convictional sets’, and Wittgenstein’s theory around ‘family resemblance’. We have established that the groups each were relatively different in regard to ecclesiological practices; what we examine in chapter 12 are the shared ecclesiological themes that inform and shape them as Christian communities. There are different words to frame this discussion; one term that sometimes has been used is the ‘mind-set’ of emerging churches. This concept points towards a shared attitude, disposition, or mood - categories that are not inaccurate per se, but the shared traits of emerging

churches seem to be far more robust than what the term implies. What I surmise in my discussion is that the term 'convictions' and 'convictional sets' better frame the shared characteristics that we can observe in the case study material. A conviction implies a "persistent belief" that exists within a group or a person, which is not abandoned without making the group or the person significantly different than before.⁸³⁹ Convictions often relate to and interact with other convictions, and they, in turn, form convictional sets. The convictions that are presented in this study seem to function in that way, as they overlap and interact and together shape the communities in important ways. My observation, then, is that the emerging churches which are part of this study seem to adopt a particular kind of ecclesiological hermeneutic, informed by a specific set of convictions: Relational ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion, and Innovation and experimentation. This convictional set is expressed in a desire to deconstruct unhelpful or destructive boundaries - both within the church as well as between the church and broader society - that have come to shape evangelical Protestant church culture. Rather than addressing superficial changes within the Western church in order to make it "trendy" and "relevant" to people who are far from the church and the Christian faith, emerging churches are concerned with deeply held convictions about the nature of the church and what it means to be Christians in post-modern and post-Christendom cultures. In that sense, the controversy with evangelical tradition that has surrounded the ECC after the turn of the millennium can be understood as a conflict of competing or diverging convictions.

Wittgenstein's idea of 'family resemblance' has been useful to frame the discussion around the differences and similarities that come to light when comparing the four groups. On a superficial level, the four emerging churches which are part of this study seem to have little in common. However, when analysing the case study material, we can conclude that we in fact can observe shared ecclesiological themes and characteristics between each of the four groups (e.g. the convictional sets mentioned above). The groups are similar in important areas to some others in the 'family of emerging churches, "though not in all respects to any or in any respect to all."⁸⁴⁰ Applying the idea of family resemblance to our discussion in this way, then, implies that the term 'emerging churches' is not just an arbitrary label that can be used for any Christian group, but that the label in fact communicates something particular about what kind of Christian community we are dealing with.

16.4.2 Shared missiological themes

My conclusion from the critical analysis of the case study material was that the ecclesiological convictions within the groups which were part of this study (i.e. Relational ecclesiology, Openness and inclusion, and Innovation and experimentation), expressed in a desire to deconstruct boundaries, were in significant ways informing their missionary posture. Similar to the ecclesiological characteristics,

⁸³⁹ James Wm. McClendon, and James M. Smith, *Convictions*, 5.

⁸⁴⁰ John Hick, *Interpretation*, 4. Here Hick uses the idea of family resemblance when discussing the concept of religion, although his reasoning can be applied to emerging churches as well.

it was not the specific missionary methods and strategies that were common in these groups. Rather, the shared traits had more to do with deeper convictions about what Christian mission is (and what it is not). Three missiological themes emerged as part of my analysis: Mission as a witnessing presence, Mission as innovation, and Mission as the pursuit of cultural proximity. What follows is a summary of the key observations made in this analysis:

1. A critique of traditional evangelistic methods

The underlying missiological themes that emerged from the case study material - in particular mission as a witnessing presence - can both be interpreted as a *reaction to* practices, methods, and mind-sets within evangelical Protestant church tradition which are perceived as negative and unhelpful, as well as a *proactive pursuit* of a vision of the church that is missional at its core. Mission was central in the self-understanding of the four groups which were part of this study; how this was expressed practically, however, varied between each community. The conclusions drawn from the case study material regarding attitudes and practices with regard to evangelism resonate with similar studies of emerging churches in other parts of the world. The groups were purposefully attempting to move beyond programmatic understandings of evangelism. Rather, they tend to adopt a missionary approach akin to mission as a witnessing presence, placing greater emphasis on the life of the community and the individual as a signpost to Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

To emerging churches, then, demonstrating the Kingdom of God seems to take priority over the announcement of the Kingdom of God, as the demonstration of the Christian faith is perceived as more accessible to people living in a post-Christian and post-modern culture. In their critique, the groups bring to attention two issues in particular: first, there are evangelistic practices that have been developed by the church in the West that are not only unhelpful, but also risk damaging the Christian witness in this world; and second, as culture has shifted, the church is facing the crucial task of rearticulating its evangelistic message as well as reforming its evangelistic practices and methods. To emerging churches, the 'how' in mission matters, and with this mind-set, the end never justifies the means.

2. Reimagining evangelism and witness in a post-Christendom culture

As part of this discussion I identified five areas that are of particularly challenging for the church in Sweden today: the memory of Christendom culture; the atheistic critique of religion and the Christian faith; the perceived irrelevance of religion to peoples' lives; the challenges of consumer culture; and last, the church's own understanding of evangelism and witness. From the case study material, I surmise that where we can learn from emerging churches in particular are issues relating to the first and the last themes. Emerging Christians are acutely aware of the legacy of Christendom culture. This legacy can at times awaken feeling of nostalgia as well as creating cultural blind spots within established and institutional churches in their missionary activities. Emerging churches seek to reimagine what evangelism and

Christian witness might look like from a position of marginalisation, minority, as well as lack of power and normative privilege. Also, emerging churches brings to attention the need to reconfigure our understanding of what evangelism might look like in a post-Christian context. Here, exclusive or strong stances on truth and faith can be seen as suspect and an affront - a softer approach to mission that emphasise long-term witness and presence through service, dialogue and the possibility for people to experience God through a loving Christian community is more the focus of emerging churches. To some groups which are part of this study, this was a relatively conscious process, while for other groups this seemed to be expressed in a more intuitive way. For example, with Tribe this was manifest in their desire for people to encounter God in miraculous and supernatural ways within a hospitable and approachable community; to H2O this was expressed in experimenting with spaces for spiritual exploration, to Underground Church the focus of their witness rested on changing the attitudes and presumptions about Christians and the church in a cultural context where the church often is viewed in negative terms, and Oikos emphasised *mission ad intra* - that their primary evangelistic task was aimed at themselves as a community, rather than on the people living around them and in Hammarkullen.

3. Innovation and experimentation

The case study material showed that innovation and experimentation shaped the missiological approaches of the four groups in important ways. We can also see that for the emerging churches which were part of this study this was not only approached from a purely pragmatic concern - i.e. from the perspective of effectiveness in mission - but emerged out of the conviction that creativity and experimentation is at the heart of the Christian faith and Christian community. The case study material also showed that contextualisation was one of the primary methods for the four groups to innovate and experiment their forms and practices.

4. A pursuit of proximity

The case study material revealed that rather than establishing absolute boundaries between the church and society, emerging churches value authenticity, presence and a pursuit of proximity that can be expressed in a number of ways: by emphasising the need for genuine and authentic everyday relationships (relational proximity), by valuing local presence (geographical proximity), as well as contextually appropriate forms of church and mission (cultural proximity). To emerging churches proximity is essential if the Gospel is to become intelligible and credible in today's post-modern and post-Christendom cultures.

5. Contextualisation

From the case study material we can also establish that cultural sensitivity and authenticity were integral to the four groups which were part of this study: Tribe in their focus on youth and club culture; Underground Church in their focus on the

alternative music scene in Gothenburg; and H2O in their embracing of a fluid and networked structure and ministry approach, emphasising dialogue, process and openness as they seek to engage with postmodern culture. Oikos stood out in the material, seemingly engaging in a double contextualisation; both in terms of the local multicultural context of Hammarkullen (e.g. expressed in their commitment to reconciliation, social justice, peace-making and building relational bridges to people who part of other cultures and faith communities) as well as postmodern culture (e.g. expressed in their eclectic mind-set and ecclesial practices, embracing feminist critique, flat leadership structures, as well as openness and dialogue).

From a general perspective all four groups could be considered as deeply contextual forms of Christian communities shaped by post-modernity: Highly relational, valuing openness and authenticity, motivated by the deconstruction of borders, anti-institutional, expressing eclectic mix-and-match spiritualities, preoccupied with identity formation, and entrepreneurial.

The starting point for my critical analysis of the contextual approaches of the four groups was Stephen B. Bevans' map of models of contextual theology presented in *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002). From this exercise I was able to establish:

- The emerging churches which were part of this study expressed a predominately positive view of culture, orientating towards to a creation-centred theology, where "the world is a place where God reveals Godself" and "revelation does not happen in set-apart, particularly holy places, in strange, unworldly circumstances, or in words that are spoken in stilted voice."⁸⁴¹
- They seemed to adopt different kind of contextual approaches, ranging from the anthropological, praxis, translation, and counter-cultural models. This challenge previous assumptions of contextual practices of emerging churches; e.g. Ian Mobsby's study of emerging congregations in the United Kingdom and the United States from 2007, which maintained that emerging churches can be defined by adopting a synthetic approach to contextualisation.⁸⁴²

The discussion also led me to the conclusion that the contextual approaches of the emerging churches which were part of this study challenge Bevans' theoretical framework. His map of models of contextualisation is based on a two dimensional juxtaposition between context and human experience at one end of the spectrum and Christian tradition/Scripture at the other end of the scale (See figure 15 above). This did not resonate with the two groups which seemed to adopt translation and/or counter-cultural approaches to contextualisation. Rather than being concerned with preserving Christian identity (e.g. ecclesiological and doctrinal traditions and assumptions), which we can expect from adopting these kinds of contextual

⁸⁴¹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models*, 21.

⁸⁴² Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging*.

approaches, the groups emphasised the need for developing ecclesial forms and Christian faith authentic to culture.

My conclusion was that a three dimensional model can be helpful in order to correct the discrepancy we observed in Bevans' map. Instead of juxtaposition context and human experience with Scripture/Tradition I presented a three dimensional model, in the form a triangle, which separates context, Scripture, and tradition (illustrated in figure 20 below).

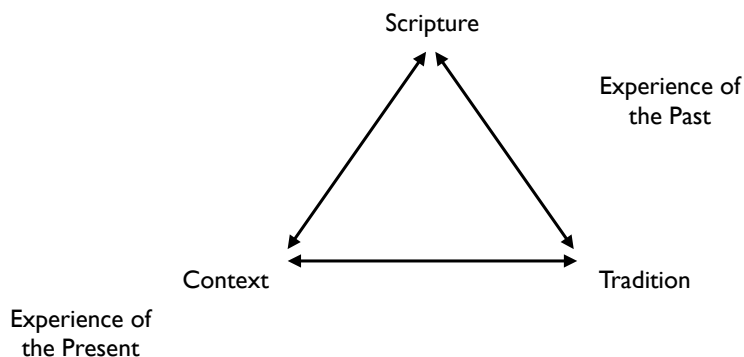


Figure 20. A modified illustration of the dynamic between Scripture and Tradition (Experience of the Past) and Context (Experience of the Present) in Contextual Theology

Using this representation, we may lean closer to any of the sides of the triangle, which also affects our underlying assumptions for a contextual theology. The concerns of the two groups that seemed to adopt translation and translation/counter-cultural contextual approaches were never expressed as a need to preserve Christian tradition, but to encourage culturally authentic expressions of faith (i.e. leaning towards the Context point of the triangle). Where critique towards their contexts was expressed, it was never framed as the need for Christian tradition to challenge the context (e.g. ecclesiological and doctrinal traditions and assumptions), but rather framed around questions regarding permissible lifestyles, practices, attitudes, and behaviour in the light of the Scriptures (i.e. leaning closer to the Scripture point of the triangle). In fact, the participants were at times quite verbal in their critique of inherited church models and traditional practices. For the other remaining two groups which were part of this study, we can surmise that they were gravitating towards the Context point of the triangle.

From the case study material, I also established that we are able to observe something that is specifically *emerging* in their approach to contextualisation, shaped by a specific hermeneutical process which involved the following four elements:

1. *Critical auditing* of Christian tradition where the emerging churches seek to deconstruct unhelpful or destructive theological frameworks, practices and ecclesial forms.

2. *Exegesis of culture* where the emerging churches seek to listen to culture in a deep way.

3. *Sampling* of elements of culture as well as Christian faith and tradition in a creative way.⁸⁴³

4. A process of *remixing* elements of the Christian faith, forms and practices with culture, establishing a creative expression that is both contextual, and highly deconstructive in regard to the original sending ecclesial tradition.

16.5 In what ways are “emerging churches” in Sweden contributing to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society?

Our inquiry into the ECC and how this phenomenon is expressed in Sweden has brought to our attention a number of important questions for the church to consider if it is to respond to the challenges posed by contemporary society in positive and fruitful ways. Emerging churches challenge the church to reimagine its identity and reconfigure its organisational priorities in order to better align with its calling to be a missionary people in this world. Our examinations of the emerging churches which are part of this study also reveal that there are no “silver bullets”. Rather, the material highlights the extraordinary challenge that churches in Sweden are faced with in the light of a post-Christian culture. Neither of the groups saw any significant growth in terms of new followers of Jesus. However, other studies reveal that the same is true for more traditional church plants that have started in the last two decades. By all accounts, innovation does not automatically result in numerical growth (i.e. in terms of new Christians), but innovation and experimentation might very likely be one important way forward for that to become a reality for the church in a post-Christian culture.

16.5.1 Contribution 1: Changing the score card

The study leads us to ask what kind of score card churches in Sweden are to use for mission in contemporary society? From the perspective of Church Growth Theory (CGT), which has influenced much of evangelical thinking on mission and evangelism in Sweden, it could be argued that the emerging churches which are part of this study lack the results we hoped for in terms of mission and church planting. In terms of quantitative results, three of the four groups saw little growth in terms of seeing new people become Christians. In fact, the interview material revealed that numerical growth - as in numerical growth for the sake of growing the community

⁸⁴³ The metaphor of sampling is here borrowed from pop culture, where a DJ extracts a piece of music or sound from its original setting and inserts it in a new musical context.

bigger - was of little or no concern for any of the groups. However, the deep shifts in society have created a previously unknown situation for the church, and as our available ecclesiological forms and missiological methods seem to produce little tangible results in the form of growth, the church is faced with a situation that requires - in a Swedish context - experimenting with altogether new methods and models. In such a situation, it could be argued that success in mission not only involves numerical growth (as much as that is desired in our missionary endeavours), but also the opportunity to experiment and try new things, and where *learning from those experiences* could be regarded as success in itself.

I maintain that shaping a framework for mission in Sweden today, then, not only involves strategic consideration in the training of people and the methods applied in mission, but also open, honest and strategic conversations about what kind of tangible results we can expect for each missionary enterprise, whether that be church planting, mission projects, evangelism, etc. Our study of emerging churches reveals to us that we might need to considerably reassess our goals and expectations for mission today (i.e. that learning from what we do is an appropriate goal in itself), in order to perhaps expect more numerical results in the future. However, a score card that measures qualitative results, more so than quantitative figures, require from a denominational perspective good evaluation processes that manages to measure these kinds of results in appropriate ways. It also calls for more and frequent qualitative research, perhaps similar to this research project, that draws from the rich and deep experiences of the communities and people who attempt to reimagine Christian community, faith, spirituality and mission within their specific contexts. This is by no means easy but can also involve a degree of frustration and pain, in particular if there are (spoken or unspoken) expectations for quantitative growth. The reflection of one of the H2O team members may serve as an illustration here:

I think it is obviously challenging ... If you start a regular church plant, with a target group [for example] internationals and you go out and it gets bigger. [The way we work] is more of a challenge: to go from the outside in, it's hard to measure. ... A regular church plant may have so many members. But working from the outside in you have relationships that are just forming and growing at different levels and different stages. Different commitment levels. It's hard to measure how fast we should go, how fast we should move from A to B to C when we're doing it the way we do it. While the other model it's easier to have a defined process in how things should follow. So, that can be a challenge, because you think this should go faster, and it's not.⁸⁴⁴

Here we see that, although the team was deeply committed to innovation and exploring new avenues for Christian community and mission, the legacy of the church growth paradigm can still be affecting the mind-set of people. From the perspective of the sending agency (whether that be a denomination, church, mission organisation, etc.) this requires the setting up of appropriate support structures that both clearly communicate the expectations of the mission project, as well as being able to handle the frustration and pain that innovation and experimentation sometimes can involve.

⁸⁴⁴ H2O Participant 5, 24 May 2010.

16.5.2 Contribution 2: Encouraging innovation and experimentation

The discussion in Chapter 1 regarding religious change and cultural shifts supports the idea of approaching Sweden as context with a missionary mind-set and identity:

- A steady numerical decline of churches and Christian believers, as well as a steady decline in the participation in traditionally Christian practices (e.g. church attendance, baptisms, church weddings, confirmation classes, etc.)
- An increasingly religiously pluralistic and multi-cultural society, where religious beliefs are changing in favour of alternatives rather than traditional Christian confession and doctrine.
- A resistance towards and critique of Christianity as an institution and belief system.

The current cultural situation, then, presents the church in Sweden with an unknown and unexplored map where previously applied models and mind-sets no longer seem to work well. This is, of course, experienced and acknowledged outside the context of the ECC. As mentioned previously in our discussion, recent studies of church planting activities in Sweden since 2000 reveal that many church planters were motivated by the idea of trying new ways of being Christian community and to reach people with the Gospel. However, the same studies also established that most projects found it difficult to break away from traditional mind-sets, forms, and practices.⁸⁴⁵ Here, it is my conclusion that the churches in Sweden can learn from emerging churches. According to these groups, the shifts in society have created a new and unknown religious and cultural map which warrants an approach that is deconstructive, deeply innovative, and contextualised. Cultural change is not to be viewed as a threat but may be understood as a hermeneutical tool holding redemptive and liberating capacities.

Here, emerging churches could fulfil the function of a “Research and Development Department” of the traditional church - or incubators for innovation and experimentation. In that role they have the potential to serve as important contexts for learning what contextualisation might look like within a Swedish context. Emerging churches bring to attention skills, tools, and practices that the church in the West has previously used to equip and train missionaries with for the purpose of overseas ministry, but these may now serve as an important component in the church’s endeavour to innovate new expressions of faith, community, and mission at home. This, however, poses demands on both emerging churches and the traditional church. Emerging Christians need to address some of their deep-seated scepticism

⁸⁴⁵ Björn Asserhed, *Församling som mission.*, an interview-based study of the experiences of 11 church plants from various denominations and movements in Sweden between 2000 and 2020, as well as an unpublished study by the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), which included interviews of 40 church plants part of SEM that started between 2007 and 2017. The SEM study was presented by Martin Alexandersson (national coordinator for church planting, SEM) at a symposium hosted by *Vidare* in Stockholm, 18 February 2020.

and mistrust towards the institutional church. Traditional churches, on the other hand, need to address issues of safety and control, and instead learn to develop a culture that encourages risk taking and a “willingness to fail” mind-set. They also need to provide room for the prophetic voice within the church that questions the status-quo and calls for renewal and creativity. Stefan Paas points out that “innovation cannot be planned, but it can be stimulated by cross-fertilization between very different people who share some values, and who recognize each other as partners in a common quest.”⁸⁴⁶ What inherited churches can do is to *create permission giving environments* where such cross-fertilisation and innovation can take place for the purpose of mission, church revitalising, and church planting.⁸⁴⁷ If they do not, emerging churches and similar expressions of Christian community risk becoming increasingly sectarian at the cost of unity and a vibrant Christian witness in contemporary society.

In the previous section I briefly mentioned the pain and frustration that innovation and experimentation can involve for people. The difficulty in pioneering new ways for the church to engage in mission and function as Christian community in today’s society should not be underestimated. As one team member from H2O explained:

There are not blueprints. That has been my challenge from the beginning actually. If you want to build a house, if you want to put a roof on it you have to build the walls first. If you want to build the walls you have to lay the foundation. There is nothing like that, so it’s a lot of trial and error, to see what works, recalibration. Sometimes confusion within the team, that’s really a challenge. At the same time, it’s also a challenge to see how much time it takes to build the relationships and to let trust grow.⁸⁴⁸

Issues of sustainability and longevity have been addressed previously in the study, and it is my conclusion that this seem to be a tangible issue for these kinds of communities. Two out of the four groups which were part of this study closed down during the course of the research project. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to address this in any detail, but two observations can be made from the case study material: the two groups that closed down both expressed fuzzy leadership and organisational structures, and they had few, if any, support structures outside the groups. Although this is insufficient for us to draw any clear conclusions in regard to the lack of sustainability in these groups, it does raise the question of what importance external support can have in the development of highly innovative and experimentative communities.⁸⁴⁹

16.5.3 Contribution 3: Adopting a reflexive approach in mission

Mission and evangelism normally have a natural focus on the people and

⁸⁴⁶ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 230.

⁸⁴⁷ In his book, Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*. borrows from innovation theory by highlighting three ‘biotopes for renewal’: Free Havens, Laboratories, and Incubators.

⁸⁴⁸ H2O Participant 1, 24 May 2010.

⁸⁴⁹ Here the concept “mixed economy of church” which has been developed by the Fresh Expressions movement may be helpful to our discussion. C.f. Michael Moynagh, *Every Context*.

communities that we want to reach with the Gospel and serve with the love of Christ. However, what our study brings to attention is that authentic cultural expressions of Christian community require that we also critically address our own traditions and practices. If we neglect this, we risk exporting forms, practices and mind-sets that do not grow well in the “contextual soil” in which we want to plant the Gospel. Although emerging churches at times can become overly polemic in their critique of the traditional church, the emphasis on what I would call *reflexivity in mission* is of significance to our discussion. The term reflexivity is borrowed from the social sciences and carries a number of implications:

- To be reflective about the implications of one’s methods, values, biases, and decisions for the work that is being generated.
- To be sensitive to one’s cultural, political, and social context.
- To be aware that knowledge is always a reflection on one’s location in time and social space.⁸⁵⁰

Translating this to a missionary situation, then, it implies that the person performs a critical auditing of what they bring to the context - e.g. doctrinal traditions, ecclesial forms and practices, cultural aspect, mind-set, etc. This exercise can help expose blind spots that may encumber the emergence of a culturally authentic local expression of Christian community. This perspective, which is an essential component to the hermeneutic of emerging churches, is an important contribution to our discussion about a missiological framework for Sweden today. The issue of reflexivity in mission raises a number of issues, not the least how this can inform the training of church planters and pioneers, and the curriculum of ministry formation at our seminaries. Also, I maintain that this is an approach that can shape local congregations as they engage in everyday mission and evangelism in their specific contexts.

16.5.4 Contribution 4: Taking context seriously

Although context and contextualisation are commonplace concepts in academic discourse, and have a given place in the curriculum when training overseas missionaries, it is perhaps less so in the day to day lives of local Christian communities in Sweden. Church Growth Theory, together with “seeker sensitive” churches like Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago, USA, introduced an awareness of social context, the use of language, and the need for churches to address life situations of ordinary people in relevant ways.⁸⁵¹ With emerging churches we can observe the advent of an even deeper engagement with context in more radical

⁸⁵⁰ Alan Bryman, *Methods*, 393.

⁸⁵¹ C.f. Paul G. Hiebert, “Evaluation.”. For a more detailed discussion on Church Growth Theory see Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*. Paas writes, “Church Growth Theory (CGT) originated in the 1950s, as a response to the challenge of rapid world evangelization, and on the basis of Donald McGavran’s reflection on people movements in India and Africa”, and it has since then come to influence most of the Protestant thinking around church in North America Stefan Paas, *Church Planting*, 113. For a presentation of Willow Creek Community Church and the Willow Creek Association, see <https://willowcreek.com/Member>.

and deconstructive ways. To these communities, then, contextualisation is not merely a way to become more “relevant” to people, but to critically examine our understanding of what church can be within contemporary society. As established in this study, one of the ways that emerging churches innovate and experiment with ecclesial forms and practices, is through a deep engagement with culture and adopting highly contextualising postures. The emerging churches which are part of this study are motivated by establishing culturally authentic expressions of Christian community and faith.

Churches in Sweden are situated in a cultural context that includes more unknowns than certainties. From the material presented in this study I conclude that two habits to nurture in this environment are listening and asking questions. This challenge both standardised evangelistic programs and events, as it calls for a greater flexibility and adaptability of a local church, and a mind-set of coming with ready solutions and presenting answers to the spiritual needs of people. As part of the process for local churches, then, to develop evangelistic events, courses, and programs; it is perhaps just as important to develop methods and skills to listen to their contexts, both on an individual level and from a wider societal perspective. In this study I introduce the idea of evangelism as midwifery as a useful metaphor to reimagine what mission and witness can look like in a “post-culture”. The role of the midwife, in this metaphor, is proactive and present, and serves a maieutic function as spirit of God birth faith within people. Evangelism in a post-Christian context may very well be less about saying the right things - as in conveying facts and knowledge about God - but instead asking the right kind of questions and then paying attention to the answers that are given.

In this study I surmise that the strengths with the missionary posture of emerging churches are their openness to culture and readiness to learn from context. This is directly related to the ecclesiological convictions of these communities addressed above. However, I also observe in the case study material that this is one of the weaknesses of these communities, as they tend to take culture as given and at times lack in their critique of the context which they are part. The critique of culture, however, is one of the strengths with more traditional evangelical approaches to contextualisation, which stress the prophetic challenge of the Gospel in any given context. I propose that a creative synthesis can be developed when we combine both the emerging and more traditional evangelical contextualisation models. In this study I refer to this synthesis as an *emerging critical approach to contextualisation*, where I combine Paul G. Hiebert’s Critical contextualisation model and the hermeneutical approach of emerging churches. For a more detailed discussion see Section 15.4.2, but in brief from this synthesis a dialectical model emerges which consists of a *trifocal lens* - a critical exegesis of and dialogue between Christian tradition, Scripture, as well as culture and human experience. This *critical auditing process* is followed by a *creative sampling process* with the aim of *remixing* elements of the Christian faith with culture. This exercise, when done well, results in: first, a local expression that is at the same time authentic to culture and redeemed by the Gospel, and second, as the process is reciprocal, it also transforms Christian tradition (See Figure 21 below).

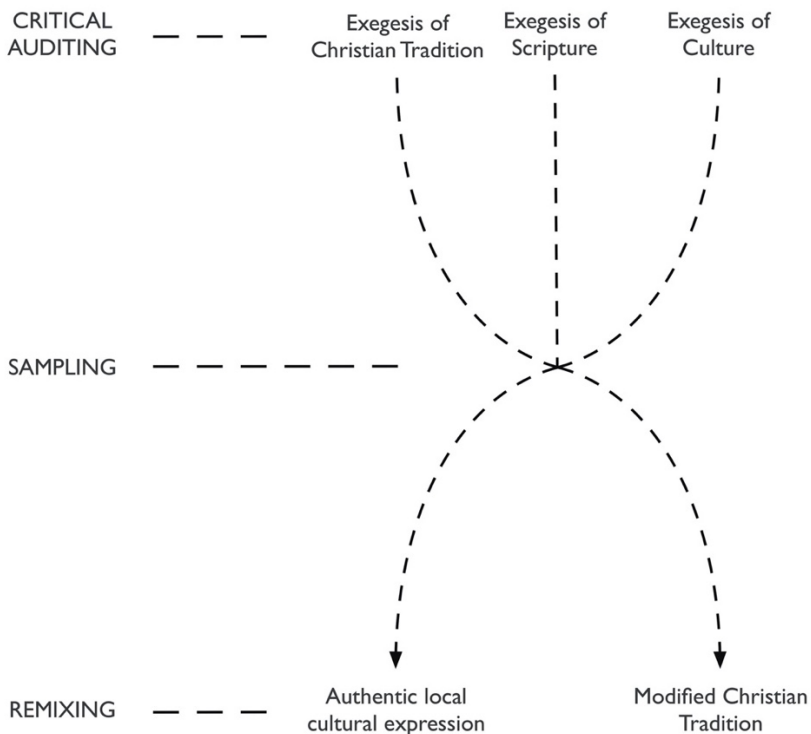


Figure 21. Illustration of the Emerging Critical Model utilising a trifocal lens consisting of a critical exegesis of culture, Scripture and Christian Tradition

16.5.5 Contribution 5: The need to address underlying ecclesiological assumptions

From our examination of the emerging churches which are part of this study we have established how the ecclesiological convictions of these communities significantly shape and inform their missionary posture. From this we can surmise two things: First, Learning from emerging churches is not merely a copy and paste of the different methods and practices that happens to appeal to us. Rather, for churches in Sweden it would involve the process of listening and learning from emerging churches in a deep way (i.e. examining the underlying assumptions) by addressing some of the ecclesiological issues which the ECC brings to our attention. Second, it brings to our attention that ecclesiology is a significant factor as we explore possible pathways and frameworks for mission in today's changing religious and cultural landscape. This is at times obscured, or at least is given a back-row seat in current conversation about a missional church for a post-Christendom culture. For example, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch maintain in their widely read book *The Shaping of Things to Come* (2003) that the primary starting point for mission is Christology. They write:

The church by its very nature has an indissoluble relationship to the surrounding cultural

context. This relationship defines the practical nature of its mission. But the reason for mission comes from somewhere else. To say it more theologically, Christology determines missiology, and missiology determines ecclesiology. It is absolutely vital that the church gets that order right.⁸⁵²

In *ReJesus* (2008) the authors also write:

Before there is any consideration given to the particular aspects of ecclesiology, such as leadership, evangelism, or worship, there ought to be a thoroughgoing attempt to reconnect the church with Jesus; that is, to reJesus the church as the first order of business. So much is bound up with this recovery of a radical New Testament Christology.⁸⁵³

Although I agree with Frost and Hirsch that the reason for mission originates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,⁸⁵⁴ the theological point that they make risks obscuring the fact that no one enters a mission situation as a blank canvas. There are underlying ecclesiological assumptions that can affect both how we understand the Gospel and also can affect our missiological approaches and practices. As far as I surmise from the authors, I have no reason to believe that Hirsch and Frost would disagree with me on this point (i.e. that we bring our ecclesiological assumptions with us in mission), but the important role of a reflexive approach in mission risks being lost in their model.

16.6 Suggestions for further research

Due to the limitations of the study there are, of course, a number of issues and topics I have been unable to address which calls for further research and academic inquiry.

- The study has been limited to Stockholm and Gothenburg, and more research needs to be done in order to understand how the Emerging Church phenomenon has come to be expressed in other parts of Sweden. Is it predominately an urban phenomenon, or are there emerging churches in more rural areas of the country as well?
- During the course of this study a few networks have emerged in Sweden that could be considered expressions of emerging Christianity; for example, the Simple Church network, and *Nya sätt att vara kyrka* [New ways of being church]. Although these networks are mentioned in this study I have not been able to address these groups in greater details.
- This study has not included a generational perspective and it would be of interest to study if the concerns and convictions of emerging churches are also expressed in the younger generations in Sweden (i.e. the generations born in the 1990's and early 2000's)?
- This project is limited to the evangelical Protestant tradition, and it would be

⁸⁵² Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *Shaping*, 16.

⁸⁵³ Alan Hirsch, and Michael Frost, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008) Kindle edition, LOC 892.

⁸⁵⁴ Although I would frame the discussion in a more Trinitarian language, but that it beyond the scope of this discussion.

of interest to study whether or not emerging Christianity is expressed in other ecclesial traditions as well in Sweden, such as the Roman-Catholic Church and Orthodox Church traditions.

- It would be of value to conduct longitudinal studies of these kind of communities in Sweden in order gain a better understanding of how the groups develop and change over time. For example, a longitudinal study would have generated valuable data and insight regarding the longevity and sustainability issues observed in this research project.
- In this study we observed a lack of diversity among the emerging churches which were part of this research. We could also conclude that similar studies in other parts of the world reached the same conclusions. The question is if the concerns of emerging churches also are addressed in migrant churches in Sweden, or if it predominately attracts a certain segment of the population that is invested “in a postmodern ‘deconstructive’ critique of their institutions”?⁸⁵⁵
- Innovation is a central theme in this study, and it would be of interest to address this topic from the perspective of traditional churches as well. For example, what issues need to be addressed in order to create permission giving environments where cross-fertilisation between emerging and traditional forms of church can take place for the purpose of mission, church revitalising, and church planting? Also, what is already happening in terms of innovation and experimentation within traditional forms of church and established institutions?

16.7 Concluding remarks

In this thesis we have established that emerging Christianity, as it has been expressed in the four communities which are part of this study, has much to contribute to shaping the church’s cross-cultural mission, action and reflection in contemporary Swedish society. With that being said, there are no “silver bullets” to be discovered as we discuss the urgent need to develop frameworks for church, mission, discipleship, and spirituality in today’s changing religious and cultural landscape. The four groups which were part of this study were all in their early stage of development when the interviews took place and they are located at the very edge of the established church culture in Sweden as they attempt to reimagine Christian community and mission. Much of the critique that is raised toward emerging churches in this study can be explained by this fact, that most of them are very young, and there is indeed room for increased maturity and self-reflection. With that being said, I believe that there is a prophetic voice to be heard from these small communities that the traditional church could do well to listen to.

I believe that this study presents material that is useful for strategic considerations within established churches, denominations, networks and mission organisations in Sweden. The study also presents material of value when developing training

⁸⁵⁵ Lloyd Chia, “Emerging,” 254.

programs and support structures for church planters and pioneers in this country. My assumption is that we need many different approaches here, ranging from more traditional forms of church planting models, to the kind of experimentative examples that we read about in this study. My hope for this dissertation is twofold: first, that it will encourage further ethnographic research into these matters in Sweden, and second, that this thesis, in whatever way it can, will inspire Christians and churches in this country to creatively engage their specific contexts, and to experience the freedom we have in the spirit of God to experiment and innovate as we follow Jesus in mission.

Appendix A: Interview Participants

Oikos, Gothenburg

Oikos participant 1:

Community leader, 24 y/o, male, married, Lutheran minister, musician.

Oikos participant 2:

Community member, 25 y/o, female, single, church deacon.

Oikos participant 3:

Community member, 25 y/o, male, single, working within the hotel and restaurant industry.

H2O, Gothenburg

H2O participant 1:

Team leader, 42 y/o, male, married.

H2O participant 2:

Team member, 40 y/o, female, married, health care professional.

H2O participant 3:

Team member, 37 y/o, male, married, background as church planter and teaching professional.

H2O participant 4:

Team member, 40 y/o, female, married, background in the Lutheran church and the Pentecostal movement.

H2O participant 5:

Team member, female, single, background as missionary, church planter and teaching professional.

Underground Church, Gothenburg

Underground Church participant 1:

Community member, 28 y/o, female, single, health care professional.

Underground Church participant 2:

Community member, 23 y/o, male, single, raised in a Christian Charismatic context, student.

Underground Church participant 3:

Community member, 24 y/o, male, single, student.

Underground Church participant 4:

Community member, early 20's, female, single, background in the New Age before becoming a Christian, personal care assistant.

Tribe, Stockholm

Tribe participant 1:

Leader, 37 y/o, male, married, background as youth leader, raised in Christian context by parents by overseas missionaries.

Tribe participant 2:

Leader, 31 y/o, male, married, working professional.

Tribe participant 3:

Leader, 42 y/o, male, married, works in the music industry, raised in Christian context by parents by overseas missionaries.

Appendix B: Case Study Questions

The case study questions serve as a reminder to the researcher as to what information that needs to be collected and why. These questions are posed to the investigator, not to the people participating in the case studies categorised thematically: General and background questions, Community, Mission, and Worship.

1. General and background questions

- In what ways does the group express the streams of the Emerging Church presented in Chapter 5 (i.e. Emergent Theology, Alternative Worship, Neo-Monastic, and Missional)?
- Is the group part of an informal or formal network of likeminded Christian communities?
- What does their weekly/monthly schedule/program/rhythm look like?
- Who are the members of the group? Is the group diverse or homogenous?
- What kind of people does the group reach?
- What are the members' and leaders' life stories and backgrounds? What has brought them to the place where they are today?
- Why was the group started? What is the vision and their dreams for the community?
- What does it mean to be a church according to the members? What is the function and purpose of the church in their understanding?
- Are there any particular motivating factors for starting the group, which has influenced the characteristics of the group? Outside influences? Experiences?
- Do they express a critique towards the traditional church? If so, how is this critique articulated?
- How do they understand the current situation for churches in Sweden?
- What is their view of other churches and Christian traditions?
- Is it possible to observe any significant theological themes in what is being communicated (e.g. in teachings, sermons, Bible studies, documents, music, art, causal conversations, etc)?

2. Community

- What is their understanding of Christian community and how is this expressed in practice?
- How does the community organise itself?
- How and where do they meet as a community?
- Do they live in shared households?
- Do they emphasise living in geographical proximity?
- Are they committed to common daily/weekly spiritual practices? If yes, what are these practices, and what has shaped and informed these practices?

- How do they understand Christian discipleship? Are there any particular themes or aspects stressed?

3. Mission

- What are their missionary and evangelistic activities? Why do they engage in these activities?
- Does the group function in an attractional (Centripetal) and/or incarnational (Centrifugal) way?
- How do they describe the missionary function of the church? What is mission according to the members, and what is the function and purpose for mission?
- What is their view of culture and surrounding society?
- How do they describe the specific context they are part of?
- How does their context(s) inform and shape their:
 - Gospel message
 - Ecclesial forms and structures Liturgies
 - Language
 - Liturgies
 - Missional and evangelistic practices
- Are there any particular issues, problems, or concerns that they observe or experience within their specific context? How do they respond to these issues, problems, or concerns?
- Are there any particular issues, problems or concerns that they experience, identify or engage with in regard to the context they are part of / aim to reach?

4. Worship

- How do they practice communal worship?
 - What is being communicated during worship (verbally/non-verbally)?
 - What is the purpose and function of worship according to the members?
- Specifics to look for:
 - Liturgies
 - Use of multimedia and technology
 - Participation
 - Use of ancient Christian practices
 - Use of arts and creativity
 - Music and singing Preaching/teaching
 - How the gatherings are led
 - How they use the room/venue
 - How they pray
 - Where the group meets

Appendix C: Introductory letter for the Preliminary Online Survey

The text is the introductory letter sent out to the groups selected to participate in the preliminary online survey.

The text presented here is a translation from the original text in Swedish.

Dear [NN],

My name is Mattias Neve and I am a doctoral student enrolled at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. The studies are done on a part time basis, and parallel to my research I work as pioneer pastor with the Baptist Union of Sweden. The working title of my research project is "*An inquiry into the Emerging Church Conversation as a paradigm for the future shape of the church in urban Sweden*".⁸⁵⁶

My hope for the research is to find tools and a theoretical framework for mission, church planting, and church renewal for churches and denominations in Sweden.

As a part of my dissertation, I will conduct case studies of Christian communities in Stockholm and Gothenburg that could be regarded as expressions of the Emerging Church conversation. As a first step I have collected names and suggestions for groups that could be included in this study - which is the reason for why I am contacting you.

My question to you is if as a group is willing to participate in this research project?

If you are, then as a first step I ask you to fill in an online survey (the person to answer is preferably the leader of the church, pastor, priest, minister or someone with a similar function in the group). The purpose of the survey is to assess if you as a group fulfil the criteria to be included in the case study research. What I am looking for a churches and Christian groups that in different ways express an emerging church ethos (as I define in my dissertation).

If you are to be selected to participate in the case study research, I will contact you to make arrangements. The collection of data is done during approximately a two week period.

The data that is collected will be used as part of my dissertation work.

I would be grateful if you could consider participate in this study and that you also could consider answer the online survey. You find the survey here: [Website address].

⁸⁵⁶ The title was changed later in order to clarify the focus of my research; emerging church communities in Sweden.

Please contact me if you have any questions or would like to talk more about the online survey.

Sincerely,

Mattias Neve

[Contact details: mobile phone number and email address]

<http://www.ibts.eu>

Appendix D: Information regarding the Preliminary Online Survey

The text presented here was used as an introductory text to the preliminary online survey.

The text presented here is a translation from the original text in Swedish.

Information regarding the online survey and the case studies

This online survey is a preliminary study and part of a more in-depth study of Christian communities in Stockholm and Gothenburg. The purpose of this online survey is to examine if the community can be defined as an expression of the Emerging Church phenomenon (the terms used in the dissertation are 'emerging churches' and 'expressions of emerging church').

The online survey is part of a doctoral research project titled "*An inquiry into the Emerging Church Conversation as a paradigm for the future shape of the church in urban Sweden*".⁸⁵⁷

- The online survey should be answered by a pastor/priest or other leader part of the community.
- The survey responses will be dealt with in a confidential manner.
- If you are to be selected to participate in the case study research, I will contact you to make arrangements.
- The data gathered will be used as part of the publication of my doctoral dissertation.
- The case study research is a qualitative exploratory and descriptive study that utilises multiple methods for retrieval of data.
- The collection of the case study d If you wish to participate in the case study research, please consider that the collection of data is done during approximately a two week period and that you need to be available during the time.

About the researcher

My name is Mattias Neve and I am enrolled on a part time basis, distance learning, at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Prague. I also work as a pioneer pastor with the Baptist Union of Sweden. My research area is in the field of Applied Theology and Missiology. My supervisors are Dr. Parush Parushev and Dr. Andrew Kirk.

⁸⁵⁷ The title was changed later in order to clarify the focus of my research; i.e. emerging church communities in Sweden.

I am grateful that you wish to participate in this project and that you take the time to answer the questions. Please contact me if you have any questions regarding the study:

[Contact details: mobile phone number and email address]

Sincerely,

Mattias Neve

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