THE NETWORK DEPENDENCY

OF

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR BELIEF

ROBERT W HIRST ©

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

University of Surrey

Guildford

October 1999

This thesis is dedicated to my dear mother,

Eva Margaret Hirst

Also in loving memory of my dear father,

the late William Henry Hirst

And these three things abideth - class, role and network -

and the greatest of these is network!

Mitchell, 1969

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

LIST OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Respondent	Refers to those who completed the questionnaire.
Informant or interviewee	Refers to those who completed the questionnaire *and* who were interviewed.
	Pseudonyms have been employed throughout the thesis to maintain the anonymity of all respondents/informants.
CA	Church attender.
NCA	Non-church attender.
RNCA	Religious non-church attender.
HNCA	High belief importance level non-church attender.
MNCA	Medium " " " " " .
LNCA	Low " " " " " .
Ego-centred network analysis	The analysis of networks as they are perceived by the individuals at their centres.
Ego	An individual at the centre of a social network.
Alter(s)[1]	All individuals within the social network of ego.
Religious alter(s)	All individuals within the social network of ego with some form of religious beliefs.
Dissimilar alter(s)	All individuals within the social network of ego holding different beliefs to those held by ego.
Selected alter(s)	All individuals admitted into the social network of ego by choice, e.g. the partner, or a personal friend of, ego.
Non-selected alter(s)	All individuals within the social network of ego who are not within the network by choice, e.g. a work colleague. These non-selected alters tend to be more prolific during childhood.
Religious agent(s)	All individuals holding religious beliefs who seek to transmit those religious beliefs to others.

---

[1] 'Alter' is a word derived from the definition of an ego-centred network by Wasserman and Faust, 1994:53 (see Chapter Two for more details).

Negative agent(s)	All individuals holding religious beliefs who, by their behaviour and/or their understanding and interpretation of a belief system, discredit the belief system espoused by those same individuals.
Belief system	'An organized diversity of attitudes, or a number of opinions on multiple issues that can be summed up by a few underlying dimensions' (Erickson, 1982:159). 'Some ideas or attitudes go together because they are in the interests of people in shared structural locations and/or because they have been plausibly linked by ideological innovators and then have diffused as a package' (ibid.:160).

Measurements associated with the following terms are given in Chapter Two.

SRA	Strong Religious Alter, i.e. a religious alter with strong religious beliefs.
MRA	Moderate Religious Alter, i.e. a religious alter with moderate religious beliefs.
WRA	Weak Religious Alter, i.e. a religious alter with weak religious beliefs.
Relational proximity	A concept to measure the conditions (i.e. the style and intensity) of encounter relationships (i.e. "a connection between two individuals which is based on some degree of unmediated contact")[2] and according to which the interaction between two individuals can be described. Relational proximity is not to be confused with a description of the personalities or the geographical locations of two individuals; its focus is that of interaction.
HRP	Highly relationally proximate.
MRP	Moderately relationally proximate.
LRP	Minimally (low level) relationally proximate.

---

[2] Schluter and Lee, 1993:274

All **interview reference numbers** take the following form:

e.g. H26M10/256 [3]

This indicates: belief importance category, followed by age group, marital status, interview number / interview text unit number for start of quotation.

The codes are as follows:

C	Church attender
H	High belief importance category
M	Medium belief importance category
L	Low belief importance category

18	Age group	18 - 25
26		26 - 34
35		35 - 44
45		45+

M	Married
L	Living as married
D	Divorced
S	Single
W	Widowed N.B. None of the interviewees were 'Separated'.

FN   Information obtained from field notes.

All **questionnaire reference numbers** featured in the text are given in the following form: e.g. (Q.243) and refer to the Stage One questionnaire number.

---

[3] So the example given indicates: High importance category, followed by age group 26 - 34, married, interview number ten, first text unit number for quotation: 256.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

conferences around the country, including those organised by the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group. In this respect, special thanks are due to Paul Chambers for his friendship and helpful advice. A new postgraduate weekend conference, organised by Dr. Kieran Flanagan at the University of Bristol, was also highly useful at an important stage in compiling the thesis - long may that conference continue!

On a more personal level, I am very grateful to my mother for her kindness and patience during the writing of this thesis - as well as through all the years which preceded it! I can also think of at least a dozen very dear friends whom I would include in my most frequent and most intimate network of alters without whose support it would have been far more difficult to have completed this thesis. I shall not name them individually here to avoid missing any of them out; they have all been such precious friends.

Finally, but by no means least, Professor Mike Hornsby-Smith has been an outstanding Supervisor. I could not possibly have produced this thesis without him. His knowledge of the subject, his guidance, encouragement, help, advice, and eye for detail, together with his warm and friendly disposition, has been a continual source of inspiration to me. I shall always be grateful to him.

ABSTRACT

This thesis develops and tests a social network theory of religion to explain the phenomena of religious and secular beliefs in the general population in contemporary Britain. Drawing upon the writings of several historians and upon the work of Giddens (1994a, 1994b), the study is placed in the theoretical context of the debate about the nature of modernity. Due to the various processes of modernization it is argued that *personal network links* between church attenders and non-church attenders have gradually been severed since pre-modern times. The immediate consequences of this development are twofold. First, the transmission of church religion is greatly restricted. Second, personal overarching religious, or indeed secular, world views are now likely to be formulated, maintained, modified and transmitted by individuals within discrete and geographically dispersed social networks within the private sphere.

On the basis of this argument a network dependency hypothesis was formulated, from which twenty-two testable propositions were derived. By employing ego-centred network analysis,[1] the empirical dimension of this thesis reports the testing of each of these propositions against data obtained from a quantitative 500 questionnaire survey of a middle class suburb in the south of England, followed by 39 qualitative focused interviews with informants selected from the initial survey.

The data showed that responses to the process of primary socialization had a profound effect on the initial belief formation of ego. This provided a foundation both for religious or secular belief in later life and for the future selection of network alters. With the exception of conversionists, these beliefs generally continued to be maintained by ego within ego's current network. At all stages ego demonstrated a need to reduce cognitive dissonance and to pursue cognitive consonance (Festinger, 1985). The local community did not constitute a plausibility structure and even the local church did not perform this function. Only discrete, dispersed, personal networks in the private sphere functioned to maintain the plausibility of religious *and* secular beliefs. The findings constituted overwhelming support for the network dependency hypothesis.

---

[1] See list of terms and abbreviations for explanation of the terms: 'ego-centred network analysis', 'ego' and 'alters'.

CHAPTER ONE
NETWORKS AND PERSONAL BELIEFS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Recent sociological debate has highlighted a distinct lack of knowledge about the religious beliefs of ordinary English people who have no contact with formal religious structures (Short and Winter, 1993; Davie, 1994). Short and Winter have stated that:

> sociologists know very little indeed about the nature of uncommitted religious belief in contemporary Britain apart from the fact that this very wide religious penumbra continues to exist (ibid.:638).

We do know that even though English society is now to some extent pluralist and multi-racial, and offers multi-religious education, Christianity remains by far the most dominant religion. Yet there is disparity between indicated levels of religious belief and practice (e.g. Davie, 1994; Barker, *et al.*, 1992). Some surveys have indicated that up to 79% of the English population still calls itself Christian, yet the figures for those in England who attend church at least once a month do not exceed 18% (e.g. Ahern and Davie, 1987; Brierley, 1991; Gibbs, 1993; Davie, 1994), hence Davie's phrase: 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1990a, 1990b, 1994, 1997a, 1997b). But can the use of Davie's phrase be justified? *Do* people in the general population actually hold religious beliefs beyond a mere nominal assent to Christian belief? And if so, what is the nature of these beliefs and how are they acquired and transmitted? Reflection on these questions and on the relatively scarce literature on this subject led to the construction of a social network theory to explain the phenomena of religious and secular beliefs within the general population.[1] The aim of this thesis is to report the formulation and testing of this theory.

---

[1] Wallis and Bruce (1984) make a clear distinction between theories 'of religion' and theories 'about religion'. Theories 'of religion' focus on the *origins* of religion, such as the Stark and Bainbridge (1987) theory (which, put very simply, reduces religious beliefs to this-worldly considerations of rewards, or compensators in lieu of actual rewards). Wallis and Bruce (ibid.) further argue that on the basis of their critique of the Stark and Bainbridge theory: "it is highly unlikely that any theory of (rather than about) religion will ever succeed". The current thesis avoids the problems which beset theories 'of religion' by presenting a theory *about* religion, i.e. how religion is acquired, transmitted, modified and maintained.

Subsequent to a review of the sociological literature on religious beliefs held by people located outside of religious institutional structures an explanation is given concerning the reasoning involved which led to a focus on network analysis. The literature on network analysis is then explored with particular emphasis on the general lack of its application both to the study of religious belief in general and to the body of literature on secularization theory.

The study is then placed in the context of modernity through references to the writings of Giddens (1994a, 1994b) on pre-modern and modern cultures, and to the work of various sociologists on differences between pre-modern and modern types of kinship and friendship relationships (e.g. Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988; Allan, 1996). This is supplemented by the writings of several historians (e.g. Beck, 1950; Thomas, 1971; McLeod, 1974; Currie, *et al*, 1977; Houghton, 1980; Thompson, 1986; Speck, 1988; Myers, 1988) on the network links which formerly existed between the Church and the majority of the general population. This contrast between past and present types of network forms a theoretical framework for the study. In theory, it is possible that social network relationships are intrinsically associated with the religious beliefs of individuals. Stark and Bainbridge (1980b:1389), whilst not providing an answer themselves, pose a question which is central to the empirical dimension of this study, viz.: "is all religion sustained by social networks?". If this question can be answered and if this is indeed an empirical reality, then changes to the structures of personal networks as a result of the processes of modernity may be postulated as a highly significant social development which has, on the whole, been ignored by sociologists of religion. Changes to personal network relationships would help to explain the decline of traditional religion in Great Britain in terms of church attendance figures and thus supplement current theories of secularization. A network analysis approach should also shed some light on the nature of contemporary personal religious and secular beliefs held by individuals within the general population.

Following this theoretical discussion, which clearly draws upon an eclectic range of sources, the empirical dimension of the study is outlined. First, a network dependency hypothesis derived from this social network theory about religious beliefs in the

general population is formulated. This is followed by a brief summary of the general areas of empirical enquiry which emerge from this discussion of social networks and personal beliefs. These empirical issues then become clearly focused in each chapter of the thesis through reporting the testing of specific propositions based upon the network dependency hypothesis - hence this chapter finally outlines the content of each of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.2 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

The initial aim of this project was to seek to gain further evidence which might help to explain the disparity in the statistics between indicated levels of belief and practice within the general population and to gain further understanding of contemporary religious belief outside of traditional religious structures. A further aim was to seek to complement the following few studies which exist on the beliefs of non-church attenders.

In general terms, empirical evidence from a number of surveys (for example, the European Values Surveys, 1981, 1990; and recent Marc Europe surveys and publications[2]) has revealed the influence of geographic and demographic factors on levels of church attendance, together with the effects of variables such as age, class, education, and gender. Several studies have been produced which have analysed the European Values Surveys (e.g. Harding and Phillips, 1986; Ester, *et al.*, 1993). The findings of these studies, together with the results from specific questions used in the EVS questionnaires, will certainly serve as a useful comparison with the questionnaire data collected for Stage I of this research.[3]

More specific material, however, concerning the contemporary beliefs of non-church attenders, is sparse. Key projects on this subject have included:- belief within the

---

[2] For example, Brierley, 1991, 1995.

[3] This is discussed in Chapter Three.

inner city (Ahern and Davie, 1987); belief on a council estate in Hull (Forster, 1989); belief within rural areas (Short and Winter, 1993); and belief among male working class non-church attenders of north Birmingham (Edrington, 1987) - all of which studies found evidence of religious beliefs held by people located outside of religious institutional structures. Short and Winter (1993) reported that the majority of their respondents expressed high levels of religious belief, despite relatively low levels of active participation in organised religion. Likewise, Edrington (1987) certainly found high levels of religious belief among his sample. Indeed, similar findings to the Edrington study have been collected by associates of the Alister Hardy Research Centre, Oxford, such as those referenced by Hardy (1978, 1979), Hay and Morisy (1978), Hay (1987) and Eason (1993).

Two studies in particular, however, have found less evidence of religious belief within the general population. Collins (1997) found that only a minority of her sample of younger people aged between 13 and 16 displayed a 'transcendent faith' (in the form of traditional Christian beliefs) which appears to suggest that age may be a significant variable to explain the difference between Collins' findings and the other studies noted above. Cottrell (1985) has likewise discussed the issue of whether religious belief exists outside of religious institutions by examining religious belief within the context of the private sphere. Her sample consisted of 34 'middle class' unemployed individuals. Cottrell tested Luckmann's (1967) theory[4] about the changing nature and form of religion in the modern world and found the theory lacking credibility in the light of her own empirical data. Cottrell, on the basis of her findings, concluded that a secular cosmology is dominant. This particular study requires further detailed comment and will therefore be discussed in section 1.4.4.

These few studies, most of which provide evidence of the existence of religious beliefs among non-church attenders, would indicate that religious belief in the general population constitutes a topic worthy of further sociological enquiry. Clearly, more knowledge is required in this area, the urgency of which is emphasized by Davie

---

[4] See section 1.4.4 on 'Changing forms of beliefs'.

(1994:190). In this respect, Bailey (e.g. 1986, 1990a, 1990b) has produced a large body of work on 'implicit religion'.[5] Implicit religion does, however, move away from the substantive definition of religion employed in the current study.[6]

Outside of these specific studies, much of the available data and its analysis tends to be rather unhelpful to sociological investigation (Short and Winter, 1993). The empirical dimension of this study therefore complements recent research on non-church attenders through its focus on a sample of 'middle class' respondents aged 18 and over, both church attenders (hereafter termed 'CAs') and non-church attenders (hereafter termed 'NCAs'), living at Grange Park - a relatively new housing development located in a suburban area of Southampton.[7]

The original theoretical approach to this research was rather flawed, however. Initially it was reasoned that the aforementioned disparity between church attendance figures and indicators of Christian belief might well be due to 'dormant' belief, i.e. defining 'dormant belief' as beliefs important to individuals to the extent that such beliefs have the *potential* to be developed further, yet remain undeveloped and untapped by religious organisations. The original aim, therefore, was to test the extent to which 'dormant' belief existed in the general population. It then became clear that such reasoning *assumed* this type of belief already existed in the general population prior to any empirical investigation. This type of error has been noted by Popper (1959) and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

Further reflection on the research problem and on the literature led to a shift in theoretical approach. The possibility of religious beliefs being held by the majority of the general population coupled with an absence of involvement with formal

---

[5] The concept of implicit religion is clarified by Homan (1996:2): "Popular religion accommodates the unorthodox. Implicit religion identifies another domain of practice and belief in which there is no aspiration to be religious but in which there are characteristics ... that are recognisable as the phenomena of the religious domain".

[6] Definitions of religion will be discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.4.2. Reasons for adopting a substantive rather than a functional definition of religion are also given in Chapter Two. This matter requires further detailed discussion which is not appropriate at this juncture.

[7] See Chapter Two for more details of the empirical study.

organised religion gave rise to the theory that any religious beliefs held by NCAs are likely to be dependent upon the influences of people within their social networks rather than directly upon religious organisations.[8] Attention was therefore focussed on literature on network analysis (e.g. Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988; Law, 1991, 1992; Wasserman and Faust, 1994) and to the sociology of kinship and friendship (e.g. Fischer, 1982; Crow and Allan, 1994; Allan, 1989, 1996).

1.3 NETWORK ANALYSIS

Theorists such as Law (1991, 1992) have argued that social networks ought to be the starting point of an analysis of social life. Using an example of the application of network analysis (which Law terms as 'actor network' theory) to the mechanics of power and organisation, Law states:

> It is important not to start out *assuming* whatever we wish to explain ... Instead, we should start with a clean slate. For instance, we might start with interaction and assume that interaction is all that there is. Then we might ask how some kinds of interactions more or less succeed in stabilizing and reproducing themselves: how it is that they overcome resistance and seem to become 'macrosocial'; how it is that they seem to generate the effects such as power, fame, size scope, or organization with which we are all familiar (Law, 1992:380).

Whilst this thesis is not directly concerned with the origins of power and organisation, the relevance of this actor-network theory to the study of peoples' religious beliefs is clearly evident. For instance, studying personal religious belief systems at the level of social interaction should clarify why some types of religious belief result in participation at an organisational level (e.g. church attendance) whilst other types of religious belief remain at the level of the private sphere.

Allan (1996) continues this theme of the fundamental importance of social interaction

---

[8] This is a somewhat over-simplified outline of the argument. Clearly, there are other influences, such as the media. There is also the question of whether some individuals acquire their religious beliefs through an isolated process of contemplation and reasoning. These issues will be considered in some detail in Chapter Eight.

when discussing kinship and friendship relationships:

> These relationships matter. They matter at a personal level, but they also matter more widely in terms of social organisation ... Far from being social 'luxuries' of little sociological consequence, these ties are, to use Jerrome's analogy, 'the cement which binds together the bricks of social structure' (Allan, 1996:2).

A similar view is expressed by Fischer (1982:3): "We cannot exaggerate, however, the overall importance of networks. It is through personal connections that society is structured and the individual integrated into society".

Yet, despite this emphasis by the above writers on the importance of social networks as a fundamental starting point for the analysis of social life, there appears to be an absolute minimal application of network analysis to the study of personal religious beliefs and only one reference was discovered (Fischer, 1982)[9] in the sociology of friendship and kinship to the religious beliefs held by individuals. Social network analysis has been applied to many areas of social life (e.g. compilations edited by Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988; Wasserman and Faust, 1994), but, apart from the following few studies on localism, urbanism and religious conversion, its wider application in the sociology of religion is conspicuous by its absence.

1.3.1 Localism and Urbanism

W.C.Roof (1978) seems to come close to the objectives of the current study through his structural analysis of religious belief, although his research is confined to a sample of 518 Episcopalian church members. His main argument is that local, parochial types of individuals who are involved in the local community will tend towards traditional fundamentalist religious beliefs and will have a greater tendency to conform to the group. On the other hand, cosmopolitan types of individuals have commitments which are centred outside the residential community. These individuals tend to be ecumenical

---

[9] See discussion commencing on page 11.

in their religious orientation, with a tendency to discard traditional orthodoxies. They are more inclined to accommodate religion to secular and scientific thought. This distinction between local and cosmopolitan types does appear to constitute evidence of religiosity dependent upon local community involvement if not on the actual networks of individuals, at least, in terms of the beliefs held by these church members. Nevertheless, Roof does not focus on a detailed analysis of the personal networks of individuals.

Furthermore, the current thesis departs from the position adopted by Roof on three major points. First, Roof's emphasis is typical of the epistemological orientation of most secularization theorists[10] when he refers to "the most serious problem of all - a crisis of plausibility" (1978:6). In this respect, Berger (1969:45) has defined a *plausibility structure* as a 'social base' through which a particular social construction of reality, i.e. a world view, is maintained, whether that world view be religious or otherwise.[11] It is certainly conceded that a plausibility *structure* is a prerequisite for any 'reality maintaining process', which of course includes the maintenance of traditional religious beliefs. But in contrast to Roof's thesis, it is arguable that plausibility structures supporting traditional religious beliefs can equally be maintained in the form of dispersed urban based social networks, even if these networks are not strictly orientated towards a particular local setting. Thus, the type and the frequency of network contacts may be more important than the distance which separates them from one another.

Second, it would appear - in theory at least - that an equally pressing, if not greater, problem than a crisis of plausibility facing religious organisations is in terms of decreasing network links between the religious and the secular, i.e. between CAs and NCAs,[12] and the difficulties of creating such links. It follows from this argument that even if one's personal network is local rather than cosmopolitan, it does not

---

[10] See section 1.4.2 for more details.

[11] This definition of 'plausibility structure' will be used throughout the current thesis.

[12] See section 1.5 of this chapter for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

necessarily mean that religious affiliation will enter the equation unless religious and secular networks somehow become integrated.[13] Roof's study does not seek to account for the mechanisms through which religious belief is transmitted at the interface between the religious and the secular. Neither, for that matter, does Roof account for what makes a local type a local type (i.e. what *causes* individuals to become involved in the local community), other than through reference to personal preference. It is possible that this, in itself, could be related to interaction within social networks.

Third, Roof comments that:

> It is conceivable if the mainline churches continue to lose members and support, the remnants of the faithful might at some point best be regarded as 'cognitive minorities' perpetuating a deviant set of beliefs and values in an otherwise secular context (ibid.32).

In making this statement, Roof implies a clear divide emerging between on the one hand religious networks based upon churches and on the other hand the secular world. Again, in contrast to Roof, and echoing the view expressed by Davie that "almost everyone's religious views contain elements of both conventional orthodoxy and common religion"[14] (Ahern and Davie, 1987:57), the current thesis will argue (based on the empirical evidence collected for this study) that there are varying shades and degrees of religiosity, from the strongly committed orthodox CA, to a plethora of idiosyncratic religious beliefs held by both CAs and NCAs, through to the firmly entrenched NCA atheist. Furthermore, the empirical section of this thesis will report the testing of a proposition derived from the network dependency hypothesis (given in section 1.5.2), that: *personal networks provide plausibility structures for all types of religiosity or non-belief*. One might argue, therefore, that there is not simply a plausibility structure called 'the Church', with everything outside of that structure constituting a secular realm where religious belief becomes implausible. Rather, this thesis will report the testing of the proposition that personal networks provide, for

---

[13] These issues of integration are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

[14] A definition of 'common religion' is given in Chapter Two.

example, plausibility structures for philosophical positions such as agnosticism and atheism which equally require social maintenance.

These three reservations about the work of Roof are partially supported by Lehman's (1986) multidimensional theory which casts doubt on Roof's local/cosmopolitan distinction and argues that further refinement of the model is necessary by distinguishing primarily between social localism (locality identification, i.e. an individual's rootedness in a specific geographical location) and cultural localism (the values and meanings individuals attach to community life in general). Lehman argues that these conceptual differentiations were "implicit in [Roof's] earlier work but not actually pursued systematically" (ibid.:461). Through an analysis of a questionnaire survey of 1,414 members of four Protestant churches in Great Britain, Lehman confirmed the usefulness of this refinement of the local/cosmopolitan dichotomy. From his research, Lehman found "no support for Roof's hypothesis that local community involvement immerses people in plausibility structures which encourage religious activity" (Eisinga, *et al.*, 1991:126). Further work carried out by Lehman (1990) on a sample of 559 lay members of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States, gave additional empirical support for differentiating between these two dimensions of localism. Furthermore, subsequent research by Eisinga, Lammers and Peters (1990, 1991) - using data from a 1985 national Dutch survey of 1,045 adults - confirmed Lehman's theory.

Roof's thesis is not entirely bereft of support, however. For example, Eisinga, Lammers and Peters state that: "By and large the results echo Roof's observation of education, urbanization, and geographical mobility having negative and age having positive effects on localism, religiosity and social conservatism" (1991:131). Where Eisinga *et al.* differ, however, can be summarized in their statement that "the data do not warrant the conclusion that local communities now constitute plausibility structures for the meaning component of religious commitment" (ibid.:132). Their concluding comments are also worth citing at this juncture:

Not all local communities function as a social base for traditional religion, an issue entirely overlooked in localism research. Roof's proposition that local communities now constitute plausibility structures for traditional religiosity implicitly rests on the assumption that local communities are religious communities. This, however, should not be taken for granted. In Holland, at least, there are numerous communities which are not very religious in terms of the inhabitants' attitudes and behaviour. Hence, attachment to those locales will probably not serve to reinforce traditional beliefs and practices (ibid.:133).

Thus, the finding that local communities cannot automatically be deemed to constitute plausibility structures and that cultural localism is more predictive of religious belief and practice than social localism, is entirely consistent with the theory advanced by the current thesis that traditional religious beliefs can be maintained in the form of dispersed social networks even if these networks are not strictly orientated towards a particular local setting.

The effects of urbanism on religious belief is a topic closely related to this discussion of localism. The single reference to religion in the sociology of kinship and friendship - already cited, by Fischer (1982) - marginalizes the dynamics of the interface between the religious and the secular[15] (and is resonant of Roof's thesis in this respect) although Fischer does not set out primarily to study religious belief and only refers to religious belief *en passant*. His central concern is to compare systematically the personal relations of people living in large and small communities.[16] Nevertheless, and again with some similarities to the Roof thesis, Fischer found, in his study of 1,050 adults living in fifty northern California cities and quiet towns, that urbanism *per se* undermined traditional values (including religious values):

> There is a good deal of truth in the belief that urbanites tend to be morally deviant. Among our respondents, for example, residents of the Regional Core were over one and a half times as likely as others to be living with someone out of wedlock, two and a half times as likely to disclaim any religious identity, and a dozen times as likely to be openly 'gay'. These contrasts

---

[15] The word 'secular' is used here to signify all people located outside of religious institutional structures, i.e. NCAs, and does not communicate the signification intended by Roof.

[16] Fischer defines urbanism simply in terms of size of locality.

appear to be typical across America, and elsewhere too ... Among the 1,050 people we interviewed, urban residence was associated with rejection of traditional values and was a significant cause of that rejection (ibid.:63).

Social conditions in rural areas therefore tended to be more conducive to the transmission and maintenance of traditional moral and religious values, whilst the urban (Regional Core) areas tended towards the weakening of traditional values. Fischer observes that this finding was mainly due to people's high involvement with kin networks in rural areas and less involvement with kin in urban areas:

> ... urbanism tends to expand people's opportunities for building social ties beyond the family and neighbourhood (ibid.:80) ... Small town residents, especially the less mobile ones, must turn to neighbours for lack of alternatives, but ... city residents can turn to neighbours only if they find them compatible (ibid.:103).

Furthermore, rural residents were more likely than urban residents to "form or expand their relations within a church or church-based setting" (ibid.:113). This, again, was due to a lack of alternative relations in rural areas and due to Church involvement forming part of a traditional way of life. Roof mentions similar relations among local types:

> Locals are more attached to their immediate social locale and are quite sensitive to the primary groups in which they interact, such as the family, neighbourhood cliques, and community organizations ... For those attracted to developing close friendships and informal, communal relations, churches are an obvious place to turn (1978:41-43).

From the work of both Roof and Fischer it becomes clear that network composition is the common denominator which is cited to account, to a large extent, for the effects of localism and urbanism respectively, with the involvement of kin being particularly influential in terms of traditional types of religious belief outcome. This may indicate the primary influence of kin in the process of religious socialization.[17]

---

[17] In relation to the empirical data for this study, this issue is discussed in Chapter Four.

Nevertheless, citation of the involvement or non-involvement of kin may not in fact constitute the main intervening variable to explain the primary relationship between urbanism or cosmopolitan types and a weakening of traditional values and beliefs. Involvement with kin is clearly less likely in urban areas given increased social mobility in urban areas, more geographically dispersed relationships and fewer opportunities in rural areas for the development of relationships outside the family. But to view a lack of kin involvement as the main intervening variable when attempting to explain a weakening of traditional values is debateable. Kin may pass on religious *unbelief* to their offspring as well as religious belief, particularly when one considers the offspring of generations since the 1960s. Indeed, Fischer does acknowledge - in a similar manner to that of Eisinga, Lammers and Peters (1991) - that: "social integration into the local community can - when that community's climate of opinion is non-traditional - weaken commitments to traditional values" (Fischer, 1982:75). There is, therefore, a need to know what type of beliefs and values are held by the kin within the networks of the informants. Neither Roof nor Fischer develop this line of enquiry. From the empirical data collected for the present study it was found that levels of kin *involvement* were similar for all of the informants, regardless of whether or not the informants' beliefs and values were traditional. Correspondences were found, however, between the types of *beliefs* held by kin and the types of beliefs held by the informants, i.e. if kin held traditional religious beliefs the respective informants generally held traditional religious beliefs, whereas if the kin held secular beliefs the respective informants generally held secular beliefs.[18]

A further contestation with Fischer's thesis is that, just as traditional religious beliefs do not necessarily require a local personal network to provide a plausibility structure and can equally be supported by dispersed networks, so too might it be argued that urbanism need not inevitably result in the undermining of traditional religious beliefs. If geographically dispersed individuals maintain networks with relatives and friends holding traditional values or if new contacts are established between CAs and NCAs within urban areas, then traditional beliefs have an opportunity to be maintained or

---

[18] See Chapters Four and Five for more details.

even to flourish. Such an argument is greatly strengthened when one considers the phenomenal growth of 'cell group'[19] churches (and similar types of religious organisation such as the Soka Ghakki and the Rissho Koseikai) in major urban areas across the world. For example, in the city of Seoul, South Korea, just *one* cell group church professing *traditional* Christian beliefs grew from "five people who gathered in a tent in 1958, to a congregation of over 600,000 in 1989" (Neighbour, 1990:24), with networks of individuals from that church distributed throughout the city. Further examples could be given of identical urban 'mega-church' growth in countries as culturally diverse as Japan, China, Africa, Australia and North and South America (ibid.:ch.1). Fischer's assertion that an association between urbanism and the undermining of traditional values may be typical 'elsewhere' is somewhat questionable when one considers such examples of thriving urban religiosity. The main intervening variable which might explain the primary relationship between urbanism or cosmopolitan types and a weakening of traditional religious beliefs may well be that of the existence or non-existence of network links between traditional churches or traditional religious believers and the surrounding population.[20] Prior to a development of this aspect of the argument, attention will be directed to the application of network analysis to the religious beliefs of individuals in the literature on religious conversion and commitment.

1.3.2 Networks, conversion and commitment

The literature on conversions and recruitment to new social movements - which forms an 'enormous body of literature' (Gartrell and Shannon, 1985:33) - and a smaller body of literature on social network analysis and traditional church involvement appears to constitute the only other sociological domain which gives a certain amount of theoretical consideration to the notion of an association between social networks and religious belief. This thesis will focus only on those studies most relevant to social

---

[19] See discussion of the Soka Gakkai, Rissho Koseikai and the 'cell group' movement in Chapter Nine.

[20] This argument is developed further in section 1.5. In addition, the testing of this relationship, using the empirical data collected for this study, is reported in Chapters Four to Seven.

network analysis. One of the earliest papers in this area of research concerns White's (1968) discussion of a religious influence model. To explain the development of religious commitment, White argued that religious norms are transmitted through interaction between believers and non-believers within a group context and that this group context ensures continued religious commitment. Using data from a sample of 1,571 Northern California church members, Welch (1981) built upon White's paper by applying this principle to traditional religious commitment and tested the hypothesis that: "extensive friendship ties and formal participation within the congregation which are not neutralized by extra-congregational commitments will result in stronger commitment to the norms of Christianity" (Welch, 1981:85). Welch found strong evidence to support his hypothesis and concluded his study with a very pertinent comment:

> On impressionistic grounds, it seems that much of the sociology of religion, particularly that concerned with quantitative survey research, is still dominated by individual-level explanatory schemes. Little systematic attention has been given to the role of community in shaping religious belief and behaviour. Yet it is becoming clear that this psychological approach lacks explanatory power; individual religious commitment is not determined by individual-level characteristics, at least not to any important degree. On the contrary, ties to the denominational or congregational community, as well as the nature of the community itself, are much more important [in explaining traditional religious commitment]" (ibid.:91).

Thus, the importance of a focus on friendship ties for 'shaping religious belief and behaviour' within the context of local churches is foregrounded in the research of both Welch (1981) and White (1968).

More recent network research on traditional churches includes three studies in particular which are pertinent to this thesis. In the first of these studies, Herman (1984) makes use of a network approach to analyse three conflicting groups within a single Anglican Church: the 'reformers' (containing the minister and young to middle aged congregation members who desired to modernize the church), the 'conservatives' (containing older members who wished to maintain the traditions of the church) and the 'followers' (containing younger members not engaged with the

conflict but in passive support of reform). Herman found that network analysis of the congregation yielded some insight into the structure of religious groups in terms of understanding how different types of belief can exist within the same congregation in the form of sub-networks. In the current empirical study, a similar phenomenon has been identified but with an even greater divergence of belief between three of the second stage CA interviewees, all of whom (by sheer coincidence of selection as informants) attended the same church, yet all of whom held radically different religious beliefs. An analysis of their personal networks has yielded dividends in terms of providing a clear explanation for this diversity of belief.[21]

Second, the work of Bradley (1995) - who has conducted a secondary analysis of an American survey of 3,617 respondents, entitled 'Americans Changing Lives' - devotes attention to networks and CAs. Bradley found that frequent CAs reported "larger networks, more frequent telephone and in-person contacts and enhanced perceptions of the supportive quality of their relationships" (1995:259) in comparison to less frequent CAs. Exactly the same type of findings were reported in a third study on CAs by Ellison and George (1994) featuring an analysis of a survey of 2,956 U.S. households. The findings from all three of these studies will be useful to compare with the experiences of the CA informants from this study. But apart from the work by Herman (1984) which only concentrates on the networks of CAs within a single church congregation, neither Bradley's research, nor the research carried out by Ellison and George, sheds any further light on whether there is an association between the beliefs of others within the networks of the informants and the beliefs of the informants themselves. All we are given are variations on the types of networks inhabited by different types of CA.

Stark and Bainbridge (1980a, 1980b) have briefly explored the boundaries of the network phenomenon through reference to other studies which have adopted a network analysis approach to church religion. They found a variety of evidence which suggests that ties within the community in the form of social networks are crucial both

---

[21] See Chapter Six for further discussion of these case studies.

for commitment within the Protestant churchgoing population as well as for the growth of radical religious groups. In this respect they referred to the (then forthcoming) paper of Welch (1981) as well as the important work of Heirich (1977).

Heirich's (1977) thesis forms a key text in that he tests the logic of the arguments of 50 previous studies of conversions (i.e. prior to 1977), his main focus being the social influences which other theorists have said account for religious conversions. These causes of religious conversions identified by earlier social science literature are summarized as:

i) a fantasy *solution to stress* in the social circumstances of believers,

ii) the result of *socialization*, i.e. the result of previous conditioning, such as parental orientations, impact of schooling and so on,

iii) as a result of intensive interpersonal influence: "sometimes called the process of *encapsulation*, whereby inputs from others become so mutually consistent and reinforcing that one begins to see things through the other's eyes" (1977:656).

Lofland (1965) argues that all three of the above factors work together. Other notable studies, such as Stark (1965) and Lofland and Stark (1965, 1966) have found the primary causes of religious conversion to be located in the social environment and not in unrelated, individually motivated, actions. Lofland and Stark (1965) outline seven factors constituting a necessary and sufficient cause for conversion, which might be summarized in essence by the three factors noted above. But Heirich (1977) finds all of these explanations lacking because the three specific factors noted above, of solutions to stress, socialization and encapsulation should "apply equally well to all forms of changed outlook or behaviour ... they do not explain why any particular perspective should be attractive to potential converts" (ibid.:657).

Heirich also notes the lack of control groups used in previous studies and stresses the importance of using them to obtain valid data:

> The results mean little. Until we know the extent to which the general population shares the same circumstances, we cannot assume that these factors account for the phenomena observed (ibid.:664).

This is one reason why CAs have been used as a control group in this study which predominantly focuses on the religious or secular beliefs of NCAs in the empirical section of this thesis.

In Heirich's research on converts to Catholic Pentecostalism, the control groups of orthodox Catholics revealed similarities on most factors (for example, stress and socialization) except for "mass attendance and personal piety and in availability for social influence by the Pentecostals" (ibid.:664), thereby highlighting: "the costs of previous failures to use control groups" (ibid.:667).

Heirich then proceeds to stress the importance of social networks in the process of conversion:

> The impact of social networks is striking indeed - for those already oriented towards a religious quest ... It seems clear that the process of conversion occurs through use of available social networks (ibid.:673).

But, Heirich continues: "If one is not already a religious seeker, such contact is insufficient in most cases to produce a change of heart" (ibid.:673). Through Heirich's analysis of the encapsulation argument in relation to his own data, he concludes that "it would be erroneous to assume that it is social *influence* rather than simply social contact that accounts for most of the conversions that occurred" (ibid.:669). This emphasis on social contact rather than social influence is discussed at some length in relation to the model of social networks developed in the empirical section of this thesis.

So the final question for Heirich, which he deems to be more appropriate to the study of conversions, then becomes: what makes a religious seeker? This question is broken down further into several questions concerning an individual's conception of 'root

reality'. These questions can be summarized as follows: a) What circumstances destroy clarity about one's understanding of root reality? and: b) Under what circumstances will an alternative sense of root reality be taken seriously?

From this study by Heirich, then, two things are clear regarding the causes of religious conversion: the importance of social networks in terms of social contacts rather than social influences, and the importance of the circumstances surrounding how a person views root reality and comes to consider alternative root realities. There is one caveat to bear in mind, however, concerning Heirich's marginalization of the importance of earlier socialization as an explanatory factor in conversions. Heirich's research was about converts to Catholic Pentecostalism and only involved a comparison between Charismatic Catholics and a control group of orthodox Catholics, so one might *expect* previous socialization to be similar across the two groups. But, from the data collected for the current study, socialization is far more significant when different *types* of religious individuals are compared, i.e. types separated by denomination or by NCA belief importance levels and not just separated within a single type of Church.

Cavendish, Welch and Leege (1998) are the most recent authors to publish research on social network theory related to the Roman Catholic Church. Drawing their data from a survey of 2,667 registered U.S. Catholic parishioners, Cavendish *et al.* examined differences between black and white Catholics in terms of patterns and predictors of religious devotionalism and spirituality and found that for both blacks and whites "social network variables [were] the strongest net predictors of every measure of religiosity" (1998:397). They concluded that: "many Catholics - black and white alike - find God through other people ... possibly ... by fostering a form of community that sustains religious practice" (ibid.:405). These findings are therefore consistent with the theory of an association between social networks and religiosity and again confirm the wisdom of extending the application of network analysis beyond religious organisational structures to the beliefs of people within the general population.

Other relevant work on conversions and the importance of social networks includes that of Olson (1989) and Kox, Meeus and Hart (1991). In a study of 762 attenders of five Baptist churches in the metropolitan area of Minneapolis, Olson (ibid.) found that the growing churches tended to be those which, in the first instance, attracted people looking for new friendships. Kox *et al.* obtained a similar finding when testing the Lofland and Stark (1965) model of religious conversion. Their study of 92 adolescent converts joining the Unification Church and the Pentecostal Church in the Netherlands revealed that the majority of their respondents were attracted to these religious groups because, in addition to offering a new perspective on life, they provided satisfying social networks which they had previously lacked. This is congruent with Swatos's (1981:226) conclusion, in his discussion of community and culture in contemporary American religion, that: "the churches experiencing growth are those giving people a sense of place - individual meaning and purpose in a physical and spiritual community".

Tangential to the work on churches and on conversions is the recent research by Miller (1995) which presents and tests a rational choice model of religious behaviour in Japan. In parenthesis, Elster (1990) discusses rational choice theory in some depth, but also provides a useful and succinct statement about the theory: "When faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall outcome. This deceptively simple sentence summarizes the theory of rational choice" (ibid.:22). The objective of the discussion at this juncture is not to become diverted by an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of rational choice theory. The important issue here concerns the inclusion of social networks in the findings of rational choice theorists. Thus, Miller (1995:234) found that "membership in sect-like new religions is correlated with the absence of a social support network". The rational choice in this example involved the positive outcome of the provision of a social support network through becoming a member of a sect-like religion. The social ties formed by these individuals then led to their acquisition of alternative beliefs.

Likewise, Gartrell and Shannon (1985) have presented a rational choice theory of

conversion which they have combined with network principles. Conversion, according to Gartrell and Shannon, is not just "a function of recruits' evaluations of the social and cognitive outcomes of converting relative to not converting" (ibid.:32) but they also argue that "conversion decisions hinge not only on their own but also on significant others' evaluations of movement beliefs" (ibid.). Clearly, this process of assessment by the recruits, of others evaluation of movement beliefs, would involve time and the concomitant availability of the recruit for frequent interaction with others within the movement. This phenomenon of the evaluation of movement beliefs by significant others within the networks of recruits (through a process of interaction over a period of time) may well have its counterpart in relation to other types of belief and unbelief in the general population. To simplify this argument, let us term each individual with a friendship network in the general population as 'ego' and those within the network of 'ego' as 'alters'.[22] Thus, within the network of each ego, various religious or non-religious beliefs may be held by the alters. Ego, over a period of time, may be exposed to the evaluation of those religious or non-religious beliefs by the alters and thereby the belief outcome of ego may be modified as a result. Indeed, this may be one of the key mechanisms which drives plausibility structures.[23] Of course, at this stage, such reasoning (even though derived from the theory of Gartrell and Shannon) is hypothetical and requires empirical verification.

This theoretical issue of a possible association between social interaction, time and the formation of religious beliefs arises in the debate between Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson, (1980, 1983) and Wallis and Bruce, (1982). This debate requires explanation and elaboration, however, prior to consideration of this issue of social interaction, time and belief modification. In 1980, Snow *et al.* presented a paper in which they formed a number of conclusions concerning the reasons why people choose to join one type of social movement rather than another functionally equivalent movement within the same market and why some movements grow more rapidly than others. Their main conclusion was that:

---

[22] Terms derived from Wasserman and Faust, 1994:53.

[23] See Chapters Six and Seven for further discussion.

... the probability of being recruited into a particular movement is *largely* a function of two conditions: (1) links to one or more movement members through a pre-existing or emergent interpersonal tie; and (2) the absence of countervailing networks (1980:798).

Wallis and Bruce (1982) subsequently wrote a paper objecting to the thesis advanced by Snow *et al.*, with regard to their use of evidence, their overall substantive argument, and the conceptual tools used in the research. Snow *et al.* (1983) made a strong defence of their paper on all three grounds, by arguing that Wallis and Bruce misread and misrepresented their work. It was clearly important that Snow *et al.* defended their study on empirical grounds. Indeed, they emphasized that: "However appealing a particular thesis on meta-theoretical or philosophical grounds, the norms of science suggest that its viability is ultimately contingent on how it resonates with the empirical world" (1983:114). One of the main criticisms of the work was that the data chosen for the study - i.e. research on the "Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement in America ... interviews with 25 Hare Krishna devotees ... and a survey of 300 university students who had either participated in or were sympathetic to one or more social movements" (ibid.) - was inadequate for the purpose of network analysis. To avoid becoming diverted by a discussion of the (more than adequate) detailed defence offered by Snow *et al.* concerning their use of this empirical data, it should suffice to draw attention to the following propositions advanced by Snow *et al.*, that on the basis of the above data:

> individuals who are linked to one or more movement members through pre-existing extramovement networks will have a greater probability of being contacted and recruited into that movement than will those individuals who are outside of members' extramovement networks and that movements which are linked to other groups and networks will normally grow at a more rapid rate and normally attain a larger membership than will movements which are structurally more isolated and closed (ibid.:116).

They followed this by claiming: "There is nothing in the 'evidence' presented by Wallis and Bruce that urges modification of those propositions" (ibid.). Furthermore, Snow *et al.* cited numerous other studies which amounted to over 1,700 participants in 33 different social movements, of whom "the vast majority ... were recruited

22

through social networks" (ibid.). However, Wallis and Bruce completely ignored this aspect of their argument.

Nevertheless, it is the substantive and conceptual criticisms which are most pertinent to the current thesis, since a criticism of the work by Snow *et al.* on a substantive and conceptual level constitutes a potential criticism of any study which might set out to argue a similar thesis (bearing in mind that in the current thesis the application of network analysis will be extended beyond recruitment to social movements).

The first substantive criticism - which introduces the theoretical issue of a possible association between social interaction, time and the formation of religious beliefs - concerns the charge by Wallis and Bruce (1982:112) that the analysis by Snow *et al.* placed "undue emphasis on the role of social networks". Wallis and Bruce argued that the paper presented recruitment to religious movements such as Krishna Consciousness as: "primarily a matter of networks rather than of beliefs, attitudes, aspirations or nebulous longings of the individuals concerned; in short that cognitive factors are trivial in comparison with the effects of personal networks in recruitment to social movements" (ibid.:103). Wallis and Bruce then commented that:

> Such a view accords well with a Durkheimian tradition of sociology suspicious of the internal processes of thought and belief of human agents and one which sees the sociological enterprise essentially to consist in showing that thought and belief are much less important to social action than structural factors and external constraints (ibid.).

The thesis of Snow *et al.* and, by implication, all other similar studies which follow are thereby accused of being "reductionist in character depending upon a mechanistic conception of the person and the means by which he is activated" (ibid.).

Snow *et al.* respond to this charge by admitting that they do give greater attention to social networks than to cognitive factors but they make no apology for their thesis, arguing that such a theoretical stance by no means implies that cognitive factors are deemed to be trivial and unimportant. They state that, on the contrary, the process of

23

recruitment is dynamic and indeterminate rather than subject to predetermined cognitive states or personality traits. The reasons for people either joining or continuing to participate in social movements "are generally emergent and interactional rather than prestructured" (Snow, *et al.*, 1983:113) but social network ties create the conditions whereby such interaction is facilitated. This process is therefore one of interaction and belief negotiation over a period of time within the context of social networks - precisely the position adopted by the current thesis when applied to all types of belief and non-belief within the general population.

The debate is subsequently reversed by Snow *et al.* and criticism is directed at the paper by Wallis and Bruce through their statement that it is equally mechanistic and reductionist to argue that human action, and therefore recruitment, is primarily "driven or propelled by internal dispositions rather than pulled or compelled by external forces" (ibid.:114). They argue that recruitment to social movements does not take place in a social vacuum. To advance a psychological / motivational thesis therefore implies, in the words of Snow *et al.* :

> ... that movement ideology and goals are self-evident given a certain cognitive orientation. We think such an assumption is sociologically untenable. Not only does it presume a connection between preaffiliation cognitive states and movement appeals that is too immediate and direct, almost to the point of being magnetic, but it glosses the process by which predispositions and movement appeals become aligned ... we see this process as central to understanding movement joining and participation (ibid.:113-114).

Thus, Snow *et al.* argue that time is required in which people outside of social movements gradually assimilate the belief systems whilst integrating with movement members and that this is largely "a function of an individual's availability for participation" (ibid.:113).

Finally, at the substantive level, Snow *et al.* object to the assumption of Wallis and Bruce that "movement joiners differ significantly from non-joiners in terms of personality or cognitive factors" (ibid.:114). They further state that such an assumption:

... smacks of the kind of dualistic fallacy that has plagued *this analysis* for years. Not only is there no compelling evidence for assuming a qualitative distinction between movement joiners and non-joiners but such an assumption begs the question of how some individuals rather than others come to be informed about and introduced into one movement rather than another. Is it a matter of chance? Is it because of some mystical attraction? Are some individuals touched by a kind of 'tongue of flame', an unnamed or undefined spirit that causes them to rush to become movement participants? Or is recruitment generally structured, as we argue, by interpersonal ties or network linkages? (ibid.).

It would appear to be sociologically sound that interpersonal ties or network linkages feature as an essential component in the process of recruitment to social movements.

Snow *et al.* do admit to conceptual weaknesses in their thesis but only in terms of treating the conceptual issues rather lightly. This was due primarily to lack of space as well as assuming that "social networks were salient features of the working vocabulary of most sociologists" (ibid.:116-117), hence Snow *et al.* avail themselves of the opportunity to clarify what they mean by 'network'. No such assumption will be made herein; hence a detailed discussion follows further on concerning the concept of 'network'.[24]

Apart from these, and similar, studies on recruitment to social movements and on specific churches, there appear to be no other applications of network analysis to the religious beliefs of individuals.[25] It is clearly possible, however, to apply network analysis to all types of religious belief and indeed unbelief within the general

---

[24] See Chapter Two.

[25] Some very recent work has been carried out by Scheepers and van der Slik (1998) on moral attitudes in terms of the effects of people in the "primary circle of the respondent ... that is, his/her spouse [or partner], his/her parents, and his/her parents-in-law" (ibid.:687). Scheepers and van der Slik have stated that:

> We found [from data derived from the Dutch Family Survey, 1992-1993] clear evidence in favour of the hypothesis that there are additional effects at work, next to individuals' characteristics [*], especially of spousal characteristics on the explanation of moral attitudes (ibid.:688).

* Individuals' characteristics included beliefs and religious involvement, which "on moral attitudes certainly outweighed the effects of educational level and personal income" (ibid.).

Scheepers and van der Slik have therefore proposed that further research be carried out on "the effects of social characteristics of people belonging to both the primary or secondary social networks [of the respondent]" (ibid.:689). A logical development of this argument would be to extend this network approach beyond the study of moral attitudes to a much more detailed network study of all forms of *religious* belief and unbelief.

25

population (outside of organised religious structures) and not to restrict this line of approach merely to various types of religious conversion or religious activity within churches, sects or cults. In summary of this section on network analysis, studies on networks, if they refer to religion at all, tend either to confine the studies exclusively to research on churches (e.g. White, 1968; Heirich, 1977; Roof, 1978; Welch, 1981; Herman, 1984; Ellison and George, 1994; Bradley, 1995; Cavendish, Welch and Leege, 1998), or to research on other religious organisations (e.g. Lofland and Stark, 1966; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson, 1980, 1983; Gartrell and Shannon, 1985; Miller, 1995), or they consider religion as just one of a number of variables (e.g. Fischer, 1982; Scheepers and van der Slik, 1998). They do not examine social networks in relation to all types of belief through to unbelief and it would appear that this thesis is therefore unique in this respect.

Turner (1991) and Beckford (1989) both argue that the sociology of religion has been too narrow and has become marginalized. Beckford has also argued that the secularization debate has contributed towards the isolation of religion from other social phenomena. The sociology of religion thus requires integration with other areas of sociology. So to link the study of religious beliefs in the general population with the study of friendship and kinship fulfils this criterion and simultaneously retains the significance of the secularization debate whilst taking the sociology of religion in a less familiar direction. If we accept Law's argument that networks are the place to begin analysis of social life, then network analysis of the beliefs of individuals in the general population should help to shed light on the current nature of religious beliefs outside of organised religious structures and yield fresh insight into the transmission of contemporary religious beliefs. This approach is particularly useful when one takes into account that few sociologists of religion have based their methodologies on network analysis. This argument becomes even stronger when one considers the lack of attention given to network analysis by secularization theorists. Thus, a discussion of this issue now follows.

1.4 SECULARIZATION THEORY AND NETWORK ANALYSIS

1.4.1 Religious beliefs in the general population and secularization theory

It has already been mentioned that few studies are available on the contemporary religious beliefs of people living in the general population. It is rather ironic, therefore, that there are plenty of theories about the process of secularization as it relates to contemporary religious belief, yet little detailed empirical evidence (of religious beliefs held by people in the general population) to support them. The strengths and weaknesses of some of these theories will be outlined below to show how this thesis might complement these studies and move the debate forward.

Secularization has been very precisely defined by Wilson (1966:14) as the "process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance". Even by 1982, Wilson had found no reason to modify this definition, which to some extent confirms its adequacy (1982:149). Wilson has emphasized that:

> ... such a definition does *not* imply ... that all men have acquired a secularized consciousness. It does not even suggest that most individuals have relinquished all their interest in religion, even though that may be the case. It maintains no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system (ibid.:149-150).

Wilson has conceded that: "Certainly it is an open question whether secularization is reversible" (1985:17). Nevertheless, he argues that: "It would be difficult to demonstrate that any such reversals have ever occurred" (ibid.).

On the whole, the secularization thesis is complicit with a dominant linear image of Western thought which contends that: "social life is systematically 'coming from' somewhere and 'going' elsewhere" (Hammond, 1985). Hammond continues:

27

> In the social scientific study of religion this dominant linear image is expressed chiefly in the term *secularization*, the idea that society moves from some sacred condition to successively secular conditions in which the sacred evermore recedes (ibid:1).

In this respect, an important distinction has been made by Dobbelaere (1981, 1984, 1985, 1987) in terms of three principle levels of secularization, namely, the wider society, religious organisational structures, and the individual. Bruce (1996) suggests that decline has occurred on a number of indices of religious belief and behaviour and presents evidence (some of which is more substantial and convincing than others) to support his argument. This includes a decline in institutional religion in the form of church attendance figures and a loss of the social or political influence of the traditional Church; a decline in religious celebration and legitimation of social events such as births, marriages and deaths; fewer national days of fasting, repentance or prayer; a fall in the number of people holding orthodox Christian beliefs; a decline in generalized supernaturalism and a decline in people's mass media consumption of religious publications and popular religious programmes. Various attempts have been made to explain these various aspects of religious decline, some of which have met with theoretical opposition and contention. The theoretical priorities of these explanations will now be considered and attention will be directed to the lack of application of social network theory to the process of secularization.

1.4.2 The theoretical priorities of secularization theory

In the sociology of religion, from Weber onwards, writers favouring the theory that progressive secularization is taking place (e.g. Berger, 1963, 1969; Wilson, 1966, 1976, 1982, 1985; Bruce, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1997) have tended to emphasize epistemological factors, such as the growth of rationality and of relativism to provide a primary explanation for the undermining of religious interpretations of the world and the ostensible decline of religious belief in the West. This trend in secularization theory has been observed by Beckford (1989):

28

One of the principal legacies from Weber and Troeltsch was a set of interpretive categories which emphasized the gradual ascendancy of intellectualized and calculative reason over the values which had traditionally given meaning to human affairs in Western societies. This process of rationalization was regarded as a prime determinant of the modern Western world and the chief agent of religion's decline (ibid.:39).

This view is echoed in the words of Hamilton (1995). Hamilton - with reference to a number of sociologists who have appealed to inherent secularizing tendencies within Protestantism - states that: "Perhaps the dominant view, stemming from Weber, is that it is the growth of rationality in the West which is the key to the process of secularization" (ibid.:170), thus offering what might be described as a partial and less than adequate explanation of why Protestant countries have been the most affected.

Moreover, the debate often has ideological undertones which suggest an inevitability to the secularization process and which advance the notion that religion and modernity are incompatible (Martin, 1991). By way of contrast, Martin (1978) avoids this ideological approach by arguing that broad tendencies towards secularization may take place in different cultural contexts if all things are equal. But, Martin continues:

... things are not equal - ever ... they are most conspicuously not equal with respect to the particular cultural (and generally linguistic) complex within which they operate (ibid.:3).

Martin argues that secularization is largely a European phenomenon and that even in Europe the future of religion appears to be uncertain, i.e. whether a 'new kind of space for religiosity' in Europe will be created as 'old alignments become remote memories', or whether there will be 'a total fragmentation of all belief systems' (1991:473). The important point here is that:

... the vastly varied religious situation needs to be studied apart from the pressure to illustrate a philosophical position (Martin, 1965:182).

Epistemological preoccupations have therefore tended to obscure, or lead to the omission of, the analysis of religious beliefs in relation to the effects of personal

network relationships.

Even when sociologists of religion have given assent to structural factors such as globalisation and mass communication (e.g. Wilson, 1982:129-130), the impetus of the debate has tended towards discussion of pluralism as an epistemological problematic, i.e. a focus on the concomitant escalation of alternative ideas and experiences which, at least ostensibly, has further undermined any possibility of a collective overarching religious world view.

Some theorists have acknowledged the influence of structural factors such as population distribution and institutional differentiation (e.g. Martin, 1978; Wilson, 1982; Bruce, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) but - apart from the previously cited negative critique by Wallis and Bruce (1982) on Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson's work (1980)[26] on the importance of social networks in recruitment to social movements - *all* of the theorists noted above who support the secularization thesis have tended to omit a detailed discussion of the effects of personal network relationships on the religious beliefs of individuals.

1.4.3 Emphasis on decline and the insignificance of contemporary religious beliefs

Weber predicted religious decline (with the exclusion of a continued quest for meaning) but left it to others to discover its nature (Bottomore and Nisbet, 1979). The Weberian legacy of the inherent secularizing tendencies of Protestantism has provided a key theme for secularization theorists. The influence of Protestantism has been marginalized, however, in the formulations of Marx and Engels (1957). They favoured the view that the bourgeois revolutions - encompassing a rejection of the divine right of kings and the ascendency of individual citizenship - created the conditions necessary for the rejection of religion and the rise of a materialist,

---

[26] This refers to the discussion commencing on page 21.

rationalist, scientific approach to the world. Such a theoretical stance fails to acknowledge the complex interactive processes which accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie and the spread of Protestantism. The theories of Marx and Engels are also less than adequate to account for the continued presence of religion in varying degrees (and sometimes even the growth of religion) in various modern democratic societies.

In contrast to the theories of Marx and Engels, Bruce (1995a:4) has argued that the Reformation "gave voice to simmering social, political and economic tensions, and, in so doing, amplified them, and produced massive changes in the societies of western Europe". According to Bruce, then, it was the Reformers, with their emphases on individualism and egalitarianism who thus inadvertently "undermined the hierarchical vision of society as a pyramid that underpinned feudalism" (ibid.:5). Bruce builds upon the Weberian legacy noted above through his focus on the gradual transition from church to sects to denominations - a transition which ultimately had its origin in the Protestant Reformation. It is from this origin that Bruce traces not just the rise of the secular state, but also the rise of cultural pluralism and a gradual increase in the religious toleration of denominations which now appears to have removed most reasons for recruitment of new church members through the generation of 'conversions'. This is indeed a valid observation in terms of the extent to which religious toleration has impinged upon the proselytizing activity of church members, thereby inhibiting the transmission of traditional forms of religious belief. However, Bruce tends to write-off the existence of religious beliefs in the general population as being insignificant and sees little hope for the future of religion in general (ibid.:70-71). The previously cited paper by Bruce (1996) argues that secularization is occurring at all levels of society and that 'latent' or 'implicit' religion is a mere residue of earlier forms of traditional religion and generalized supernaturalism. Bruce thereby tends to write-off what he terms the 'silver lining' theorists such as Davie (1994), by claiming the superiority of empirical evidence which supports a description of Britain as largely secular. Davie's (1994) view is more optimistic than this. She argues that religion persists in contemporary Britain outside of religious institutional structures but that more research is required on this subject. Bruce therefore makes a bold invitation to other sociologists to produce evidence to contradict his argument.

In relation to the empirical evidence collected for this study, the theoretical stance adopted by Bruce will be discussed further and challenged to a certain extent in Chapter Nine of the present thesis.

Berger (1969:111) similarly concentrates attention mainly on factors internal to Christianity, maintaining that secularization tendencies were inherent within the Christian tradition and that Protestantism brought about 'an immense shrinkage in the scope of the sacred'. This is indeed true, but one could argue that in more recent times, certain Pentecostal revivals and the modern Charismatic movement have to some extent redressed the balance by reinstating the miraculous and the magical without recourse to certain ritual and sacramental elements of Catholicism (with the exception, of course, of Charismatic Catholics), elements of which were abandoned through the Protestant Reformation.

But outside of the secularizing tendencies within Christianity itself, and outside of Berger's stress on the removal of sectors of society and culture from the domination of religious institutions and symbols, Berger draws attention to what he regards as 'the subjective' aspect of the secularization process, namely, the 'secularization of consciousness' (ibid.:107). What Berger means by this term is that "the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations" (ibid.:108). The extent to which this has happened, however, needs to be subjected to further questioning and analysis, particularly in the light of the findings of this study. For example, the majority of the informants interviewed for the second stage of the research did report at least some degree of religious interpretation of the world and of their own lives.[27] Despite this reference to the secularization of consciousness, Berger nevertheless appears to be optimistic about the continuation of socially produced transcendental forms of meaning.

---

[27] This is discussed further in the empirical section of the thesis, particularly in Chapter Eight.

1.4.4 Changing forms of beliefs

Others advance the theory that religion is not in decline but merely changing its form, having been relegated to the private sphere (e.g. Luckmann, 1967, 1983; Bellah, 1971, 1985; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985). Indeed, Durkheim envisaged this type of change in response to the processes of modernity - a change from collective representations of the sacred to individualized symbols of the sacred and thus a focus on the sacredness of individuals (Beckford, 1989:25-31). But there is no empirical evidence to suggest this is in fact what has happened. Rather, the small amount of available evidence on religious belief in the general population appears to indicate the contrary, i.e. that no change in form has taken place (e.g. Cottrell, 1985; Collins, 1997), and it further indicates the presence of beliefs akin to Towler's (1984) 'common religion' or Hornsby-Smith, *et al.*'s (1985) 'customary religion',[28] (e.g. Ahern and Davie, 1987; Edrington, 1987; Hay, 1987; Forster, 1989; Short and Winter, 1993).

Luckmann (1967) is the principal exponent of the theory that whilst traditional religion may decline, religion itself will continue and merely change its form. To express this theory very simply, Luckmann postulates that individuals within the private sphere will form religious cosmologies from an eclectic range of sources other than church religion. But Cottrell (1985) has tested this theory and found it wanting. In her attempt to test the Luckmann thesis, Cottrell looks for the presence of certain criteria in her data which Luckmann postulates are characteristic of changing forms of religion in the modern world. These criteria involve first, the *a priori* assumption, held by Luckmann, that man is naturally religious in terms of his achievement of transcendence through the construction of self-identity resulting from the process of socialization. Second, meaning based on transcendent values or symbolic systems is deemed by Luckmann to be essential to make sense of life. Third, Cottrell defines two terms related to the problematic of the definition of meaning, viz. a) the

---

[28] Towler (1984) has defined common religion as "those beliefs and practices of an overtly religious nature which are not under the domination of a prevailing religious institution". Hornsby-Smith (1991) has defined 'customary religion' as beliefs and practices: "derived from 'official' religion but without being under its continuing control". See Chapter Two for a more detailed account of definitions of religion.

'superordinate' - Cottrell's term for *general meaning* "which has to do with the search for the significance of human life in cosmic terms" (ibid.:97) and which is "a theme of meaning which has, in Luckmann's terms, a 'transcendent' referent; that is something which refers to a plane above and beyond the world of everyday life" (ibid.:104), and b) 'proximate meanings' - Cottrell's term for meanings which: "stem either from the immediate world of subjective life or from the environs of the surrounding culture" (ibid.:97). Cottrell then includes these two terms in a description of Luckmann's postulate that an overarching superordinate will be formulated by individuals which will thereby inform all other proximate meanings. Fourth, Luckmann predicted that this formulation of an overarching superordinate would take place with an increasing degree of psychological independence from the social structure. Cottrell tests all four of these criteria empirically and finds Luckmann's theory lacking in credibility as a result.

Cottrell asserts that, from the evidence of her empirical data, identity formation and meaning is derived primarily through achievement, shared interests and the prospects of rewards by the system, of material success, comfort and status. Religion, then, does not perform various functions that are indispensable for the maintenance of individual and social life, neither is religion essential for meeting certain human needs such as that of meaning in everyday life, i.e. proximate meanings. Religion has not, therefore, changed form to alternative forms as argued by Luckmann. Her argument is convincing in this respect. One might agree, on the whole, that her evidence does suggest that religion is not surviving in a different form and that, indeed, there is not always a need for religious belief. It is clear from her evidence that people are not alienated from the social system and that self-identity is generally formed in the ways suggested by Cottrell without reference to that which is essentially religious.

One caveat concerns the way in which general meaning is dismissed by Cottrell as inconsequential if it is not integrated into the proximate meanings of everyday action. Obviously, in terms of the testing of Luckmann's theory, this is a logical step to take. Yet it is clear that most people, according to extracts from Cottrell's sample, rate general meaning quite highly if life is ultimately to make any sense. The only

34

difference between these respondents and those classified by Cottrell as 'religious' is that general meaning fails to become the superordinate due to its non-integration with proximate meanings. Nevertheless, these so-called non-religious respondents saw a definite place for general meaning. Cottrell herself states that:

> ... *they can't make ultimate sense of life without it* ... others felt that there had to be something otherwise they were left with the thought that there was no point to existence at all ... People are not inclined to believe that the world is a gigantic accident and simply the product of chance ... There seems to be a stubborn intuition that it cannot all be for nothing [my italics] (ibid.:168-169).

This is surely highly significant, yet Cottrell down-plays its importance. This does not constitute a major weakness in her overall thesis since, as stated above, her intention was to test Luckmann's theory, part of which argues that the salient values of individuals would become apparent from the choices individuals make between different courses of action. Yet, having proved the weakness of Luckmann's theory, then to proceed to dismiss empirical evidence which suggests a need for an ultimate context without it affecting the rest of one's life is to gloss over an important religious element in the lives of these individuals. Cottrell's citation of evidence of a need of an ultimate religious context in order to make sense of life also fails to explain why her informants still held on to such beliefs and fails to explain how her informants acquired these beliefs. Indeed, Cottrell herself comments that: "The similarity of opinions evidenced raises the interesting question of how these ideas are transmitted ... there must be an underlying mechanism" (ibid.:167). Socialisation theory[29] and network analysis would be most appropriate in this respect, to uncover such mechanisms.

1.4.5 Other studies which, in varying degrees, seem to contradict secularization theory

In theory, at least, it is likely that people retain at least *some* degree of concern with

---

[29] This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

matters of a 'religious' or 'spiritual' nature. Giddens (1994a, 1994b) has argued that the process of secularization "does not seem to result in the complete disappearance of religious thought and activity - probably because of the purchase of religion upon ... existential questions" (1994a:109) which can arise in the modern world. These existential questions, according to Giddens, fall into four categories and demand to be addressed by each and every individual. The first concerns the very nature of existence itself. Individuals have not only to accept the reality of existence in the present but, as an on-going process of being-in-the-world,[30] have to maintain a sense of security about that existence in the future. In pre-modern times, tradition supplied a firm organisational framework for that ongoing security of personal being which the process of modernity has undermined. The second category involves the coming to terms with the finite nature of human life and the subjective uncertainty of that which lies beyond biological death. The universality of this dilemma has been aptly expressed in the words of Shakespeare's Hamlet: "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil?".[31] The third category of existential question concerns the inherent uncertainty of the reliability and integrity of others from the perspective of the individual. The orderliness and predictability of social interaction is thereby constantly under threat by the unpredictable actions of others and the inability of individuals fully to perceive others as subjects. No individual can be sure there are no malicious ideas or intents in the minds of others. Even the biographical continuity of personal identity and the development and sustenance of trust in one's own self-integrity can be problematic for some people. This forms the fourth category.

Giddens argues there are further substantial reasons why individuals should feel ontologically insecure in the modern world. In addition to these existential questions on a personal level, there are - on global, national and regional levels - the risks of nuclear war and of other threats to the environment. Thus, the reliability of the environment, of things, of others and even of the self are all open to question. This

---

[30] Giddens, 1994b:48, uses this phrase drawn from the philosophical works of Kierkegaard, 1944.

[31] Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1, Lines 68-69.

may provide certain reasons why some people revert to religion as a strategy to cope with such issues.[32] On the basis of the continuing existence of these existential questions, Giddens therefore suggests one might expect to find a certain degree of religiosity in the general population.

The lack of epistemological certainty in the modern world forms another key focus of Giddens' writing, particularly in terms of reflexive knowledge. He states that: "the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason, at any rate where reason is understood as the gaining of certain knowledge" (1994a:39). This type of uncertainty may help to explain the contemporary appeal of fundamentalist forms of Christianity as a 'rock' of certain knowledge amidst a sea of shifting reflexive knowledge.

Giddens does balance these views, however, with his thesis of the emergence, in the modern world, of a general awareness of risk, i.e. an awareness that most of the contingencies which affect human activity are now humanly created rather than merely given by God or nature. Giddens claims that the: "concept of risk replaces that of *fortuna* ... it represents an alteration in the perception of determination and contingency, such that human moral imperatives, natural causes, and chance reign in the place of religious cosmologies" (ibid.:34). Thus, divine or spiritual influences are sequestered from the world of humanly created risks and *fortuna* is relegated to the margins of social life in the form of superstition. Religion is therefore deemed to be incompatible with most of the everyday situations encountered in the modern world. According to Giddens, scientific rationalism supplants religion through reflexively organised knowledge "focused upon material technology and socially applied codes" (ibid.:109).

Giddens does qualify his theoretical position, however, with the following caveat:

> Even where the hold of traditional religion becomes relaxed, however, conceptions of fate do not wholly disappear. Precisely where risks are greatest

---

[32] Responses to existential questions will be explored in relation to the empirical data in Chapter Eight by reporting the testing of propositions related to the network dependency hypothesis formulated at the end of the current chapter.

- either in terms of the perceived probability that an unwelcome happening will occur or in terms of the devastating consequences that ensue if a given event goes awry - *fortuna* tends to return (ibid.:111).

Whilst this, to a large extent, constitutes a valid claim, it does fail to take into account how individuals, both CAs and NCAs, are able to maintain religious cosmologies despite the pervasiveness of such a rationalist, empiricist and materialist world view. The empirical section of this thesis aims to determine if there is an association between peoples' social networks and their decisions about whether or not to adopt religious or secular strategies in response to the emergence of an 'awareness of risk' and to the issues of 'ontological insecurity' and 'epistemological uncertainty'.[33]

Long before Giddens, Weber (1965) had predicted that individuals would continue a religious quest for meaning and direction in life, despite the decline of traditional religion. Weber's view of the 'disenchantment of the world' was therefore, in the words of Beckford (1989:35), "more of a tendency than an accomplished fact". This emphasis on the continuity rather than the demise of religion in the modern world can also be observed in the work of Bellah (1970) who stresses the human need for symbols of ultimate meaning. Some of the evidence noted in Section 1.2 above, particularly with reference to Edrington's (1987) findings of strong religious beliefs among NCA working class men, seems to contradict the notion that religious belief in the general population is insignificant. The claims of secularization theorists such as Bruce (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996) are challenged somewhat by these few studies.

There is a danger, however, in assuming that the majority of people within the general population have concerns with existential questions and ultimate meaning. Greeley's (1973) work, for example, is predicated on the assumption that religious 'needs' are:

> inherent in the human condition and that there is no reason to believe that they are any less widespread or less powerful today than they were among the prehistoric painters of France (ibid.:16).

---

[33] This is discussed in Chapter Eight.

In their work on young people's beliefs, however, Collins, Eyre and Hornsby-Smith (1996:15) reported that, from a sample of 21 young people: "several young people we interviewed had recently experienced traumatic events such as a family breakdown or bereavement but there was little evidence in our data to show that they sought an ultimate explanation or meaning for these events, nor were our young people left in a frightening state of anomie or chaos". Among younger people, at least, the findings of the study were more in accord with the Cottrell (1985) thesis. Bearing this variable of age in mind, Harding and Phillips (1986:30) have nevertheless noted evidence of "continued widespread religious belief" from responses to the 1981 European Values Survey (particularly with reference to the 75% of the sample who said they believe in God) and they have cautioned: "against premature conclusions concerning the state of contemporary religion and the prevalence of Christian values" within Europe. Likewise, Yinger (1970, 1977) has reported a similar percentage of students, both CAs and NCAs surveyed in eight different countries, who expressed a religious concern with the general problems of human existence. More needs to be known, therefore, particularly at a qualitative level, about religious belief outside of organised religion before pronouncing its demise, or its decline or its changing form.

1.4.6 Accounting for decline: belief transmission

Within the various theories of secularization noted above, a number of important relational mechanisms[34] at a micro level of social interaction have been neglected when seeking to account for decline in church attendance figures and the decline of traditional forms of religious belief. Clearly, the perpetuation of a religious world view is dependent not only upon maintaining the credibility and relevance of the tenets of whichever faith happens to be in question but also upon maintaining the efficiency of the mechanisms through which such a world view is transmitted. Empirical and theoretical attention, therefore, to the mechanisms through which religious beliefs - and for that matter, secular beliefs - are transmitted in the modern world should

---

[34] These mechanisms are defined in Chapter Two and are discussed in Chapter Seven.

contribute somewhat towards rectifying this theoretical oversight. The interface between religious and non-religious individuals within personal networks, thus requires attention and analysis.[35]

Hervieu-Léger (1993, 1994) has moved towards this type of analysis to some extent through her formulation of religious memory and her identification of different ways in which the 'chain of believing' is maintained. To explain the decline of people's involvement with traditional religious institutional structures, Hervieu-Léger focuses on the erosion of a 'collective memory' - a sharing and handing down of the beliefs, values and practices of the past. To account for this erosion, and thus the decline of traditional religion, she highlights two major factors: i) a decline of social events which concentrate on collective memory which have been eroded by secular 'technical' knowledge rooted in capitalism and rationality, and ii) a fragmentation of collective memory through a plurality of institutions and groups, thus making a unified meaning system impossible. Again, the familiar emphasis on epistemology appears in the work of Hervieu-Léger in terms of her argument that religious philosophy faces an epistemological crisis in the face of technical rationality, thus accounting for the decline of social events which contribute to the maintenance of collective memory. Hervieu-Léger further argues that this erosion process is exacerbated by the emergence of contemporary religious emotionalism which has a tendency to take the place of intellectual theologies. This is, of course, a valid argument up to a point,[36] but such an outcome need not necessarily lead to a decline in traditional religious beliefs for similar reasons given earlier when discussing the effects of cosmopolitanism and urbanism. In other words, social networks, particularly within urban areas, may in theory hold the key to the maintenance of collective memory if traditional religions recognise the importance of developing network links

---

[35] The statements in this paragraph are further justified in the theoretical discussion of the differences between modern and pre-modern networks (section 1.5). The interface between religious and non-religious individuals is analysed in Chapter Seven.

[36] Whilst Hervieu-Léger's formulation of intellectualism being replaced by emotionalism may apply to her study of young pilgrims to Poland, Chapter Nine gives a number of reasons why this view may be inapplicable to the phenomenon of emotionalism within the churches in general.

with those outside of organised religion.[37]

To recapitulate, it has been asserted that, first, it is possible that plausibility structures can exist in the form of urban based social networks and need not be localised. Second, urbanism need not undermine traditional religious beliefs if urban individuals maintain, or become involved in, social networks holding traditional religious beliefs and values. And third, it is possible that the 'chain of believing' may still be maintained through dispersed social networks in the absence of social events which concentrate on collective memory. This argument should become clearer if, at this juncture, the differences between pre-modern and modern networks are considered in relation to the issue of the decline of traditional religious observance.

1.5   DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MODERN AND PRE-MODERN NETWORKS

1.5.1 Possible reasons for decline and/or transmission of traditional religious beliefs

Hamilton (1995:170) has stated that: "if we could understand what it is about contemporary society that tends to weaken religion, we may gain a better understanding of the presence and strength of religion in past and other societies. The question of secularization is, then, of crucial theoretical significance". The social network analysis approach to the current study of religious belief in the general population includes a focus on relational factors which arguably weaken religion in contemporary society. It should, therefore, provide further insight into the debate about secularization, particularly when considered in the context of structural changes which have occurred in personal network relationships between pre-modern and modern societies. There is an immediate danger, however, of over-simplification of

---

[37] This is one of the implications of the social network theory developed in this thesis and discussed in the final chapter. There are also implications for educationalists which relates to the observation by Hervieu-Léger of the failure of French schools to transmit Christian cultural knowledge. This is also discussed in Chapter Nine.

these differences. The few sociologists who have specialized in the study of kinship and friendship relationships are rightfully cautious about using sweeping generalizations about the differences between pre-modern and modern societies. A major reason for this caution is that the history of personal relationships is essentially unknowable in sociological terms, for lack of appropriate data (Allan, 1996). Furthermore, a number of studies have been carried out which question some of the assumptions of Tonnies' *Gemeinshaft* and *Gesellshaft* model, which postulates a transition from a pre-modern communal society to a modern associational society (Bottomore and Nisbet, 1979:149-186). For example, it has been demonstrated that it is simply not true that in urban societies people have fewer ties with one another. Neither are all informal ties, "impersonal, superficial, transitory or segmental" (Allan, 1996:7), to counter Wirth's (1938) phraseology. People still rely upon one another for certain practical and emotional needs (Allan, op.cit.:115). Allan has also drawn attention to empirical research which has shown that "kin wider than the nuclear family [have] continued to be important" (ibid.:8). But whilst Allan acknowledges the continued importance of these relationships he nevertheless comments that: "it would be strange if they were not influenced by the changes in social and economic organisation which have been occurring since the early industrializing period" (ibid.). Hence, Allan prefers the 'privatization thesis', which essentially argues that:

> ... the private realm of family, home and domestic relations has increasingly become detached from the public sphere of employment, organisational activity, and participation in public arenas of sociability. Moreover, it is the private sphere, rather than the public one, to which the majority of people are most committed. Whereas once there was a feeling of public, communal solidarity, this has disappeared and its place has been taken by a far more fragmented, individualized attachment to the personal realm of family and home. Clearly linked to the 'breakdown of community' thesis, claims for the privatization of the modern world nonetheless emphasize the replacement, rather than the disappearance, of older loyalties by new forms of solidarity ... the vision is of an atomistic society in which individual households and families get on with their lives with little reference or concern for anything other than their familial welfare and private interests (ibid.:9-10).

This position adopted by Allan is complemented by Fischer (1982):

Certainly social science has moved beyond the issue of whether people in modern societies - or people in cities - have any personal relations at all. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the literature was replete with the rediscovery of family and friendship in the large metropolis (1982:2).

Wellman and Berkowitz (1988:47) endorse this view by placing the focus of attention on social networks: "structural analysts ... have found abundant evidence of 'community' by looking for it in networks rather than in neighbourhoods".

Given the findings of these studies, one might legitimately express some reservations about the recent thesis offered by Schluter and Lee (1993). Their thesis essentially postulates that the process of modernity in the West has created the 'mega-community' where encounter relationships - i.e. "a connection between two individuals which is based on some degree of unmediated contact" (ibid.:274) - are being slowly and persistently shifted towards contingent relationships - i.e. "a connection of two individuals who may have no knowledge of one another but are, none the less, linked through social, political and economic institutions" (ibid.:273-274). They argue that the scale of the community within which we relate has expanded since pre-industrial times beyond recognition. They further claim that this expansion has served as a catalyst for the shift towards contingent relationships:

> In the West, we find ourselves scattered too far and moving too fast to maintain a strong base of encounter relationships. Relationship is less and less a matter of sharing the same patch of earth and the same block of air. We meet many more people but less frequently; we still have friends and families, but on the whole these relationships are fewer, more intermittent, less stable. Instead we feel millions of tiny threads tying us into general and indirect relationship with people we will never touch or talk to, people who as individuals we know nothing about, nor ever will. And this has a profound effect on the way we live. For it means that in the mega-community we live among strangers (ibid.:13).

This general concept tends to reflect Tonnies[38] description, noted above, of a shift from a predominantly *Gemeinschaftlich* to a *Gesellschaftlich* society. Furthermore, the

---

[38] See Bottomore and Nisbet, 1979:149-186.

assertion that our friends and families have diminished in number and that these relationships have become more intermittent is, to some extent, questionable in the light of the studies noted above (although their reference to the erosion of stable relationships will receive consideration further on).

Bearing these points in mind, there are certain differences which *can* be identified with reference to historical evidence particularly when one considers the changes which have occurred to personal network relationships in relation to the Christian Church in England over the past few centuries. To clarify the latter statement, in the context of modernity the Christian Church is no longer directly integrated with the majority of the surrounding population and controls over church attendance have been lost. Some writers on this subject (Robinson, 1992; Short and Winter, 1993) have concluded that reasons for contemporary low church attendance are not so much due to a lack of religious belief or to a high level of secularization, but rather, a gulf exists between the Church and contemporary culture, hence the title of Robinson's (1992) book: *A World Apart*. Robinson simply assumes this cultural gulf exists without reference to any empirical sociological evidence concerning the personal networks of CAs and NCAs. On the other hand, Cottrell (1985:416) *does* identify a general lack of encounter between NCAs and the teaching and perspective of organised religion in her sample of 34 middle class individuals, although, again, no reference is made to the personal network relationships of her informants. The present study aims to provide substantial empirical evidence to test the following proposition derived from the original network dependency hypothesis that a gulf now exists, not just between the cultures of CAs and NCAs, but also, on a much more fundamental level, between the *personal networks* of CAs and those outside of religious organisations. Thus, proposition P2 states: *A gulf exists between the personal networks of CAs and NCAs.*[39]

In pre-modern times, particularly prior to the Interregnum (1649-1660), on the whole, peoples' personal networks were linked to parish Churches in small rural

---

[39] See Chapters Four and Five for further discussion.

communities. There are several reasons for stating 'prior to the Interregnum'. The main growth of towns and urban occupations certainly took place during the period of the Industrial Revolution. There is much disagreement, however, concerning when the Industrial Revolution started and finished. Traditionally, historians have dated the Industrial Revolution as occurring between 1760 - 1830 with the rise of manufacturing industries, such as cotton, textiles, iron and metal goods. Yet even by 1660 the population of London was 450,000 and by 1700 well over a half of the population was on wage labour (Lowe, 1986, Falkus and Gillingham, 1987, Morgan, 1988). But prior to the Interregnum (1649 - 1660) it would be reasonable to state that the majority of the population lived in smaller communities and that personal networks were linked to parish Churches. This fact is attested by a number of historians. For example, Thompson (1986:17) states: "The majority of the inhabitants of late medieval England lived close to the soil and were engaged in agriculture". And Myres (1988), in his work on the late Middle Ages, comments:

> A Venetian who visited England at the end of the fifteenth century was struck, not only by the wealth of the churches, but by the devotion of the people. Parish churches were the centres of the social life of the community, and the clergy controlled education, hospitals, and poor relief. Furthermore, the Church tended to be the hub of the community (ibid.:237).

Myres continues by noting that the:

> towns were dominated, not by factories and warehouses, shops and civic buildings, but by a forest of church towers and steeples. Their bells were constantly tolling to call men to devotions within the churches, and friars frequently harangued the people outside (ibid.).

And Myres conclusion is that: "In short, the church was everywhere in evidence and seemed to be all-powerful" (ibid.).

Thompson (1986:325), writing about the period: 1370 - 1529, mentions that failure to attend church was an 'offence' according to Church law. The historian S M Houghton (1980) supports this view in his observation that during the reign of

Elizabeth I (1558 - 1603), people were fined if they did not attend church: "Non-attendance at church on Sundays and holy days carried a fine of one shilling for each offence - a very substantial part of a labourer's weekly wage!" (ibid.:148).

The citation of this historical evidence is not to suggest that there was a religious 'Golden Age' but merely that there was a higher likelihood that people would have had some sort of network connection with the Church or with church attenders. Indeed, the historical evidence offered by Thomas (1971) would question the notion of a 'Golden Age' to a certain extent. Thomas points out that, in 16th and 17th century England, the Anglican Church did not enjoy a monopoly of loyalty and that there exists much evidence to suggest that many of the poor did not become regular churchgoers. He also argues that "the conduct of many churchgoers left so much to be desired as to turn the service into a travesty of what was intended" (ibid.:161).

To balance this picture, Thomas does state that few people were able to avoid the established Church with regard to the rites of baptism, matrimony and holy burial. In fact, certain passages in his book give the opposite impression to the otherwise negative view of traditional religion during this period. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Anglican Church, he argues:

> ... was nothing less than society itself in one of its most important manifestations. Every child was deemed to be born into it. He was expected to be baptized by the local clergyman and sent by his parents or employer to be catechised in the rudiments of the faith. It was a criminal offence for a man to stay away from church on Sundays, and the very mode of worship there symbolised the society in which he lived ... the Anglican seating arrangements reflected the social gradations among the parishioners (ibid.:151 -152).

Indeed, Thomas continues:

> This great social and administrative structure was not financed simply from its own endowments, but from tithes, church rates and miscellaneous fees which the parishioners were required to pay the clergy ... The religious groups which came to exist outside the Anglican Church provided the same all-embracing framework (ibid.:153).

46

One also has to bear in mind the objections made by Bruce (1996) to the overall thesis advanced by Thomas, namely:

> Thomas demonstrates that the people of 16th and 17th century England were not all well-informed, reverent and regular church-attending Christians. However, his own evidence shows that they were profoundly superstitious, believed implicitly in the supernatural and accepted the most basic of Christian beliefs (a creator God, heaven and hell as rewards, and punishment for good and bad behaviour, the Church's control of access to salvation). The English peasants may have often disappointed the guardians of Christian orthodoxy, but they were indubitably religious (ibid.:262).

However, this argument by Bruce is not beyond dispute. Glasner (1977) has highlighted a tendency of such arguments to rely on:

> ... contemporary Western industrial society as being in some way less 'religious' than the society with which comparisons were being made. It [is] therefore suggested that most 'theories' of the secularization process are really generalizations from *limited empirical findings* used by sociologists to bolster an implicit ideology of progress (ibid.:64).

Bruce also seems to forget that Thomas argues against the anthropologist Malinowski's (1925) thesis that belief in magic declined as a result of increased control over the environment and as a result of the development of new kinds of knowledge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thomas argues, rather, in favour of the view that magic was losing its significance *prior* to any technological revolution. Thus, Thomas draws attention to such historical facts as the fourteenth century Lollards' renunciation of the Church's protection from disease, even though there were no effective alternatives. Thomas adds that even witch-beliefs declined "before medical therapy had made much of an advance" (1971:657).[40]

There is therefore much dispute over the issue of whether there existed a 'Golden Age' of belief, and despite the protestations of Bruce, the evidence is not sufficient to form a reliable conclusion. Regardless of this point, the historical evidence is very

---

[40] It is important to note that Thomas points to the *decline* of witch beliefs here and not to their total disappearance.

47

clear about the fact that the likelihood of contact between the Church and the general population was much higher prior to the eighteenth century, even if the quality of faith was low among the poor, and therefore an *opportunity* existed for religious belief to be transmitted. Even as late as 1851, the first religious census completed in that year revealed that out of a total population of 15 million, two thirds of the population still attended church.[41] So links between CAs and NCAs were still prolific and the chances of not having religious others in one's immediate social network were minimal.

Nevertheless, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Church of England's parish structure was unable to cope with the migration of the population from the countryside to the towns and cities. The Roman Catholic Church likewise struggled to cope with the influx of starving Irish migrants from famine (Beck, 1950). During the nineteenth century, even though more Catholic churches were built, in some instances the established Roman Catholic communities were "hostile to the Irish immigrants fearing further outbreaks of anti-Catholicism" (Hornsby-Smith and Lee, 1979:20). The independent Churches, such as the Evangelicals, Baptists and Methodists, set up churches in towns and cities to try to cater for the migration of people from the countryside who were no longer connected to parish churches. The historian W A Speck (1988) explains the difficulties faced by the Church of England and the attempts made by the Methodists to overcome the situation:

> One of the difficulties which faced the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century was that the growth of population and internal migration to industrial areas put too much pressure on a medieval administrative system based on parishes. Some of the newer industrial areas had several thousand people living within a single parish. Manchester, for example, with a population of at least 20,000 by 1750, had only one parish church. Short of wholesale reform of church government, for which the will was lacking, the Church could only proceed piecemeal with this problem since it required a special act of parliament to create a new parish church. ... The ways in which churches were built or altered ... reveal that to some extent priorities were social rather than spiritual ... [For example...] The beauty of holiness thus took precedence over the pastoral needs of the London poor. Methodism deliberately set out

---

[41] Terence Thomas, 1988:19-20.

> to meet these people. Preaching in the open air made initial contact with thousands, and when eventually chapels were built, Wesley was adamant that they should be 'plain and decent: but not more expensive than is absolutely necessary' ... His appeal was particularly strong in industrial communities; indeed methodism made relatively little progress in agricultural areas (1988:112-113).

The same view is echoed in the words of Thomas (1988:12):

> With the advent of the Industrial Revolution many of these Dissenting Churches made initial gains as they were more flexible than the national Church which was bound to existing parish boundaries and was not able to move with the new movements of population.

The inner-city Roman Catholic parishes nevertheless remained an important support for the Irish immigrants (Lees, 1979; McLeod, 1974). But despite the initial gains of the Dissenting Churches, attempts by the non-Conformists and the Roman Catholics to make up for the shortcomings of the Church of England were never ultimately going to keep up with the huge increases in the populations of towns and cities. Even though these Churches established a presence in the urban areas, they no longer formed the 'hub of the community'. Network links between the Church and the general population were therefore gradually severed as this process took place and, indeed, the process continues to this day.

Due to the process of differentiation, the Church was also unable to retain control over several key areas of social life and these factors have been highlighted by theorists such as Berger (1969) and Wilson (1976, 1982). Church organisation, Berger (1969) argues, had an inherent potential towards institutional specialization which ultimately led to a separation between the sacred and the secular. Berger, in a similar manner to other theorists, considers the epistemological consequences of this separation.

The detrimental effects of declining communities on the influence of the church and on the relevance of religious belief in modern urban settings is discussed at length by Wilson (1976, 1982), who places more weight upon factors external to Christianity

to account for secularization. Wilson has argued that damage has occurred to religion through the process of differentiation and through the process of 'societalization' (life increasingly organised societally rather than locally). His main emphasis has been on the loss of control of the Church over areas of social life such as those mentioned above, of welfare, health and education, and on the migration of large numbers of people to urban industrial cities and conurbations. This, he argues, has led to a decline in community which he associates with a loss of the religious basis for communal values and communal celebrations, thereby leaving little of common interest and undermining a shared world view. The emphasis of Wilson's thesis is clearly placed on a loss of community - and thereby a concomitant loss of a collective, single, overarching world view held by the members of such communities - rather than on the damage incurred by personal network links with religious organisations.

In the light of the work of theorists such as Berger and Wilson, one might well ask if the argument about population migration and re-distribution already pre-empts this thesis concerning the effects of personal network relationships. The answer to that question is a resounding 'no'. The Wilsonian approach implies that a collective over-arching religious world view is heavily dependent upon the existence of small communities whereas the current thesis argues that over-arching religious world views are generally held and maintained by members of *discrete networks* which need not be local. Even though Beckford (1989) does not place any emphasis on the importance of personal networks, he shares a similar reservation about the Wilsonian view of a necessary connection between religion and community when he states:

> In my view, the connection between religion, obligatory beliefs and community may be an historical contingency. Religion has, in the past, been primarily associated with local communities for sound sociological reasons, but it does not follow that this is the only modality in which religion can operate or, indeed, has operated. There is a danger of mistaking historical contingency for categorical necessity. For, even by Wilson's own definition of religion as 'the invocation of the supernatural' (1982:159), there is no *necessary* connection between religion and local community (1989:110).

The decline of religious belief is therefore not inevitable just because the majority of people now live in huge conurbations. If *network links* exist, or become established, between religious individuals and other types of individuals, traditional religious beliefs, or any other types of religious belief, at the very least, have an *opportunity* to flourish.

In fact, one could take this argument further by stating that the nature of communities themselves has changed and that the only form of community we now have is in terms of social networks. Communities in the neighbourhood sense can only truly exist if everyone has knowledge of everybody else within a given area. Individuals, as well as certain interest groups, may create discrete communities through the creation of networks, but communities based upon neighbourhoods within cities where everyone has knowledge of everybody else can hardly be said to exist at all.

The term 'community' is, however, highly problematic *per se*. Halsey (1974:130) comments that community "Unfortunately ... has so many meanings as to be meaningless". Crow and Allan (1994) draw attention to three major difficulties in specifying the meaning or content of the term 'community'. First there is the problem of normative and evaluative connotations of the term 'community', i.e. "the term is overlaid with positive resonances about its social desirability" (ibid.:192). Second, the term is highly contestable, i.e. "there is little agreement about the relative weightings to be given ... [to the elements which] best capture the 'real essence' of community" (ibid.). And third, there exists the problem of locality. Crow and Allan point out that "difficulties emerge if any locality is analysed as though it were structurally isolated and unaffected by social and economic processes occurring at a non-local level" (ibid.:191). They further add:

> It is not that 'community style' ties are absent; most individuals actively maintain a small number of significant informal bonds and regularly draw on these to help solve life's contingencies, small or large. However, these ties are rarely located exclusively within an immediate or bounded neighbourhood, and nor are they necessarily close-knit or dense in the way that the traditional model of community suggests (ibid.:182).

Bott's (1971) famous 1950s study of twenty London families supports the above view, where she concludes that:

> Few urban local areas can be called communities in the sense that they form cohesive social groups. The immediate social environment of urban families is best considered not as the local area in which they live, but rather as the network of actual social relationships they maintain (ibid.:99).

Any other reference, therefore, to 'community' in the modern urbanized environment is simply rather empty rhetoric.

Hornsby-Smith (1989) formulates a useful definition of religious community, based upon a New Testament model. He states that an "obvious starting point for the consideration of the community-like characteristics of contemporary parishes is the ideology and practice of the early Church in Jerusalem as reported in the Acts of the Apostles" (ibid.:66-67). Hornsby-Smith then identifies eight distinct operationalisable elements of religious 'community' and reduces them to the following three elements:

> a) the generation and manifestation of shared beliefs and values among members;
> b) the frequency of interaction between them; and
> c) the provision of reciprocal social support and mutual aid to each other (ibid.:69).

Outside of the existence of such 'communities' in the form of Churches or other specific secular organisations (which may be weak on the dimension of shared beliefs and values among members), one could argue that the only other way in which such notions of 'community' might exist within contemporary urban environments is through personal network relationships. A network understanding of 'community' would therefore seem to be the most appropriate formulation in the context of modernity. Indeed, this formulation would also encompass organised networks such as Churches and other institutional structures in the sense that such organisations provide personal networks into which individuals may become integrated.

Furthermore, there are three principle objections to the 'loss of community and therefore a loss of an overarching world view' thesis being primarily responsible for secularization:

i) There is no concrete *sociological* evidence to support the view that *all* shared the *same* world view within a small rural community. This has to remain as speculation. There is a possibility there were variations in world views, just as there are variations in world views even among members of the same Church today.[42]

ii) If churches had been able to maintain network links with the general population, the decline of traditional religion may not have been as rapid. Nevertheless, one still has to bear in mind other factors, such as greater religious choice and competing leisure interests, and epistemological challenges to religious belief, making decline more likely but not inevitable. The local community was therefore not essential, but rather, the existence of network links between the general population and the Churches.

iii) Writers such as Allan (1996) argue that the world has not become more impersonal. We still have close kinship and friendship relationships but these are now spread over a wider geographical area. There is no reason, therefore, why world views should not still be shared by members of a personal network. The only possible significant difference is that no longer are particular world-views "uncritically shared by the entire social group in which one lives and moves and [which are] constantly reinforced by every little element of social interaction" (Bruce, 1995a:130) (not that such an idealistic situation can be sociologically proven to have existed). In other words, even if one is, for example, situated in a fairly close-knit network of CAs who tend to meet exclusively with one another, most people have jobs to maintain and so on. It is extremely difficult for people to lead completely isolated lives within modern urban industrialized environments. But, with regard to the latter quotation by Bruce, one still cannot emphasize enough the caveat noted in i) above, that such world views

---

[42] Chapter Six explores the current empirical data on this issue.

may well *not* have been shared *uncritically* by the entire social group within former small communities. There is no sociological evidence which proves that to be the case.

Thus, it is no longer virtually inevitable that individuals will have a link either to a local Church or with others who attend a Church. The only likely way, therefore, that an NCA will be influenced by the beliefs of organised religion is through some kind of network connection, either with CAs or with those involved in some other form of organised religion. Likewise, this principle should apply to CAs in the sense that it is highly likely CAs will have had some form of network connection with other CAs at some time during their past experience. Conversely, if network connections with CAs are absent and individuals only have network connections with people who have no religious beliefs, then it is highly likely that such individuals will not develop religious beliefs themselves. And even when contact *is* established between CAs and NCAs, the situation is arguably exacerbated by certain relational mechanisms, such as the sensitivity of religious belief as a topic of conversation and the modern need to avoid situations which create conflict and which threaten to destabilize friendships (Giddens, 1994a) which may further inhibit the transmission of religious belief.[43] Thus, a lack of exposure of the majority of the population to traditional religious networks in the private sphere may well help to account for the decline in *traditional* religious beliefs and practice.

It is therefore implicit within this general social network theory that: a) religious beliefs are rarely, if ever, formed in a social vacuum, and b) social network links between individuals play a crucial and indispensable role in the transmission and maintenance of any type of religious belief or non-belief, from traditional orthodox Judeo-Christian beliefs, the beliefs of other major world religions, and all other types of religious belief through to agnosticism and atheism.

---

[43] This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

The following table makes use of Weberian ideal types[44] to summarize the above argument about relational network changes between pre-modern and modern societies, and introduces some of the concepts to be discussed in the next section of this Chapter.

---

[44] Weber, 1949:90 offers the following formulation of the 'ideal type':

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasised viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a utopia.

Table 1.1 Differences between pre-modern and modern personal network relationships

PRE-MODERN	MODERN
SHARED PHYSICAL LOCATION Localized personal relationship networks - predominantly within parish.	**DISPERSED PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS** International, national, and county-wide, but predominantly city-wide personal relationship networks.
LOCALIZED HIGH DENSITY NETWORKS	**LOCALIZED LOW DENSITY NETWORKS - IF ANY** If localized high density networks - fewer involved at local level than in pre-modern times.
STABLE KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS Less cohabitation, divorce, one-parent families and single households. Less severance of network ties. Families attached to sphere of employment. Manufacturing local and small-scale. The household and the small shop were the typical producing units.	**LESS STABLE KINSHIP RELATIONSHIPS** Social networks therefore become more complex. Growth of individual wage labour associated with urban industrial producing units, giving more personal independence and mobility. Women economically more independent.
INTERACTION PRINCIPALLY IN COLLECTIVE SOCIAL SETTINGS Local church, and public meeting places.	**INTERACTION PRINCIPALLY AWAY FROM PUBLIC GAZE AND SCRUTINY** The home functions as the principal arena of social activity. Growth of home ownership and better housing conditions. The home a personal creation - a centre of self-expression.
CHURCH INTEGRATED WITH THOSE LIVING WITHIN PARISH Particular controls over church attendance.	**CHURCH NO LONGER INTEGRATED WITH SURROUNDING POPULATION** (i.e. no longer integrated with those outside the church). Loss of controls over church attendance. Little or no contact between church and non-church attenders.
CENTRALITY OF PUBLIC AND COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS	**CENTRALITY OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

Some aspects of the above table based upon: Giddens, 1994a, 1994b; Allan, 1989, 1996.

Given that these differences are typologies, the first row of Table 1.1 shows the contemporary predominance of dispersed personal relationships, mainly city-wide, which generally require a car and telephone to maintain them. This includes the radical restructuring of employment over the past two or three decades which has resulted in a demand for greater flexibility and mobility of individuals within the employment market. Furthermore, the rapid development of information technology and the introduction of the internet has broadened the scope for the development of personal networks across the globe. This compares with a former shared physical location. Closely related to the notion of dispersed networks is a lack of high density localized networks in late modernity. The term 'localized' refers to people living within easy walking distance of each other. The term 'density' simply refers to the connectedness of the people within a given network, i.e. the extent to which people within a network know one another (Bott, 1971; Allan, 1996). So, if kinship and friendship networks exist within easy walking distance they tend to be less dense than in pre-modern times, quite simply due to the fact that fewer people are generally involved at the immediate local level.

The table further shows that kinship relationships have become less stable (although not less important) as indicated by the dramatic increase in divorce, single-parent families and single households. The growth of individual wage labour has contributed to this situation by giving individuals greater personal independence and mobility. The fourth row of the table highlights the principle arenas for social interaction. The home has now become a centre of self-expression and functions as the principle arena of social activity (Allan, 1996).

As a result of these dispersed relationships, the increased independence of individuals, the centrality of intimate relationships, and the loss of controls of the Church over individuals living within parishes, churches are no longer fully integrated with the immediate surrounding population. There is now, at least in theory, little or no relational contact between the Church and those outside it.

In summary, it is possible that people still have religious concerns and questions

57

(Giddens, 1994a, 1994b) but if people do hold religious beliefs in relation to these concerns and questions it is highly likely that these are transmitted and maintained within personal networks. In theory, at least, such beliefs are never channelled into organised religion partly due to the fact that network links between churched and unchurched have largely been severed. Again, in theory, certain relational mechanisms may further inhibit transmission of church religion at the interface of CA and NCA interaction and inhibit the transmission of other types of religious belief between religious NCAs and non-religious NCAs. This leads to the formulation of the main hypothesis, the testing of which is reported further on.

1.6 A NETWORK DEPENDENCY HYPOTHESIS

On the basis of the social network theory advanced in this thesis, an hypothesis has been formulated as follows:

> *Personal social networks are intrinsically associated with the content and expression of each individual's system of religious belief or unbelief and form the primary social arena wherein religious belief or unbelief is formulated, maintained, modified and transmitted.*

In other words, specific sets of social circumstances, i.e. the beliefs and practices of people within each individual's network of relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbours are interwoven with each individual's formulation of religious or non-religious beliefs (which is arguably a dynamic, dialectic and ongoing process). This latter reference to the dialectical nature of belief formulation within personal networks arises from the previously cited debate between Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980, 1983) and Wallis and Bruce (1982)[45] and in particular, from the view held by Snow *et al.* that - far from being 'a mechanistic conception of the person and the means by which he is activated' - the process of belief formation is emergent,

---

[45] See pages 21-25 of the current thesis.

interactive, dynamic and indeterminate rather than subject to predetermined cognitive states or personality traits. In short, personal networks provide a set of opportunities for interaction with others holding a myriad of idiosyncratic beliefs, attitudes and values - the 'raw material' from which the individual formulates and maintains his or her own belief system, whether that be religious or non-religious. The question of whether other factors enter the equation will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

1.7 GENERAL AREAS OF EMPIRICAL ENQUIRY

This chapter has raised a number of empirical issues related to this social network theory. Employing the terms: 'ego' and 'alters' as before, the propositions based upon the network dependency hypothesis are grouped under the following headings which constitute general areas of empirical enquiry.

i)   The effects of early socialization on the initial belief formation of ego.

ii)   The relationship between the religious or secular beliefs held by ego and the religious or secular beliefs held by current network alters.

iii)   The function of personal networks as plausibility structures for the maintenance of all types of religious or secular beliefs.

iv)   The dynamics of relationships within current personal networks in terms of mechanisms which facilitate or inhibit the transmission of religious beliefs.

v)   The degree to which factors outside of social networks are influential in belief formation, maintenance, modification, or transmission.

Chapters Four to Eight address each of these five general areas of empirical enquiry in turn and report the testing of a number of related propositions which will be specified within each of these chapters. Alongside reporting the testing of these

propositions, a social network model will be systematically constructed to clarify the interrelationship between social networks and belief formation, maintenance, and modification vis-à-vis former and current contacts. Due to its complexity, each aspect of the model will be explained and progressively developed chapter by chapter. In the light of Davie's (1996:10) comments about the influence of gender in the perpetuation of religious memory (i.e. "men and women have different responsibilities for the handing on of a tradition from one generation to another, a crucial task in the perpetuation of a memory") each empirical chapter will also consider any possible gender differences in the accounts given by the informants. The other general research questions raised at the beginning of Chapter One - concerning whether people in the general population hold religious beliefs beyond a mere nominal assent to Christian belief and if so, concerning the nature of these beliefs - should be answered incidentally through reporting the systematic testing of the network dependency hypothesis.

1.7.1 Thesis outline

The methods employed for conducting the survey of Grange Park and for testing the propositions are discussed in Chapter Two. A brief history of 'Grange Park' (the suburban private housing development selected for this local area study) is then given in Chapter Three, together with the geographical and demographical characteristics of the area, which places the empirical aspect of the study in context. This is followed by a discussion of the results of the Stage I questionnaire survey which provides an overview of the extent to which residents in this area hold religious beliefs and which complements the detailed personal network information gathered in Stage II of the research.

Chapters Four to Eight are based on the five headings of general empirical enquiry given above. Thus, Chapter Four discusses how the acceptance or rejection of the beliefs and behaviour of former contacts in the Stage II informants' lives provided a foundation for their current religious or secular beliefs. Chapter Five examines the

basis of selection of current network alters and the relationship between the beliefs held by selected or non-selected current network alters and the beliefs held by each informant. Chapter Six considers current networks as plausibility structures for all types of religious or secular belief maintenance and Chapter Seven introduces the subject of relational mechanisms within social networks which either facilitate or inhibit religious belief transmission. The final empirical chapter examines other factors outside of social networks which may affect the processes of belief formation, maintenance, modification or transmission, such as the role of the media and of contemplation and reasoning in response to general experience.

Chapter Nine concludes the study by considering the strength of the social network theory advanced in this thesis and its implications for the development of secularization theory. Through a focus on the effects of social networks, this thesis arguably offers a fuller understanding of that which tends to strengthen and maintain the religious beliefs of individuals as well as that which tends to weaken the transmission of religious belief in contemporary society. A contribution to the debate about secularization is thereby facilitated. In particular, the view held by Bruce (1996:273) of the implied *fait accompli* of the general decline of traditional religious beliefs, and other forms of supernaturalism in modern Britain, is challenged to some extent on the basis of the research findings. Certain speculations about the future of religious belief in Britain are also made, again on the basis of the research findings. Finally, due to the qualitative nature of the main focus of this study, the testing of the network dependency hypothesis has been confined to a relatively small sample. Suggestions are therefore made for further possible research to test the network dependency hypothesis statistically.

A social network theory has been advanced in this chapter and an hypothesis has been formulated. Attention will now be focused on the methods which were used to collect the data required to test that theory through the testing of various propositions derived from the network dependency hypothesis.

CHAPTER TWO
NETWORKING WITH THE NETWORKERS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter drew attention to a distinct lack of available sociological knowledge about the nature of contemporary uncommitted religious belief in the general population (Short and Winter, 1993; Davie, 1994). The methodological problems inherent in this area may account for this dearth of empirical knowledge. These problems are magnified if network analysis enters the equation. This chapter will address these difficulties and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy adopted to overcome them. This will provide the reader with an opportunity to assess the validity and reliability of the current research and enable the research to be replicated or built upon by others in the future.

The practical objective of the empirical study was to establish network contacts with members of the general population (hence the title of this chapter) and to persuade them to part with very personal and sensitive information about their intimate personal network relationships and their personal beliefs. In the first instance, they were required to give this information to a complete stranger, i.e. this researcher! Expressed in these terms, the expectations were unreasonable. But with tact, ethical diplomacy and use of the research methods outlined in this chapter, the objective was achieved. The current chapter commences with details of the research design. The methods used to obtain a representative sample from the general population are then discussed and details of the sampling process are given. This is followed by a résumé of the design and administration of the initial questionnaire. Finally, the chapter discusses the methods used to design the interview guide, to obtain a sub-sample of interviewees from the initial questionnaire sample, and to conduct the second stage interviews.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.2.1 Research requirements

To select a research design it was necessary to review the general areas of potential empirical enquiry outlined in the previous chapter. It was explained in Chapter One that the aim of the current research was to test a number of propositions based upon the network dependency hypothesis. In order to test those propositions it was necessary to obtain information on the religious and secular beliefs held by individuals (and held by others within the current social networks of those individuals) living in the general population. This included the gathering of detailed information about their current 'most frequent' and 'most intimate'[1] relationships as well as a certain amount of life history information so that the effects of early socialisation could be taken into account. A range of other details were required from these individuals concerning their personal interactions with close family and friends in addition to the familiar range of personal demographic information. All of these areas of enquiry involved the disclosure of delicate and sensitive information. Finally, a major requirement of the empirical enquiry was to allow a comparison to be made across all types of religious or secular beliefs held by members within the general population.

Due to the amount of information required and the sensitivity of the subject matter, the distribution of a questionnaire would not have been sufficient, in itself, to achieve the objectives of the current research. In particular, exploring the nature of religious and secular beliefs would have been greatly restricted if narrow questionnaire items were the only source of information. Furthermore, measurement of network ties between each respondent and their respective network others involved many tedious and repetitive questions. It would have been unrealistic to expect anyone to provide copious amounts of highly personal information such as this on a single questionnaire.

---

[1] These terms are defined in section 2.6.2.

63

2.2.2 Combining quantitative and qualitative methods

The empirical study required, then, both general information of the religious and secular beliefs held by a sample of people from the general population as well as very detailed information about the respondents' social networks. Following the method employed by Wallman (1984) and Wellman (1979),[2] the empirical research was therefore carried out in two stages, i.e. an initial 500 questionnaire survey was conducted at Grange Park (a private housing development in Southampton) followed by a second stage of 39 semi-structured focused interviews with informants selected from the survey.

This presents a philosophical problematic, however, in that hypothetico-deductive and analytic-inductive methods involve two different epistemological perspectives or ways of knowing and gaining knowledge of the social world (Fielding and Fielding, 1986). One method predominantly involves the statistical testing of hypotheses whilst the other predominantly involves the construction of theory through the analysis of focused qualitative fieldwork data. Fielding and Fielding (1986) point out, however, that both types of method are not as disparate as has often been argued. For example,

> All methods of data collection are analysed 'qualitatively' in so far as the act of analysis is an interpretation, and therefore of necessity a selective rendering, of the 'sense' of available data ... Even more plainly, the most advanced survey procedures themselves only manipulate data that had to be gained at some point by asking people. (1986:12)

They then proceed to argue the merits of combining quantitative and qualitative data on the basis of an underlying rationale that sociologists have in recent times been less inclined to work from the premise of "either methodological individualism (where large-scale actions are accounted for in terms of the dispositions and beliefs of individuals) or methodological collectivism (where behaviour is governed by 'laws' applying to the social whole which cannot be derived from individualistic principles)"

---

[2] For example, Wellman, 1979, has used this method to test the veracity of the 'urban loss of community' theories by analysing the networks of a subsample of 33 respondents from a larger survey of 800 residents living in East York, Toronto.

(ibid.:14). In place of these premises, the relevant unit is deemed to be interaction in social situations in the form of 'methodological situationism'. The overall network analysis perspective of the current research is therefore congruent with this development. Thus, quantitative researchers are paying more attention to the integration of the micro-sociological foundation of their results and qualitative researchers are being inspired "to consider what kinds of matters may legitimately be quantified and how numerical data should enter their analyses" (ibid.:15). The conclusion of the Fielding study is that of the distinct advantage of combining these methods.

Stark and Bainbridge (1987) adopt the hypothetico-deductive method in their presentation of a theory of religion. The current study adopts a similar overall strategy and departs from the analytic-inductive use of interview data to a large extent through the use of the second stage data to test propositions based on the network dependency hypothesis. This methodological approach has been founded upon Popper's (1959) argument that inductive methods - i.e. of passing from particular statements to universal statements, such as hypotheses or theories - are never justified; "for any conclusion drawn in this way may always turn out to be false: no matter how many instances of white swans we may have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that *all* swans are white" (1959:27). This method therefore just appeals to probability. On the other hand, the hypothetico-deductive perspective argues that:

> From a new idea, put up tentatively, and not yet justified in any way - an anticipation, a hypothesis, a theoretical system, or what you will - conclusions are drawn by means of logical deduction. These conclusions are then compared with one another and with other relevant statements, so as to find what logical relations (such as equivalence, derivability, compatibility, or incompatibility) exist between them. (ibid.:32)

The deductive system of argument is also open to falsification:

> ... what characterizes the empirical method is its manner of exposing to falsification, in every conceivable way, the system to be tested. Its aim is not to save the lives of untenable systems but, on the contrary, to select the one which is by comparison the fittest, by exposing them all to the fiercest struggle

65

for survival. (ibid.:42)

The application of this deductive method to the analysis of the interview data will therefore subject the social network theory advanced in this thesis to rigorous scrutiny. It will be potentially empirically falsifiable.

The most serious epistemological challenge to the methods adopted herein derives from developments in an altogether different discipline: that of English literary theory in the form of post-structuralist deconstruction theory. Derrida (1978) is the prime exponent of the theory of deconstruction which essentially undermines the logocentric (or word centred) basis of Western philosophy upon which the discipline of sociology is founded. Sociologists tend to avoid this epistemological challenge entirely since it undermines the entire discipline but one cannot ignore its implications. This area is complex and it is not possible to do justice to deconstruction theory in one or two paragraphs. It is necessary, however, to acknowledge the problematic and to give a brief defence of the current methodology. This is discussed in Appendix IV.

2.3 OBTAINING A SAMPLE OF NETWORKERS

2.3.1 Defining the study area

The previous chapter discussed the need to complement the few specific studies which have been carried out on the contemporary beliefs of people living in the general population. A sample of 'middle class' respondents aged 18 and over from an urban area as defined by the Register of Electors was therefore deemed most appropriate in this respect. The Grange Park private housing development seemed to be ideal. It is typical of many private housing developments in the South of England and occupies a clearly defined area of Hedge End, Southampton. The area partially locates the respondents within a certain class category distinguished by home ownership. A profile of the respondents is also given in the next chapter which takes into account educational qualifications and occupations.

2.3.2 Selecting an initial sample of 500

A sample of 500 was required for the following reasons:

i) The initial aim was to obtain a representative sample of the area. Important constraints on this objective, however, were the time and cost limits associated with the Ph.D. With an estimated response rate of 60% it required the use of 500 questionnaires to obtain a sample size of 300. Statistically, a sample of 300 is too small for most purposes, but the figure was a pragmatic compromise. Nevertheless, this sample size was required, at the very least, to keep the sampling error to an acceptable level. If less than 60% had been returned from the initial sample of 500, it would have been difficult to make any claim that the sample was representative.

ii) It was estimated that only about 15% of the respondents completing the questionnaire would agree to a further interview. With a figure of 300 completed questionnaires, this would have yielded an estimated 45 informants for the second interview stage. The original intention was then to select a quota sample of 30 NCAs from the initial survey, plus as many CAs as possible who were willing to be interviewed, up to a maximum of 30 (to provide a balance between an equal number of NCAs and CAs). It was estimated, however, that only about 15% of those willing to be interviewed further would be church attenders, i.e. approximately seven potential informants. It was therefore *originally* intended to make up any shortfall in church attenders by selecting willing interviewees from churches within the local area.

As the research progressed, in terms of the theoretical approach and the aims of Stage Two, it was decided to modify the research design by restricting the selection process for the second stage just to the initial questionnaire respondents. This decision was made for two main reasons. The first was to keep the sample more tightly controlled and to retain a certain cohesiveness to the research design. Otherwise it would have involved the use of a representative sample with a further sample which would have been non-representative. The second reason was to obtain a final quota sample of 40 informants from Stage One, divided as follows:

* 10 indicating on the initial questionnaire that they attended a church or religious organisation at least once per month

* 10 NCAs indicating on the initial questionnaire a self-assessed high level of importance given to religious or spiritual matters

* 10 NCAs indicating a moderate level of importance

* 10 NCAs indicating a low level of importance.

These 'importance scores' were derived from the higher figure given to either question 15 or 16 on the questionnaire (see Appendix II).

To select the initial sample of 500, the Register of Electors for the Grange Park area was obtained from Eastleigh Borough Council (electoral register in force for the period: 16 February 1996 to 15 February 1997). With the exception of a few roads outside the study area, one single polling district covered the entire estate. It was decided to confine the study to the new housing estate. To obtain the sampling frame, therefore, the only requirements were to omit the roads, register numbers and electors located outside the study area which were associated with the much older homes located on the periphery of the estate.

The following electors in the polling district were not living on the Grange Park estate:

Table 2.1 Omission from the study population of roads/electors outside of the Grange Park estate.

OMIT	REGISTER NOS. (INCLUSIVE)			NUMBER OF ELECTORS
Birchwood Gardens	345	-	360	16
Botley Road	361	-	366	6
Chichester Close	624	-	681	58
Grange Caravan Park	1140	-	1356	217
Grange Road	1357	-	1390	34
Botley Grange Hotel	None listed			
Navigators Way	2447	-	2567	121
Old Shamblehurst Lane	2568	-	2589	22
Rose Close	2717	-	2775	59
Shamblehurst Lane South	2776	-	2845	70
Woodhouse Lane	3606	-	3614	9
Minus 'other electors':	3615, 3616			2
	TOTAL NUMBER OF ELECTORS:			**614**

TOTAL POPULATION OF ELECTORS WITHIN POLLING DISTRICT:	**3,616**
MINUS ELECTORS NOTED ABOVE:	**614**
TOTAL STUDY POPULATION:	**3,002**
TOTAL SAMPLE POPULATION:	**500**

The method chosen to obtain the sample of 500 was that of systematic random selection with a sampling interval of six (Lynn and Lievesley, 1991; deVaus, 1991; Gilbert, 1993). First, number three was selected at random between the numbers one to six, then every sixth number was selected from the complete list of 3,616. It was only after this procedure had been carried out that the above streets were eliminated, leaving the remaining chosen numbers from the final sample population of 3,002. This method was chosen for the following reasons:[3]

---

[3] The claims below are supported by standard texts on sampling methodology such as: de Vaus, 1991 and Gilbert, 1993.

i) It is less cumbersome and time consuming.

ii) This is a suitable method to use with the sample population as there is no periodicity in the register of electors which might relate to the sampling interval.

iii) An even spread of sample members across the study population was required, i.e. there was a need to avoid clustering (which could easily happen with simple random sampling). The type and the value of homes in this area can differ according to the street in which they are located. It was therefore desirable to include an even spread of respondents from each street. The use of systematic random sampling meant that this was easily achieved as the electors are listed by street.

iv) This method yields a more representative sample, for the following reasons outlined by Arber:

> Systematic selection from a list such as the Electoral Register improves the precision of the sample compared with using an SRS because it spreads the sample more evenly throughout the area. It will yield a more representative sample with a lower standard error than an equivalent SRS, which could by chance result in a sample where all sample members lived in the same street. In effect, the systematic selection is stratifying the population by streets. (1993:79).

2.3.3 The pilot study

A pilot study is always advisable prior to a large scale survey. This gave an opportunity to assess the adequacy of the wording of the questionnaire and to eliminate any problems with the design (Dixon *et al*, 1992; de Vaus, 1991). These aspects of the questionnaire were discussed with some of the pilot respondents as well as with friends and colleagues. The pilot study also provided an opportunity to test the method of administration. To select the electors for the pilot study (consisting of ten questionnaires) a simple random lottery method was used. The pilot questionnaires were then posted from the University of Surrey. They were collected in person four

to five days after the individual respondents received the questionnaires (although only four of the ten selected respondents completed the questionnaire).

Collection of each questionnaire was considered to be an advantageous method, since it definitely increased the response rate. Two respondents claimed to have thrown away the original questionnaire along with their 'junk mail' but offered to complete a questionnaire when they were supplied with a new one. Both of the respondents who made this request returned the new questionnaires supplied to them after a further collection visit. This method also gave the respondents an opportunity to speak to me in person and as a result made them feel more confident that the research project was bona fide. Furthermore, it encouraged some to volunteer for a further interview. It was a pleasant surprise to find that three of the four respondents who completed the pilot questionnaires were willing to be interviewed further. The procedure of leaving a new questionnaire and making a return visit was therefore used with similar cases during the main survey.

Several of the homes (belonging to those who were out at the time of the visits) appeared to be completely deserted. The curtains had been drawn across in every room, which indicated that these people were away and had probably not ignored the postal communication. During the main survey, homes were checked by calling on neighbours to find out if the selected respondents had moved away. All such respondents were recorded as a distinct category.

During the pilot study, it was deemed necessary to inform the local police of the research project and of my presence in the area for a period of approximately 8 - 10 months. Details were entered in their 'Market Research File' which contained details of all market researchers operating in the Hedge End area during this period. The police also advised me to consult the Borough Solicitor at Eastleigh Borough Council for legal advice concerning the prize draws[4] which were used as an incentive to encourage people to complete the questionnaires. The Borough Solicitor's office

[4] See section 2.5.1 for more details.

carefully read the letter accompanying the questionnaire and stated it was perfectly legal. If no payment is required from the participants in a draw, there are no legal requirements.

2.3.4 The representativeness of the 500 sample

The first stage of the research produced a response rate of 65% although it would have been much lower (possibly only about 15%) if the procedure to collect the questionnaires had not been adopted. One respondent was too elderly and infirm to complete the questionnaire, one respondent was in hospital suffering from a serious illness, one respondent had died, and two respondents of oriental origin had such a problem with the English language that completing the questionnaire was simply not possible for them. A further 51 respondents had moved away. The number of people buying and selling homes in this area is very high indeed, i.e. there is a high rate of mobility. When all of these respondents are added together they total 56 (11% of the 500). These were omitted from the sample, thus lowering the overall adjusted sample total to 444. A total of 289 completed questionnaires were collected - a response rate of 65%.

Of the respondents who refused to complete the questionnaire, 50 of them were characterised by anger or irritation.[5] A further 80 refused due to an expressed lack of interest or time. Finally, it was not possible to establish any contact at all with 25 of the potential respondents. These figures are clearer if given in tabular form:

---

[5] Some of this anger and irritation seemed to be associated with the subject matter of the questionnaire. Religion can be a very emotive topic for some people. One person who refused to complete the questionnaire commented rather angrily: "You have your beliefs and I have mine" (fieldnotes). This remark seemed to infer that religious belief was regarded as a personal subject not to be discussed with others. It is possible that the motivation of the researcher for conducting the survey may have also been in question. The conversation with this particular respondent left the distinct impression the respondent suspected proselytization to be the motivating factor. Some of the potential respondents may have been familiar with the use of questionnaires by Mormons as a method of street evangelism and thereby assumed a connection.

Table 2.2 Overall response from the 500 questionnaire survey.

Collected:	289
Moved away, etc:	56
Refusal (irritation or anger):	50
Refusal (lack of interest or time):	80
No contact:	25
Total:	500

Eleven church attenders and 65 non-church attenders agreed to participate in a further interview, which was a far higher response than expected.

The representativeness of the sample will now be assessed by comparing the sample figures with the 1991 Census Data for the area. The age ranges and gender figures in the sample and in the 1991 Census are as follows:

Table 2.3 Age and gender percentages for the sample and the 1991 Census.

AGE	SAMPLE	CENSUS
18 - 25	14.6	13.7
26 - 34	41.8	28.6
35 - 44	23.0	19.4
45 - 64	18.5	25.2
65+	2.1	13.1
Missing cases	2.0	-
Male	48.4	49.1
Female	51.6	50.9
N = 100%	289.0	5712.0

The 1991 Census covers a slightly larger area than that covered by the survey. The census records 5,712 residents over the age of eighteen. When compared with the 3,002 residents included in the survey, this means that 2,710 residents recorded in the census actually live outside the Grange Park area (allowing, of course, for fluctuations in the figures since the 1991 Census). The only significant differences between the two sets of figures are the 13.2% difference between the 26 - 34 age ranges and the 11% difference between the 65+ age groups. This, however, would be expected due to the relatively recent construction of the homes at Grange Park when compared to the remainder of the area. These new homes tend to attract people in the 26 - 34 age range due to the fact that they can afford such homes at this stage in their lives. The size of many of these homes would also be more suitable for those intending to start, or for those already with, families, rather than attracting older people. Again, the relatively recent construction of the homes results in the fact that the bulk of the population has not yet begun to reach the higher age ranges. There are also a number of older people's homes within the census area, but situated just outside of the Grange Park housing development. When these factors are taken into consideration, the sample appears to be reasonably representative of the age ranges of those living at Grange Park.

The gender percentages are clearly similar and show a balance between male and female responses to the survey. In terms of a comparison between unemployment figures, the census indicates a total of 197 unemployed persons over the age of eighteen (3.4%). This is slightly lower than the survey sample, which shows that seventeen (6.2%) of the 'chief wage earners' (not necessarily the respondents) were unemployed at the time of the survey. This is possibly due to the higher number of younger people in the sample. Concerning marital status, the census figures are not comparable with the sample due to the absence of a column in the census for the category of: 'living as married'. Finally, with regard to ethnicity, 5,671 people over the age of eighteen living in the area covered by the census are 'white'. Only 41 (0.7%) of the total of 5,712 people over the age of eighteen living in the area are of an ethnic group other than 'white', so ethnicity is not a significant variable in this study. Nevertheless, one respondent belonged to an ethnic group other than 'white',

and was a Hindu, **and** was selected for a further interview, which clearly constituted significant data.

2.4 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

2.4.1 The purpose of the questionnaire and of the questions

To recapitulate, the empirical research necessitated the collection of general information about the religious and secular beliefs of people living at Grange Park as well as more specific information about their network relationships. The purpose of the questionnaire, therefore, was to achieve the first part of this objective and to form the basis for achieving the latter through obtaining a sample of forty informants to provide the detailed network information for which a questionnaire would have been unsuitable. The questionnaire was designed with the following objectives in mind:

i)   To obtain a representative sample of the area and thereby form an overall picture of what people who live in the Grange Park area generally believe.

ii)   To provide the basis for selection of a quota sample of 10 CAs and 30 NCAs for further focussed interviews.

iii) To differentiate between high, medium and low levels of importance attributed to religious belief as perceived by the respondents.

iv)   To provide an initial opportunity to ask questions to indicate type of religious or secular belief and religious practice (if applicable) and so on.

v)   To ascertain if there was any evidence of active spirituality outside of formal religious institutional structures, albeit using the minimum amount of information provided by the questionnaire survey. This was then developed further in the second stage of interviews and analysis.

vi)   To use some of the European Values Survey questions to serve as a comparison with other surveys.

Prior to consideration of the actual questions used on the questionnaire, the definition of religion needs to be addressed.

2.4.2 Defining religion

At the outset it was stated that the aim of this thesis is to report the formulation and testing of the theory that the social networks of individuals are intrinsically associated with all types of belief and unbelief held by those same individuals. This of course implies that it is possible to distinguish between 'religious belief' and other types of belief such as scientific or secular belief. Indeed, one could already cite several examples from this, and the previous, chapter where the terms: 'religious belief' and 'secular belief' have been juxtaposed. In one sense, then, it is necessary to define these fundamental terms of reference. In another sense, however, since the research involves all types of belief through to unbelief there is nothing which needs to be excluded in terms of reporting the content of those beliefs. The important issue is the extent to which the beliefs held by the informants (whatever those beliefs may entail) correspond to, or have emerged from, or have been influenced or affected by, the beliefs held by people within each of the informants' networks. Furthermore, no definition of religion was imposed upon the informants in the empirical study. Indeed, each of the informants in the second stage of the research were asked themselves what they understood to be the meaning of the terms 'religious' or 'spiritual'. The informants were further asked whether they perceived if any of the individuals within their networks had religious or spiritual beliefs according to the informants' own common-sense understanding of these terms.

Nevertheless, for the sake of conceptual clarity and focus, at the very least, we need to know what we are talking about when we refer to 'religious belief' and 'unbelief'. Furthermore, if the question of whether people in the general population hold religious beliefs outside of organised religious structures is to be answered then a definition of religion is necessary.

To formulate a working definition of 'religious belief' is undoubtedly problematic. This fundamental issue has never been satisfactorily resolved. Definitions of religion generally fall into the two broad categories of 'functional' and 'substantive', but there are difficulties with both types of definition (Bruce, 1995a). It is often argued that the emphasis of functional definitions tends to be placed upon that which religion does, whereas the emphasis of substantive definitions tends to be placed upon that which religion is.

One of the major problems associated with functional definitions of religion is that they tend to be too universal. For example, Durkheim defined religion as:

> ... a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them (1975:123).

This may on the surface appear to separate the sacred from the profane but the sacred, according to Durkheim, included anything which had the capacity to unite society, such as a moral code binding people together in a moral community. Beckford observes that:

> An important consequence of associating the sacred with people, things and practices which symbolize the very possibility of life in society is that the decline or disappearance of religion is rendered virtually inconceivable except in the case of a societal collapse or destruction (1989:25-26).

Such definitions may not even be recognised as religious by those involved. Hamilton makes the point that:

> Functionalist explanations [of society] ... which essentially state that a social institution can be understood in terms of the contribution it makes to the survival of a society or to its social integration and solidarity ... are beset with problems and functionalist explanations of religion particularly so. This is because the discrepancy between the functionalist account of the given social behaviour and the interpretation of the participants themselves is at its greatest in the case of religion (1995:106).

77

It is the interpretation placed upon religious belief by the informants themselves which is of greatest concern in the current study.

Examples of functionalist approaches to the study of religion have already been touched upon in Chapter One with reference to the work of Durkheim (1961, 1975) and Luckmann (1967). Without entering any further into the complexities of their independent analyses of religion, it would be pertinent merely to refer again to their shared view that even the formation of personal identity is deemed to be a religious process in terms of transcending the biological self. Objections to this understanding of religion were raised in Chapter One in the sense that it is difficult to include this process in a definition of religion if the individual actors do not choose to reflect upon such a process. To give a slightly more extreme example of a functional approach to religion than this, Eyre (1996) has used Stark and Glock's (1968) five dimensional model of religion to analyse football as a form of religion. Due to the fact that such phenomena are not conspicuous common-sense manifestations of religion, these functionalist approaches to religion are not particularly helpful if interpretations of religion from the perspective of the informants selected for this study are to be foregrounded. These functional definitions fall into the categories of 'implicit religion' (Bailey, 1990a) or 'invisible religion' (Luckmann, 1967).

Other frequently cited categories of religion, such as 'conventional religion', 'customary religion', 'common religion' and 'folk religion' are generally included within substantive definitions of religion. Very briefly, Towler (1984) has defined conventional religion as including all the: "principal religions of the world and their long established sub-divisions" (ibid.:4) and common religion as "those beliefs and practices of an overtly religious nature which are not under the domination of a prevailing religious institution" (Towler, 1974:148). Hornsby-Smith (1991) has created a further distinction by using the term 'customary religion' to describe the religiosity of people outside of religious institutions who nevertheless hold some form of traditional Christian beliefs:

... derived from 'official' religion but without being under its continuing control ... the beliefs and practices that make up customary religion are the product of formal religious socialization but subject to trivialisation, conventionality, apathy, convenience and self-interest. (1991:90)

This definition therefore distinguishes between, on the one hand, beliefs outside the control of 'official religion' yet bearing some relation to Christian tradition and, on the other hand, beliefs outside of traditional religion which are pagan in origin, such as beliefs in the supernatural, spiritualism, astrology, superstition and so on. All of the latter types of belief are classified under 'common religion' or 'folk religion' which are virtually synonymous terms.

All of the above classifications could be subsumed under the following definition of religion formulated by Bruce (1995a). Bruce opts for a substantive 'common-sense' definition "that fits with broad contemporary common-sense reflection on the matter" (1995a:ix). His own definition states that:

Religion ... consists of beliefs, actions, and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose. (1995a:ix)

The emphasis, in this definition, is upon some sort of reference to the transcendent and is not dissimilar to a definition of religion offered by Martin (1978):

[Religion is the] acceptance of a level of reality beyond the observable world known to science, to which are ascribed meanings and purposes completing and transcending those of the purely human realm. (1978:12)

Clearly, Bruce's definition includes the additional components of 'actions' and 'institutions'. Yet beliefs, actions and institutions do not all have to be present simultaneously in the definition of religion formulated by Bruce, because Bruce (1996:271) considers 'generalized supernaturalism' to be one of the indices of religion, which of course does not necessitate an institution. Indeed, Bruce's definition of religion is sufficiently broad enough to include something as marginal as

superstition.

Superstition certainly has similar characteristics to those of conventional religion, such as the practice of prayer for example. This researcher would define superstition as follows:

> Superstition is the acknowledgement that a transcendent power or powers control human destiny and that by certain actions, or by the avoidance of certain actions, an individual can influence such transcendental power(s) and thereby influence his or her destiny.

There are four religious components to this type of thinking:

   i)   belief in a higher transcendental power
   ii) such power(s) have control over human affairs
   iii) such power(s) can be influenced, to change the course of events
   iv) actions or avoidance of actions are required of the believer.

The strength of such beliefs is another matter however. Frequency of reflection upon, or reference to, these beliefs may be one measure in this respect. When compared with someone holding conventional religious beliefs, the superstitious person may well be regarded as being less religious. Another measure would be to ascertain how seriously a person takes such beliefs, although if the fourth factor on the above list enters the equation, then it would suggest they take the superstition seriously even if they claim otherwise. The existence of such beliefs in the general population would be enough to suggest that religiosity has not been entirely supplanted by scientific rational philosophy.

The main point here is that definitions of religion, if too narrowly defined, may exclude beliefs and experiences which, even by common-sense understandings of religion, might be classified as religion. Religious belief within the general population is also unlikely to be 'orthodox Christian' in content if there is little or no contact with Church religion. Even within Christian churches there exists a diversity of religious beliefs (Ahern and Davie, 1987:57). Furthermore, if Hervieu-Léger (1993,

80

1994) is correct about religious emotionalism being more suited to the prevailing religious climate and the structural and cultural conditions of modernity, definitions of religion ought to allow room for the erosion of religious memory in the form of traditional expressions and understandings of religious belief and allow for its possible replacement by emotional forms of religion. This includes experiential encounters with the transcendent, hence the provision of a question on religious or spiritual experience in the questionnaire. The word 'spiritual' is used in this thesis to signify encounters with the transcendent. Spiritual experience can nevertheless be subsumed under Bruce's substantive definition of religion.[6] Hay (1987:89) comments that: "It would be foolhardy to try to set sharp boundaries to the kinds of physical events which people have *defined for themselves* [my italics] as religious, because there are no areas of experience which at some time have not been so called". It is important, therefore, not to marginalize peoples' own definitions of that which counts as religious.

Bruce's substantive definition certainly has its attractions in terms of its use in this thesis, in that: a) on the basis of the empirical evidence collected for this study, it views religion from the commonly held perspective of the informants, and b) using a definition of religion formulated by Bruce himself could be considered a more valid approach to the question of whether religious belief exists in the general population outside of institutional structures given Bruce's (1996) vehement opposition to the 'silver lining' theorists (e.g. Davie, 1994) who argue against the secularization thesis. This study would thereby commence from the same point of reference. A functional definition of religion, on the other hand, if used herein, could easily be dismissed on the grounds of being too all-embracing. Hamilton makes the point that:

> ... attempts to define religion ... are not always free of predilections and purposes. That is to say, what theorists think religion is often depends upon the explanation of it they favour. They do not always seek to simply demarcate the sphere of investigation but also to state or imply things within the definition which support their theoretical interpretation of it. (1995:12)

It is partly to avoid such an accusation that the definition of religion by Bruce has

---

[6] See Appendix V for more details of questionnaire items on this subject.

been selected for use in the current study.

Bruce also adds that: "the purpose of a definition is to bring together analytically similar phenomena, aspects of which we believe we can explain in the same terms" (1995a:ix). If Bruce's definition is accepted, therefore, as an adequate definition of 'religion', 'religiosity' or 'religious belief', the question remains concerning the definition of 'unbelief', 'non-belief' or 'secular beliefs'. Can the particular phenomena in the realm of unbelief be regarded as analytically similar and are these terms simply to refer to that which 'religious belief' is not?

According to Campbell (1971) a definition of irreligion transpires to be equally as fraught with difficulty as a definition of religion. Campbell ultimately defines irreligion as a specific form of unbelief, namely:

> ... a reaction or alienative response to established religion. More specifically, irreligion is those beliefs and actions which are expressive of attitudes of hostility or indifference toward the prevailing religion, together with indications of the rejection of its demands (ibid.:21).

This still leaves a rather confusing and vague area of unbelief remaining outside of the definitions given herein for religion and irreligion. Just as there are varying types and degrees of religiosity which may or may not come under the auspices of a religious organisation, one could argue that there are varying types and degrees of unbelief which, for the purposes of the current study, could be classified according to the degree of opposition or cognitive closure to religious belief. The use of the phrase 'cognitive closure' is intended here to signify a lack of acceptance of religious belief as defined by Bruce whilst not necessarily being in opposition to such belief. In fact, the desire to have religious beliefs may be present, even though such beliefs are currently absent. These classifications would be clearer if represented in the following tabular form:

Table 2.4 Level of opposition or cognitive closure towards religious belief

LOW   Seekership[7]

               The religiously sympathising unbeliever[8]

               Agnosticism

               Total indifference to religion

               Atheism

HIGH   Irreligion[9]

This short list is not an attempt to present an exhaustive and comprehensive range of types of unbelief. The table simply aims to show a continuum which has as its common denominator a lack of belief in the supernatural, the assumption of which is present in the substantive definition of religion offered by Bruce. All references, therefore, to unbelief, non-belief or secular belief employ a shared definition in this thesis, characterized by a lack of acceptance of religious belief as defined by Bruce with varying degrees of opposition or cognitive closure towards religious belief. These definitions of religious belief and unbelief have been applied to the construction of the questionnaire and to the study as a whole. The next section explores the actual construction of the questions themselves.

2.4.3 The questions

The first of the overall objectives of the questionnaire survey (given above on page 78) was to find out what people living in Grange Park generally believe. The potential range of beliefs immediately presented a questionnaire design problem. If too many

---

[7] A concept proposed by Glock and Stark and defined as those people who: "have the concern [to discover the meaning and purpose of life] but who have not resolved it" (1965:27).

[8] Defined by Campbell as: "a person who neither possesses commitment to a religious position nor regards religion with hostility or indifference, but on the contrary is favourably disposed toward it. Such a person is not easily fitted into the sphere of irreligion ... but is equally unamenable to inclusion in the category of the religious" (1971:25-26).

[9] Campbell states that "it is the specific attitude of rejection which is irreligion's principal defining characteristic" (1971:26).

questions had been included on the questionnaire, or if the questions had been too complex, it could have adversely affected the response rate. For the entire questionnaire a decision was therefore made to use a single A4 page, folded to A5 size, and to keep the questions fairly simple and limited to a few key areas of enquiry. This included the use of closed questions about religious or spiritual experience, general religious or secular beliefs and religious or spiritual practice. Some of these questions were drawn directly from the European Values Survey (1991), as they are tried and tested questions which could be used as a useful data comparison. Some of the EVS questions were modified, however. Details of these modifications together with the reasons for doing so are given in Appendix V. Answers to these closed questions were subsequently pursued in more depth with the respondents selected for the second stage of the research.

It was important to ensure the questions did not exclude genuine experiences of religion according to the substantive definition of religion given in the previous section. In order to identify as wide a range of religious beliefs as possible (including non-belief) it was anticipated that not all questions would be deemed relevant by each individual respondent, but, as Towler (1984:94) has indicated, to some extent this is unavoidable. For this reason, a number of filter questions were created (de Vaus, 1991:95). This aspect of the questionnaire design allowed for general orthodox Christian beliefs and views about God to be explored if they were applicable. If respondents did not hold such beliefs they could then quickly pass over these questions and only answer those which were relevant to themselves.

Questions were also asked about the respondents' views of the Church and the extent to which the respondents held cultural values based on individualism (which could have affected attitudes towards church attendance). Following the recognised methodology of deVaus (1991:94-95) the easiest and most enjoyable questions were asked first and demographic questions were left until the end. Open-ended questions were avoided and a variety of question formats (such as Likert-style questions, checklists and semantic differential questions) were used to keep the questionnaire interesting. Forced-choice questions were used primarily due to the fact that they are

extremely quick for respondents to answer and easy to code for subsequent computer analysis. The main objections to forced-choice questions - such as the inability of respondents to qualify their answers, or the possibility of creating false opinions by the constraints of the questions - were counteracted to a large extent by the use of the second stage interviews to check if the questions gave an accurate representation of the respondents' views. This served to check the construct validity of the questionnaire (Moser and Kalton, 1996:356-357). Inferences could then be made as to the reliability of the answers given by the entire questionnaire sample. This process of checking the representation of the respondents views was carried out in a much more limited way during the pilot testing of the questionnaire, when respondents were questioned about the content of the questionnaire itself.

The second overall objective of the questionnaire survey (given on page 78) was to select a quota sample of 10 CAs and 30 NCAs by differentiating between high, medium and low levels of importance attributed to religious or spiritual matters as perceived by the NCA respondents. The criterion for dividing the NCAs into these three categories was according to the higher score given by each respondent on the scales associated with question numbers fifteen and sixteen on the questionnaire (see Appendix II).[10] The reason for using both questions and selecting the higher score was, at the very least, *to avoid the possibility of marginalizing any respondents who adhered to an alternative belief system* (i.e. alternative to conventional Christian beliefs). The wisdom of differentiating between the higher of these two scores to form the criterion was confirmed by a crosstabulation of the two questions. Although Cramér's V indicated a fairly strong association of .55 (p < .0001) for this crosstabulation, which was indeed *expected*, the crosstabulation nevertheless indicated that 53 respondents (18.5%) did regard 'spiritual matters' to be more important than God in their lives. In some cases this difference was considerable (i.e. the figures given for importance of spiritual matters followed by importance of God were, for example, a score of 10 [very important] for spiritual matters followed by a score of 3 for the importance of God, or 7 followed by 1, or 6 followed by 1 and so on).

---

[10] Further details of the selection of interviewees is given in section 2.7.

The use of a conventional *scale of religiosity* was also avoided when dividing the NCA informants into categories, again, to ensure that any respondents who adhered to an alternative belief system were not marginalized and, just as important, *to place the emphasis of the analysis upon the importance levels* of religious or spiritual matters indicated by the informants. Appendix VI features a table which refers to the application of a scale of religiosity to the data *subsequent* to the interviewee selection process. This table shows a clear (and *expected*) pattern, even in this sub-sample of the data, in that as the level of importance of religious matters becomes lower, the incidence of conventional belief becomes less. Nevertheless, many of the respondents attributed a high level of importance to religious matters *without* registering high on the scale for conventional belief. This is explored further in subsequent chapters. It is of theoretical significance in terms of the possibility of a high degree of active interest in spiritual matters existing in a high percentage of the population, rather than just simply the existence of 'residual' beliefs among NCAs. It would have been a serious oversight not to have taken this into consideration, since the nature and content of contemporary religious belief may well be moving away from conventional forms of religion and of religious belief. Hence, this constitutes a key reason for placing the emphasis on an 'importance' scale rather than a 'conventional' scale when dividing the NCAs into categories.

One of the major concerns of the current research outlined in Chapter One was the need to find out more about the beliefs of NCAs and to pursue the possibility that any religious beliefs held by NCAs are likely to be dependent upon the influences of people within their social networks rather than directly upon religious organisations. The fact that many of the respondents did attribute a high level of importance to religious matters *without* registering high on the scale for conventional belief raises questions about the nature of their beliefs and how these beliefs are transmitted. At face value, at least, it hardly seems likely that these beliefs were transmitted through church involvement, hence, one of the reasons for studying the networks of the informants in subsequent chapters.

Details of the decisions involved in constructing each of the items on the initial

questionnaire are given in Appendix V. The next section discusses the methods used to administer the questionnaire. This involved the establishment and development of network contacts with the respondents. The process was initiated through the writing of a letter of introduction which accompanied the postal questionnaire.

2.5 QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTRATION

A decision was made to post the questionnaires and then personally to collect all 500 over a three month period, i.e. ten per day, fifty per week, to increase the response rate. The personal collection of the questionnaires provided a further opportunity to establish contact with potential interviewees at a face-to-face level. The method of systematic random selection facilitated easier collection of the questionnaires as they were sent out in batches of ten according to street name. Each batch of questionnaires was posted from the Department of Sociology at the University of Surrey to reassure the recipients that the research project was bona fide, as in the pilot study. The questionnaires were then collected in person whilst residing in Southampton. The data from each questionnaire were entered onto SPSS as the collection proceeded.

2.5.1 Letter of introduction

The questionnaire was the first point of contact with the respondents. Given the decision to administer the questionnaires by post, the first page of the questionnaire included a letter of introduction. This gave a brief explanation of the purpose of the research and the offer of entry into two prize draws[11] to provide an incentive to complete the questionnaire and to opt for a further interview. Financial rewards have tended to be avoided by conventional approaches to social research for fear of introducing bias. Yet Heberlein and Baumgartner (1978) have argued that in order to generate maximum response rates when conducting postal surveys, the most important

---

[11] See letter of introduction in Appendix I for more details of the prize draws.

factors are the provision of pre-paid envelopes and the offer of financial rewards. A similar recommendation to use material incentives with postal surveys is made by de Vaus (1991:118). He too advocates the use of pre-paid envelopes and suggests the use of free lottery tickets for prize draws. Thompson (1996:1) comments: "the conventional view is that the only valuable respondent is one who is willing to engage in the prescribed hierarchical relationship, which necessarily includes the donation of time for the benefit of the social sciences". This traditional attitude has been challenged by Thompson. She argues that the researched have often been exploited because they generally lack the power to insist on being compensated for their time. Some form of payment is therefore a way of acknowledging the help given by the respondents and places a value on the time they give to the researcher. Payments thus help "to avoid the bias which [might result] from the omission of those who declined to participate because they put a greater value on their time, energy and views" (ibid.:4). To avoid bias further, the prize draws for the current study were designed to appeal to altruistically motivated individuals as well as to those who desired to complete the questionnaires for personal gain. Hence they were offered the opportunity to donate their prize to a registered charity of their choice. Thompson forms the following conclusion concerning financial rewards:

> ... the dangers of making payments to respondents can be outweighed by the gains, both by reducing bias and by compensation for power differentials between the researcher and the researched. The advantages of making payments apply not only to survey research, where there is already experience of the merits of paying respondents, but also to qualitative research, where payments to informants are rarely considered (ibid.:4).

The arguments for the use of financial rewards are thus sufficiently convincing to provide the basis for the use of prize draws in the current study.

The letter also stated that the questionnaires would be collected in person. Clearly this meant that answers would not be entirely anonymous although the respondents were assured of anonymity in terms of any future use of the data or any publications resulting from the research.

The pilot study highlighted a need for several amendments to the original 'Version 1' of the letter. It was first envisaged that no more than five CAs would be found who would agree to a further interview. It soon became apparent, however, that it might be possible to select more than five CAs from the initial questionnaire survey as two CAs were included in the pilot responses. The original letter stated that 35 people would be required for the second stage interviews, i.e. 30 NCAs and approximately five CAs. The wording of the letter for 'Version 2' was therefore changed to allow for the selection of a maximum of 60 respondents, thus allowing for the selection of up to 30 CAs[12] (which changed the odds of winning the final prize draw). Textual errors in the letter were also noted and rectified. Finally, it became clear that four to five days would be more appropriate for collection of the questionnaire rather than the original 'three to four' stated in 'Version 1' of the letter.

It was not until approximately 70 questionnaires had been posted that it was realized the wording of the letter in 'Version 2' was not having the desired effect of increasing the response rate. In fact, it resulted in generating quite the opposite effect. It was reasoned that as most of the respondents were relatively wealthy, the opening lines of the questionnaire letter offered them little incentive to complete the form.

The method of collecting each questionnaire gave an opportunity to discuss the impact of the letter with the individual respondents. It was discovered that many of the respondents assumed the letter was structured according to a stereotypical format offering a prize draw with the aim of encouraging the reader to purchase some form of commodity. For this reason they tended to discard the questionnaire as 'junk mail' without reading any further. Most people said they 'binned' the questionnaire immediately. However, when it was explained to them that the survey was part of a project for a Ph.D and that it should only take them about five minutes to fill-in the questionnaire, they became very keen to help. Most of the respondents were well-educated and empathized with the efforts made to succeed with the survey. Almost without exception, *when the respondents gave an opportunity* for the purpose of the

---

[12] At that stage of the research the decision had not been finalized to select ten CAs for interview.

research to be explained, they agreed to participate[13]. Much harder work was therefore created through poor wording of the questionnaire letter, hence, the change to the final version (see Appendix I).

Section 2.3.4 (page 75) outlined several reasons why people totally refused to fill-in the questionnaire. One of the primary reasons concerned the subject matter of the questionnaire. A decision was therefore made to introduce the word 'religion' or 'religious' much later in the letter - certainly not in the first paragraph - hence the use of the phrase: 'people's beliefs, attitudes and values'. For the same reason, any reference to attendance at the 'local church' was omitted. As a result of these changes to the letter, the response rate increased. In most instances it was no longer necessary to offer a further explanation of the purpose of the research or to provide a new questionnaire for the respondent.

2.5.2 Reasons for using a postal questionnaire

A postal questionnaire was the easiest and cheapest method to reach the 500 selected respondents given the limited time scale and level of funding available for the project. As stated above, a postal questionnaire provided reassurance to the respondents that the research project was bona fide. The study population was also suited to a questionnaire survey as it was expected to be predominantly 'middle class' due to the private housing in this area. Middle class respondents are more likely to be literate and to have the ability to articulate their views. The use of questionnaires did not, therefore, introduce any undue bias in this respect.

It is generally accepted, however, that a postal questionnaire is less efficient than the use of a telephone questionnaire or a personal interview to target and access the correct person - in this instance the specific named person selected from the electoral

---

[13] Of course, it will be recalled that many of the refusals to complete the questionnaires were characterised by anger, irritation and lack of interest or time (see page 75). In these instances the potential respondents were not prepared even to consider the purpose of the research.

register (de Vaus, 1991:108). There was no way of being absolutely certain if the correct person had completed each questionnaire. Nevertheless, some checks were possible (Lynn and Lievesley, 1991:49). First, the question about gender could be checked against the name of the respondent. Second, when collecting the questionnaires a request was made to speak to each named respondent. Third, the interview stage of the research (which was arguably more important, since the data derived from it constituted the key focus of the research project) provided confirmation in this respect. Moreover, 76 of the respondents opted for a further interview. As these respondents knew they were likely to be selected for a second stage of interviewing, it is likely the correct persons completed the initial questionnaire among this group. With regard to the remaining 213 respondents, the collection of the questionnaires helped considerably in overcoming this problem of locating the correct person as most respondents with whom contact was made were the specific persons named on the questionnaires.

Additional notes were included with each letter/questionnaire for the first stage of the research. These notes featured items which could not be included in the letter of introduction due to a lack of space and the need to keep the letter as short as possible. For example, the respondents were assured that the results of the prize draws would be publicized.[14] To provide another incentive to complete the questionnaire it was decided to make available a summary of the survey results to all respondents (de Vaus, 1991:117). Availability of these summaries was, however, subject to request during the collection of the questionnaires. This offer was made on the basis of previous research experience where a similar offer was made but with little subsequent response. It was reasoned that this would involve little further work in order to produce and to distribute such a summary. The prediction was correct. Only

---

[14] A local newspaper was contacted with a request to publish the names of the prize draw winners in return for an article about the research. The newspaper decided to publish the article *before* there was time to conduct the draw, which defeated the object! As the prize draw was conducted by the Chairperson at an official meeting of Hedge End Town Council shortly after the empirical research had been completed, the results were at least published in the minutes of the meeting, which was of course less satisfactory. Nevertheless, an official record of the outcome exists if it were challenged by any participant. The two prizes were then distributed to the winners.

two respondents from the entire survey requested a summary.[15]

2.5.3 Potential problems and limitations of the questionnaire

Questionnaires are highly dependent upon interpretations both from the perspective of the respondent and from that of the researcher. This form of enquiry inevitably forces people into giving answers according to pre-defined categories, some of which may not be entirely appropriate to the most favoured reply of the respondent. This is quite clear from some of the attempts of respondents to qualify their choices when completing the actual questionnaires.[16] The respondent has to interpret what the researcher means by the question and the researcher has to interpret what the respondent means by the answer given. One might argue that the respondent's understanding and perception of the question is dependent upon a) that which they have been taught about the concept or issue in question, b) their own interpretation of what a concept or issue involves, and c) their own personal experience surrounding a particular concept or issue. These matters are discussed in Appendix V as they arose when constructing each questionnaire item.

The use of the initial questionnaire in this study will enable us to "see through a glass darkly"[17] in forming an impression of the religious and secular beliefs held by people living at Grange Park. The second stage interviews should facilitate the creation of a somewhat clearer image. Nevertheless, the researcher's own perceptions, interpretations and theoretical understanding of the data inevitably imposes a framework of analysis upon the data. Such are the constraints, however, within which all sociologists, as well as research scientists in other disciplines, are compelled to

---

[15] The previous research was on the topic of housing and community care needs (Hirst, *et al*, 1995) where it was expected that more respondents would have requested a summary of the survey results. It is not, therefore, just when the topic of the study concerns religion that few requests are made for a copy of the results. A very important factor in this respect is that the respondents were deliberately *not reminded* of this offer when the questionnaires were collected. If such a reminder had been given, it is likely that many would have said 'yes'.

[16] Some respondents had written qualifying statements adjacent to some of their answers on the questionnaire.

[17] An analogy drawn from: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (King James Version) where St.Paul discusses the difference between the clouded vision of earthly knowledge and knowledge in the hereafter which St.Paul argues will be clear and focused.

conduct their research.

2.5.4 Statistical analysis of the questionnaire

In the next chapter, a general portrait of Grange Park is presented which includes an overview of the data derived from the questionnaire survey. Some of the questionnaire data are also used in subsequent chapters when reporting the testing of the network dependency hypothesis. The analysis of that data predominantly utilizes frequency distributions and crosstabulations. Due to the fact that "no measure of association is sensitive to every type of association imaginable" (Norusis, 1991:318) three suitable measures of association were selected for the current study: Cramér's V, Kendall's Tau-c and lambda.

Prior to consideration of the questionnaire data in the form of an overview of the beliefs of people living in Grange Park, the methods involved in the second stage of the current research require further detailed explanation.

2.6 INTERVIEW GUIDE DESIGN

2.6.1 The purpose of the interview guide and the range of questions

The second stage interview guide (see Appendix III) was designed to obtain more focused information about the religious and secular beliefs indicated by the respondents on the questionnaire and to obtain the very detailed and extensive network information required to conduct ego-centred network analysis and to facilitate the testing of the network dependency hypothesis. Interviews are often used as a method to obtain very detailed and extensive data (Fielding, 1993:138). Fielding has pointed out that interviews are valuable whenever complicated or sensitive issues are involved, both of which apply to the current study.

The semi-structured interview guide was divided into four sections to cover: 1) level and type of belief, 2) sources of belief, 3) views on religious institutions and organisations, and 4) network information. All four sections were designed so that the interview would last approximately one hour. Most questions on the interview guide applied to all of the informants apart from the questions on the first two pages of the guide. Page One featured an opportunity to ask a series of very specific questions, unique to each individual, based upon the answers they had given on the initial questionnaire. Pages One and Two also contained specific filter questions. These were applicable a) to converts only, b) to those who had indicated a belief in God or belief in a spiritual dimension and c) to those who had indicated very low belief or no belief in God at all. The interview guide thus had to be flexible enough to talk about any form of belief or unbelief. The remaining major questions on the guide were the same for each informant but the order in which they were asked varied according to the direction in which the interviews naturally progressed. Very often answers were given to questions which would have been asked at a later stage in the interview. Probes were made for further information whenever it was considered relevant. The interview guide also had to be capable of facilitating the collection of detailed network information - an issue to which attention will now be given.

2.6.2 Defining and measuring networks

Defining networks

Wasserman and Faust (1994:53) have provided an excellent definition of an 'ego-centred network' which will be used in the current study:

> An ego-centred, or *local*, network consists of a focal person or respondent (ego), a set of alters who have ties to ego, and measurements on the ties from ego to alters and on the ties between alters.

If the latter relationships of ties between alters are omitted and the relationships included in a study only involve those between ego and alters, such relationships can

only be described as personal stars rather than as personal networks (Allan, 1996).

Ego-centred network analysis has already been defined as the analysis of networks as they are perceived by the individuals at their centres.[18] Nevertheless, any study involving ego-centred network analysis inevitably has to confront the issue of who to include and who to exclude from the networks of each informant. If the criterion for inclusion were that of all those known to each informant, the numbers involved would become virtually unmanageable. Boissevain (1974) and Pool and Kochen (1978) have estimated that the numbers involved, based on this criterion, would be in the range of 1,000 - 1,500. One weakness of network analysis, as a result of this problem, is that a selective framework generally has to be imposed upon the study. Allan (1996:122) acknowledges that:

> personal networks are not simply portrayals of an external reality. They are not straightforward representations of an empirical world. Rather, they are analytical constructions generated by the researcher, which certainly aim to reflect the real circumstances of respondents but which nonetheless operate with an analytical filter. That is, the network which is constructed by the researcher reflects the criteria which she or he chose about which ties should be included and which should not.

Bearing in mind this caveat, in the current study the criterion for inclusion was based upon those network others who were more likely than anyone else in the networks of the informants to have had some form of influence on the informants' current beliefs. It was reasoned that people falling into this category would be either those with whom the informants associated most frequently and/or those in whom the informants could confide and trust on an intimate level. The informants were therefore asked to provide detailed information on three or four current network others whom they saw 'most frequently' and three or four network others in whom they felt they could 'confide the most'. The numbers mentioned here reflect those used by Wellman (1979) in his New York study of the 'loss of community' theory. Wellman asked each of his respondents to provide information about six of their most significant network others. In the

---

[18] This definition is derived from Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988:27

current study, the informants were further asked about the total numbers of kin and friends in frequent contact and the total numbers of kin and friends in whom they felt they could confide the most. The latter questions were included to provide a clearer picture of the overall network structure applicable to each informant.

During the course of the interviews the informants were further questioned about former contacts with anyone known to them who had significantly influenced their beliefs, either from within or from outside their families. This whole process of questioning the informants about their network relationships became quite complex. The interview guide was therefore modified as the research progressed, primarily through the introduction of a series of tables to ensure that all the relevant questions were asked about each of the relationships.[19] These questions included many which could be used at a later stage of analysis to measure the relational ties between those involved in each network in addition to the collection of information about the beliefs, attitudes and values of the people within the networks of the informants.

Wasserman and Faust (1994:53) have emphasized the importance of measurement of these relational ties. There are no standardized measurements, however. This point is articulated by Wellman and Berkowitz (1988:38-39): "The shift away from methodological individualism toward structural analysis calls for the development of new relational methods and the redefinition of units of analysis ... We have, as yet, few tools for these tasks and almost none upon which there is universal agreement". Measurements of the relational ties within the networks of the informants in the current study were therefore developed through use of the concept of 'relational proximity' postulated by Schluter and Lee (1993).

The concept of relational proximity

This concept has been developed by Schluter and Lee to outline the conditions (i.e.

---

[19] See Interview Guide in Appendix III.

96

the style and intensity) of encounter relationships (i.e. "a connection between two individuals which is based on some degree of unmediated contact") (ibid.:274) and according to which the interaction between two individuals can be described. Relational proximity is not to be confused with a description of the personalities or the geographical locations of two individuals; its focus is that of interaction. Schluter and Lee suggest there are at least five dimensions to relational proximity: directness, continuity, multiplexity, parity and commonality. It would be pertinent to provide definitions of these terms:[20]

> *Directness:* that condition in a relationship involving a lack of mediation in contact and, at its most intense, involving face-to-face meeting.

> *Continuity:* that condition in a relationship involving frequency, regularity and sustaining of contact.

> *Multiplexity:* [21] that condition in a relationship involving contact in more that one context or role.

> *Parity:* that condition in a relationship involving an approximate balance of power or influence, whether or not operating from an institutional base.

> *Commonality:* that condition in a relationship involving common purpose.

Schluter and Lee further argue that whilst two individuals may be highly relationally proximate, there is still a requirement for the moral elements of obligation and commitment to be included in the equation if the relationship is to be one of quality, i.e. relational proximity does not guarantee that two people will relate well to each other. Again, it is necessary to provide definitions of these terms. Schluter and Lee define *obligation* as: "a contract, promise or demand of conscience or custom, by which an individual is bound in a legal or moral sense to certain patterns of behaviour which serve first the interests of a social group rather than him or her as an individual" (ibid.:275), and they define *commitment* as: "the individual's personal

---

[20] All definition quotations from Schluter and Lee, 1993:273-275

[21] Some anthropologists suggest 'multiplexity' indicates a strong tie (Kapferer, 1969:213; Granovetter, 1973:1361). "The notion of multiplexity in relationships linking people at one or more steps assumes considerable importance because the implication here is that people who are bound in many ways together are more securely bound to each other" (Mitchell, 1969:23).

inclination to respect and/or fulfil obligations, founded on a sense of inner moral conviction" (ibid.:273). Relational proximity thus concentrates on *conditions* for relationships; the more relationally proximate two people are, the more likely that relationship will be one of quality, although relational proximity *per se* is no guarantee the relationship will be satisfactory.

Whilst Schluter and Lee appear not to have used these dimensions to create scales of measurement, the five dimensions of relational proximity have been used in the current study to produce various scales of measurement which were then applied to the subsequent accounts given by the informants of their individual social networks. The concept of relational proximity was thus used in the second interview stage of the empirical research to test various propositions derived from the network dependency hypothesis.

The following page gives details of the scores used for each dimension of relational proximity. These scores were applied to the answers given in each interview so that a total relational proximity score could be determined for each relationship which existed within the networks of each informant. The total relational proximity scores were then used in the analysis of the interview data.

RELATIONAL PROXIMITY SCORES

CONTINUITY

1) How long relationship established:

Over 10 years:	4	
5 - 9.9 years:	3	If D.K., score 2.5
2 - 4.9 years:	2	
0 - 1.9 years:	1	

2) Frequency of meeting / contact: (Take highest contact figure)

At least once per week:	4	
At least once every 2 weeks:	3	If D.K., score 2.5
At least once a month:	2	If D.K. (confide only), score 1.5
Less than once a month:	1	

2.1) If partner/spouse: add   2   points.

DIRECTNESS

Face to face:	4	If D.K., score 2.5
Telephone:	3	For most frequent category, score 4 if face
Internet:	2	to face at least once a month in addition
Letter:	1.5	to more frequent phone calls etc

MULTIPLEXITY   (Contexts in which known or meet):

3 or more (or if immediate family):	3	
2:	2	If D.K., score 2
1:	1	

PARITY   (Occupation similarity):

Equal status (or immediate family/parents/brothers/sisters):	3	
Different status (marginal):	2	If D.K., score 2
Different status (considerable):	1	

COMMONALITY

Much in common / close family contact:	2	If D.K., score 1.5
Less in common / less close family:	1	

When the total scores were obtained for each relational tie they were classified as follows:

If relational proximity figure is 17 - 22 classify as HIGH LEVEL.
If relational proximity figure is 14.5 - 16.5 classify as MEDIUM LEVEL.
If relational proximity figure is 6.5 - 14 classify as LOW LEVEL.

If information was not available on any of the five dimensions for any relational tie, a median score was generally given. This was to ensure that the total relational proximity score for any relational tie was not unduly affected in either a positive or a negative direction. The only exception in this respect concerns the score of 1.5 in specific cases on the 'continuity' dimension. This is because the majority of 'most confide in' ties had a lower mean score than the 'most frequent' ties on this dimension. Hence, under these circumstances, the median was not a particularly appropriate score to use with 'most confided in' ties if information was not available.

During the course of the interviews it was soon discovered that network density (the connectedness of the people within a given network) was *not an important factor at all* in terms of the relationship between people's networks and their beliefs. Most alters within the networks of the informants did not know one another. The relationships were predominantly between ego and alter, not between alter and alter. Allowance was made in the interview guide to measure relationships between alters in the same way as between ego and alters but in most cases the questions were irrelevant due to the lack of alter to alter relationships.[22] *The key focus of the network dependency hypothesis therefore concerns the association between, on the one hand, the relationships within each network between ego and alters and, on the other hand, the beliefs held by ego and alters.* The key measurements for use in the analysis, therefore, are the strength and nature of each relationship between ego and alter (measured by the relational proximity score) and the beliefs held by ego and each alter. The beliefs of ego are summarized by the belief importance categories. In terms

---

[22] See note which precedes the Interview Guide in Appendix III.

of the beliefs held by alters, the informants were asked about the religious beliefs held by each alter within their personal networks. Each alter was then assigned to a category according to their level of religious belief, i.e. 'strong', 'moderate', 'weak' or 'none'. For each relationship between ego and alter, therefore, it is possible to give an abbreviation to summarize the strength of the relationship combined with the belief of the alter. So, for each tie between ego and alter, a relational proximity score of H, M or L (high, medium or low) is followed by S, M, W or N (strong, moderate, weak or none in relation to the alter's religious or spiritual beliefs). For example, 'LS' would summarize the data for a tie between ego and alter of low relational proximity where the alter had strong religious beliefs, and so on.

These measures of current networks could not be applied, however, to questions about the former contacts of each informant. It would have been unreasonable to expect the informants to remember such information about former *network* relationships, particularly when questions were asked about relationships as far back in time as their childhood. In fact, detailed analysis of such network relationships would not be possible unless a highly organised longitudinal study were to be carried out over many years. Former relationships with others cannot be ignored, however, for a number of reasons which are discussed in Chapter Four. In order to avoid omission of this important aspect of the informants' biographies, a number of general questions[23] were therefore asked about former relationships during the second stage interviews. For the purposes of data analysis and to summarize the interview data concerning former contacts, these former relationships were divided into four key dimensions of former contact:

Parental
Religious Contact/Education (includes school, Sunday school and church)
Family   (includes grandparents and other family)
Friends   (former)

---

[23] See Interview Guide in Appendix III for details about the questions.

Each individual interview was then assessed on each dimension according to whether the former contacts were:

Positive   (encouragement towards religious belief: making the adoption of
              religious beliefs appear attractive, relevant and tenable)
Neutral   (neither encouragement nor discouragement: with neutral outcome)
Negative   (encouragement away from religious belief: making the adoption of
              religious beliefs appear unattractive, irrelevant or untenable)
Positive/
Negative   (a mixture of positive and negative contacts).

Whenever a positive or negative contact occurred (in an account given by an informant) combined with a neutral contact or contacts, the positive or negative was deemed in each case to override the neutral, i.e. only positive or negative was recorded on that particular dimension. These summary measures were then applied to the analysis of the data.

2.6.3 Formulating interview guide items related to belief transmission within networks

Giddens' (1994a, 1994b) discussion of the 'transformation of intimacy' provided another useful tool to use in the construction of the interview guide and to formulate further testable propositions based on the network dependency hypothesis. In pre-modern times, Giddens argues, trust on a personal level was controlled by fixed normative codes rooted in "personalized connections within the local community and kinship networks" (1994a:121). The 'stranger' was always "a 'whole person' - someone who [came] from the outside and who [was] potentially suspect" (ibid.:80). This situation, on the whole, no longer applies in the modern world. Trust among 'strangers' (in the modern sense of the term) is now sustained through strategies such as Goffman's concept of 'civil inattention'.[24] Trust, at a personal level, however, now

---

[24] Goffman, 1963, cited in Giddens, 1994a. 'Civil inattention' is described by Giddens thus: "As two people approach one another, each rapidly scans the face of the other, looking away as they pass ... The glance accords recognition of the other as an agent and as a potential acquaintance. Holding the gaze of the other only briefly, then looking ahead as each passes the other couples such an attitude with an implicit reassurance of lack of hostile intent" (1994a:81).

has to be won. Giddens likens this process to a personal project "to be 'worked at' by the parties involved, and demands the opening out of the individual to the other" (ibid.:121).[25] This need to build trust within personal networks may well be instrumental in the process of belief transmission, particularly where there is interaction between people holding different world views, for example, a secular and a religious world view. In theory one would expect that trust and respect would need to be built between the two parties if there were to be any modification of belief system in either direction. For trust to be established between two individuals, this would suggest a need for high level scores on all, or most, of the measurement scales related to the five dimensions of relational proximity. The combination of 'relational proximity' and the 'transformation of intimacy' can therefore be regarded as a useful tool to be used in the testing of the network dependency hypothesis. The exact details concerning the operationalisation of these concepts will be given in subsequent chapters.

It is also possible that belief transmission within personal networks may be inhibited by the ambivalent nature of trust and the constant possibility that personal ties can be ruptured. The fact that people are able to withdraw both their friendship and approval and to retreat back into the "sphere of impersonal contacts" (ibid.:143) i.e. into the realm of the stranger, creates the need to avoid issues which produce conflict and which threaten to destabilize friendships. This latter point is made by Cottrell (1985), in that the structures and systems of modernity are deemed to sustain a secular cosmology[26] by providing ideal conditions in which such a world view can be held virtually unchallenged by alternative systems of belief:

> Competition requires mobility and free transaction with others and strong ideological commitments restrict negotiation and the building of social

---

[25] Giddens (1994b:88-98) discusses this social development in terms of the 'pure relationship'. There are core elements involved which characterize this type of relationship. The pure relationship includes close friendships as well as more intimate sexual relationships. Unlike in pre-modern times, the pure relationship is 'not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life'; it is 'sought only for what the relationship can bring to the partners involved'; it is 'reflexively organised, in an open fashion, and on a continuous basis'; commitment has a central role to play; it is focused on intimacy, depends upon mutual trust, and is above all, dyadic, i.e. involves two individuals.

[26] Cottrell (1985:10) defines the term 'cosmology' as "a set of moral categories which are used in society to justify particular courses of action in social life".

networks, by emphasising differences between individuals. The absence of strong ideological commitments on the other hand, enables individuals to seek common, neutral ground with others and thereby concentrate on what is of pragmatic significance. Tolerance and democracy require that the facade of consensus is maintained. The examination of ideological differences could cause disagreements to surface and this is discouraged. Hence there is a tendency to live and let live (ibid.:348-349).

Cottrell draws attention to this need to avoid situations of conflict but she does not elaborate upon this or follow up the issue of exactly how religious beliefs, or secular beliefs for that matter, are transmitted, other than raise the question as a point of interest and of possible future research: "The similarity of opinions evidenced [concerning the commonly held religious beliefs of her NCA respondents] raises the interesting question of how these ideas are transmitted . . . there must be an underlying mechanism" (ibid.:167). The need to avoid conflict, in fact, creates a number of possible relational mechanisms pertinent to the transmission of belief systems. Relational mechanisms will be defined herein as mechanisms which involve specific types of social interaction in the context of relations within personal networks. These mechanisms will be related to the testable propositions which are featured in the empirical chapters of this thesis. The interview guide was therefore designed to facilitate discussion of these issues with the informants.

Use of the interview guide discussed above provided the main data to test the network dependency hypothesis. All that remains in this chapter is to outline the method used to obtain an interview sample and to discuss how the interviews were conducted and recorded.

2.7 OBTAINING AN INTERVIEW SAMPLE

From the questionnaire survey 76 respondents (i.e. 11 CAs and 65 NCAs) opted for further interview. There were four notable differences between these 76 respondents and the remaining 213 respondents who did not opt for further interview. First, there was a higher proportion of males opting for further interview (58%) than among those

who declined an interview (45%). Males were therefore generally more keen to be interviewed than females. This may have been due to a possible fear for their own safety as they were being asked to be interviewed by a male researcher, although there is no concrete evidence to support this view. Second, there was a higher proportion of 'professional' respondents (30%) among the potential interviewees than among the remaining 213 respondents (where 23% were self-classified as being in professional occupations). This may have been due to an academic identification with the aims of the current study. Third, among those opting for further interview, a higher proportion of individuals had indicated a religious or spiritual experience on the questionnaire (28% as opposed to 14% among the remaining 213 respondents). It is possible the former were keen to share their experiences in an interview situation. The interview may have been regarded as an ideal opportunity to talk about these experiences. In subsequent chapters the difficulties experienced by informants in terms of finding others willing to listen to such experiences with an open mind rather than subjecting them to ridicule is discussed in more detail. And finally, among those opting for further interview, there was a *slightly* higher proportion of respondents who scored higher on the questions relating to traditional and non-traditional religious belief. This was expected, however, since they were more likely to be interested in discussing the subject of religion with a researcher. Nevertheless, those indicating lower levels of belief, including atheists,[27] were by no means under-represented in the interview sample. Apart from these differences, no other patterns were discernable in the data between these two groups.

It was stated previously that one of the major objectives of the initial questionnaire survey was to obtain a final quota sample of forty informants for further in-depth focussed interviews, consisting of ten CAs and thirty NCAs. It was further stated that the main criterion for the selection of the NCAs was based upon the replies given to questions 15 and 16 on the initial questionnaire. These questions concerned the level of importance respondents attributed to God or to spiritual matters in their lives. The higher score from either scale was used to place the respondents in a belief

---

[27] In fact the proportion of atheists opting for further interview was almost identical to the proportion of atheists who declined an interview.

importance category of high, medium or low.

The selection of the CAs was straightforward as only eleven of the CA respondents opted for further interview. Unfortunately at a later date two of these respondents changed their minds, claiming that they didn't have sufficient time to be interviewed. This left only nine CAs in the final interview sample. Nevertheless, this was still considered to be an adequate number of informants. The indicated level of importance attributed to religious belief *per se* among these CA informants was therefore not a significant factor for the purposes of selection. The involvement of the informants with religious organisations already implied a certain degree of importance by definition. When these informants had been removed from the total number of questionnaire respondents opting for further interview, the following calculations and decisions were made to select the final 30 NCAs from the remaining 65 NCAs in the sample.

The ultimate aim was to select the following 30 NCAs:

* Approximately 10 NCAs scoring 7 - 10 on one of the scales (i.e. a high level of importance).
* Approximately 10 NCAs scoring 4 - 6.
* Approximately 10 NCAs scoring 1 - 3.

These 30 were chosen by first sub-dividing the 65 NCAs by the above score ranges, then by age, and finally by gender, using the proportions in which the respondents were grouped by age in the total questionnaire sample as a general guide to the representativeness of the interview sample. The table shown below gives the final criteria for selection of the interview sample.

Table 2.5   Final criteria used to select interview sample

Age	18 - 25	26 - 34	35 - 44	45+	Totals
Score					
7 - 10	(1) 1 male x 1 (1M)	(5) 2 male 3 female x 3 (1M, 2F)	(7) 3 male 4 female x 3 (1M, 2F)	(6) 5 male 1 female x 3 (2M, 1F)	(19) 29% (10) 33%
4 - 6	(2) 1 male 1 female x 2 (1M, 1F)	(7) 3 male 4 female x 3 (1M, 2F)	(3) 2 male 1 female x 2 (1M, 1F)	(1) 1 female x 1 (1F)	(13) 20% (8) 27%
1 - 3	(4) 3 male 1 female x 2 (1M, 1F)	(15) 7 male 8 female x 4 (2M, 2F)	(9) 9 male x 3 (3M)	(5) 3 male 2 female x 3 (2M, 1F)	(33) 51% (12) 40%

The numbers appearing in bold type represent the final numbers of male and female respondents selected for further interview. The final task was to decide upon which particular males and females were to be selected from the original 65 respondents located within the cells of the above table. The following table summarizes the selection criteria.

Table 2.6 Final criteria for selection of interviewees

Importance Score Range	Selection Criteria
7 - 10	a) Select highest scores. b) Maintain balance of equal numbers of 'yes' and 'no' responses on 'home belief' variable.[28]
4 - 6	a) Select median score, i.e. 5, if possible. b) Maintain balance of equal numbers of 'yes' and 'no' responses on 'home belief' variable.
1 - 3	a) Select extreme low scores. b) Maintain balance of equal numbers of 'yes' and 'no' responses on 'home belief' variable. c) Maintain balance of equal numbers of 'yes' and 'no' responses on 'religious experience' variable.

With all score ranges, field notes made on potential interviewees were used as the final arbiter if it became absolutely necessary. This selection process was carried out on all 65 of the NCAs who were willing to be interviewed further. The final interview sample therefore consisted of:

9	CAs
10	High belief importance level informants
8	Medium belief importance level informants
12	Low belief importance level informants

Apart from the CAs, the totals achieved were as required for the NCAs (given in Table 2.5).

---

[28] Clearly, it was desirable to find out about informants with different types of religious or non-religious backgrounds leading to similar belief importance levels in later life, hence an equal balance was required of 'yes' and 'no' responses on this variable.

2.8 CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the informants' homes at various times of the day whenever it was convenient for the informants to be interviewed. The majority of the interviews were concluded after 80 or 90 minutes,[29] with one exception of 45 minutes (this particular informant did not have very much to say). Bucher, Fritz and Quarantelli reach the following conclusion about the tape recording of interviews:

> It is clear that the tape recorder provides a potentially valuable instrument for field research in the social and psychological sciences. Tape recorded interviews offer many compelling advantages over written or memory reconstructed interviews (1956:364).

Hence the use of a tape recorder for the current study. No informant objected to the use of a tape recorder as they were all assured the tapes would only be used for the purposes of the research. Lapel microphones were found to be most effective as the tapes were then able to detect the slightest sounds even if the informants were quietly spoken. The clarity of the tapes facilitated easier and more accurate transcription of the interview data.

Whilst the interview has been described as "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury" (McCracken, 1988:9), the use of the interview as a social research method is not without its problems. For example, the researcher needs to be aware of the possibility of interviewer bias and the problem of informants only saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Fielding, 1993). At the outset, care was taken to explain the purpose of the interview to the individual informants. It was emphasized that there were no expectations concerning 'right' or 'wrong' answers. They were simply being asked about their own perspectives on all the issues raised in the interviews. The 'neutral' position of the researcher was aided by non-disclosure of the researcher's personal beliefs, so as to avoid 'contamination' of the data.

---

[29] See note in Appendix III for explanation of why the interviews did not take longer to conduct.

Nevertheless, willingness was shown, if necessary, to be more open about these personally held views after the interview was concluded. Moreover, it was made very clear at the beginning of each interview - as well as in the letter of introduction on the questionnaire - that there was no connection whatsoever between the current research and any religious organisation. The following comment by an informant at the end of one of the interviews provides reassurance that the researcher maintained a neutral stance throughout the interviews:

> Do you know what's really interesting ... I would swear you're agreeing with everything I say but no doubt yesterday you spoke to somebody with exactly the opposite views. You're a very good interviewer. You didn't look surprised or shocked or even disagree at any time.[30]

This particular informant was herself a professional interviewer and broadcaster which makes the comment even more valuable.

To reduce further the potential problem of interviewer effects, classic studies have shown a need to link interviewers with the study population - particularly by age, race and social class (Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Gilbert, 1993). This presented no real difficulty as the researcher's own age was close to the average age of the informants in this study. The problem of race hardly entered the equation at all. The 'middle class' study population also presented no problem in terms of establishing a genial rapport with informants who were very much supportive of the academic aims of the study. During the pilot study it was noted that those returning the questionnaires were dressed casually but were nevertheless very smart in their appearance. A similar attire was worn by the researcher during the course of the research. The need for a balance between formality and informality in the researcher's presentation of self is emphasised by McCracken:

> A certain formality in dress, demeanor, and speech is useful because it helps the respondent cast the investigator in the role of a 'scientist', someone who asks very personal questions out of not personal but professional curiosity.

---

[30] No reference number is given at all here, to maintain the anonymity of the informant.

110

This formality also helps to reassure the respondent that the investigator can be trusted to maintain the confidentiality which has been promised the respondent. A certain, balanced, informality is useful because it reassures the respondent that for all of his or her professional training, the investigator is not a cold, distant creature unacquainted with or indifferent to the complexities and difficulties of the respondent's lifeworld (1988:26).

Prior to each interview, the first ten minutes or so were used to talk to the informants in a very informal manner to put them at their ease (ibid.:38). All of the interviews were relaxed and enjoyable. No informant appeared to be reluctant to discuss any of the items on the interview guide.

There is, however, the possibility that what people say in an interview and what they do in practice may not always be consistent. There was no particular reason to doubt that the informants were telling the truth in these interviews but in order to offset this possibility each of the informants were cross-examined about their responses throughout the interviews. The internal consistency of the interviews was also assessed in each case. In terms of the informants' accounts of their network relationships, there was no other way of checking the information given about that which had transpired within their personal network relationships. Given the time constraints of the current research and the difficulties of access to the informants' networks, participant observation would have been impractical in the collection of data for this study. Moreover, much of the information required of the informants was about that which had already taken place in their lives in the form of life history accounts. Finally, by definition, ego-centred network analysis concerns the analysis of networks as perceived by the informants, so ultimately the views of the informants themselves were paramount in this study.

Fieldnotes were written immediately after each interview. These included descriptions of each informant's appearance, a summary of key points raised in the interview, and general impressions about the entire time spent with each informant. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim. The data were finally transferred to NUD.IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing) - a computer system designed for the analysis of qualitative data. This particular computer program

assigns text unit numbers to the data automatically using pre-selected text units defined by the researcher. Sentences were chosen as the appropriate text units for the current study. These text units were then indexed under various headings which facilitated easier and more efficient retrieval of appropriate data when conducting the analysis.[31] Finally, again for the purposes of analysis, the main points from each interview were summarized by completing summary sheets for each informant. These gave an overview of each interview at a glance.

In conclusion, this chapter has given a detailed account of the empirical research methods employed in the current study. It has also given various definitions of concepts used throughout this thesis. It would be useful to gather together these definitions at this juncture:

Definition of the words: 'religion' 'religiosity' and 'religious':

> Religion ... consists of beliefs, actions, and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose (Bruce, 1995a:ix).

Definition common to the following words and phrases: 'unbelief', 'non-belief' and 'secular belief':

> A lack of acceptance of 'religious belief' as defined by Bruce (above) with varying degrees of opposition or cognitive closure towards religious belief.

Definition of an ego-centred network:

> An ego-centred, or *local*, network consists of a focal person or respondent (ego), a set of alters who have ties to ego, and measurements on the ties from ego to alters and on the ties between alters (Wasserman and Faust, 1994:53).

---

[31] See discussion of literary theory and the importance of context in Appendix IV.

Definition of a relational mechanism:

> Mechanisms which involve specific types of social interaction in the context of relations within personal networks.

Most of the data analysis which follows is based on the information given in the interviews. This is essentially a qualitative study to develop and test the social network theory advanced in this thesis by testing a number of propositions based on the network dependency hypothesis. But where possible and where applicable, the empirical chapters commence with a brief reference to the stage one survey data which gives some insight and indication, at a less focused level, of the issues under discussion. Most of the general information about the beliefs and other details of those living at Grange Park will be given in the following chapter which paints a portrait of this area in southern Britain and places the empirical study in context.

CHAPTER THREE
GRANGE PARK: "A DORMITORY VILLAGE"

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to test the social network theory advanced in this thesis, the empirical study first needs to be placed in its geographic, historic and demographic context. This chapter provides a portrait of Grange Park, the area selected for the current study, by first briefly discussing the history and geography of the area. General impressions of Grange Park are then considered from the perspective of the Stage One survey respondents (from whom the title of this chapter was derived) and from the perspective of the researcher. This is followed by an overview of the beliefs, attitudes and values held by the residents living in this area, based upon the results of the questionnaire survey. The results of the survey are compared to the results of the EVS surveys from 1981 and 1990 to ascertain if the views of the residents at Grange Park differ from the rest of Britain to any significant extent. The information given in this chapter will thus provide a foundation for the more focused analysis of the respondents' social networks in relation to their beliefs, which follows in subsequent chapters.

3.2 THE HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AREA

Grange Park is a relatively new private housing development which, at the time of the study, covered an area of approximately one square mile.[1] The current estate was built on a 'green field' site which was formerly farmland. All homes within this area were built within the last 10 - 15 years by major developers such as Bovis, Barratt and Wimpey. They vary in price between approximately £80,000 - £275,000; hence there

---

[1] Further building was in progress when the survey was conducted.

was a need for systematic random sampling to cover all types of property (generally located according to street). These homes are typical of many others situated on similar housing developments throughout the country. The estate is well laid-out and landscaped with an interesting mix of architectural styles as well as a range of sizes of homes. Grange Park is situated in a pleasant suburban area on the eastern edge of Southampton.

The city of Southampton is located in a central position on the south coast of England. It is a thriving container port and the cruise liner capital of the world, with a population of approximately 230,000. Southampton has a rich and varied heritage. This is the city from where Henry V sailed for Agincourt, the Pilgrim Fathers originally sailed for America, and the ill-fated Titanic sailed on its maiden voyage. In more recent times the strategic importance of the city has been highlighted by the release of highly sensitive British government intelligence reports produced during the period of the Cold War. These reports revealed that Southampton was a key target for the Soviet Union in the late 1960s. A three-megaton device was earmarked for the city due to its immense importance as a centre of trade and commerce, forming a vital link between the country and the rest of the world. Southampton is still a major hub of communication with links by land, sea and air. Manufacturing and electricity generation are highly important to the city and Fawley Oil Refinery makes a major contribution to the industrial life of the country. The city continues to expand, with vast new schemes for shopping, housing and industry. Ocean Village Marina is one example of redevelopment in the city which now forms a major attraction. Southampton is the main regional centre for the Arts and hosts a number of special events which are the envy of other cities. These include the annual Southampton International Boat Festival and the award-winning Balloon Festival which attracts crowds of 150,000 each year. Southampton's glorious parks and commons make it one of the greenest cities in Britain.

Grange Park itself has excellent communications. It is situated close to junction seven of the M27 and is within easy reach of Southampton Airport. Direct railway links to London and Portsmouth are within easy walking distance. In one sense, Grange Park

seems to have been purpose built for convenience. Whilst it is close to the motorway it is sufficiently far from it not to be disturbed by traffic noise. A number of superstores are located within a few hundred yards of the housing development. The residents of Grange Park are therefore provided with all they need in the material sense. The questionnaire survey sought to find out if they have any interest in spiritual matters.

3.3 GENERAL IMPRESSIONS OF GRANGE PARK

It was discovered, during the first stage of the research, that people living at Grange Park had moved to this area from all parts of the country. In fact, these residents appear to be a highly mobile population. Fifty six of the 500 residents selected from the Electoral Register for the survey had moved away since the compiling of the register. And even those who currently live at Grange Park tend to travel away from the area to work, with many working in London or Portsmouth. Chris Hansford succinctly captured the essence of the area when he commented: "Grange Park is a dormitory village - people just come back to sleep here and then go off to work again. There is no sense of community here" (M26S14/FN). Certainly the estate was very quiet in the daytime; hence most interviews were conducted during the evening. It was very noticeable how the area suddenly became inhabited from about 6.00pm onwards. This impression of there being no sense of community in Grange Park was considered to be an important factor in terms of the aims of the current study, i.e. to find out about how people acquire and maintain their religious or secular beliefs in the absence of traditional communities. It is unlikely, however, that *all* areas of the country are characterized by such a fluid population. Grange Park may only be typical of similar recent housing developments with a high turnover of properties. It is likely this may place *some* limit on the extent to which the results of the study may be generalizable.

The second stage of the research revealed that there was very little social interaction between the informants and their immediate neighbours. The majority of the

informants did not know their neighbours although there were one or two exceptions concerning informants with children. It was the children who were the main catalyst in bringing together neighbouring families as the children tended to play together in the streets. One other exception was that of Nigel Grantham-Wright, a semi-retired business executive, who had formed a relationship with five neighbours living in a rather select and private close formed by some of the most expensive properties in Grange Park. Nigel remarked:

> We have neighbours who we're friendly with ... We're fairly close as neighbours go these days. We have something in common being in the same back yard almost. We confide in anybody don't we - we come from Nottinghamshire. (L45M9/61)

It was thus partly due to the location and type of home, and to the social background of this informant, that these neighbourly relations had developed. It must be emphasized, however, that this was exceptional in terms of the area as a whole.

Grange Park gives the impression of being a very safe place to live, day or night. It seems unlikely to attract vandalism. In fact one could describe it as having a touch of 'class'. John Greaves, living in one of the smaller properties, admitted to having come from a 'working class' background but had now become a Conservative voter. He said: "I'm not being a snob but this is a very middle class area and people are quite well-off around here" (M35M29/FN). He was in his mid-thirties, married, with one child, and seemed to be fairly ambitious. Upwardly mobile would be an apt description of this informant.

Most of the residents took a distinct pride in their homes. During the collection of the postal questionnaires, one of the respondents invited this researcher into his home and appeared strategically to place himself in front of his rather grand fireplace prior to handing over the questionnaire. This seemed to be a totally unnecessary action, but one feasible explanation is that it was carried out with the intent to impress. This action was rather reminiscent, on a far smaller scale, of the pose adopted by the landed gentry in front of their properties in Renaissance paintings. These personal

portraits were commissioned to emphasize the social status of their owners. In one sense, this particular respondent appeared to be making a non-verbal statement about his social status. His home thus became an extension of his personality. After meeting the respondents, this researcher was in no doubt that many of them felt their self-image was enhanced by living in this area.

Pleasant country walks can be accessed from Grange Park. This was regarded as a valuable amenity by those who desired to meditate on spiritual matters. Michael Hayward, a deeply religious NCA, was one such informant who took advantage of this aspect of the locality. When discussing the subject of religious experience he related the following:

> Well I've had quite a few [religious experiences]. As I walk through the woods around this area, I do get these rays of light come through and I think it's God giving me what I want in my heart, peace, you know, because we all want peace don't we. And I keep getting these rays of light coming through. It's so strange. (H45M25/160)

Given the location of the housing development at the edge of the city, one does not have to walk very far to be in the countryside, and, from the above comment, the area is conducive to religious inspiration for those so inclined. Grange Park is also extremely well served by the availability of churches. St. Luke's Church of England (evangelical) was purpose-built for the Grange Park estate. At least three of the informants were current members of St. Luke's. A whole range of other churches are located within easy walking distance of the estate. These include the following denominations: Church of England (traditional), Roman Catholic, Community Church, Salvation Army, Methodist, United Reformed, and Brethren. To gain further knowledge of the beliefs, attitudes and values generally held by those living at Grange Park we need to turn our attention to the overall results of the Stage One questionnaire survey.

3.4 THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

The raw statistical data for responses to the questions featured in the initial questionnaire are given in Appendix II. The following discussion provides a summary of these data - i.e. in terms of the achieved sample of 289 (N = 100%) - and forms a background picture to the analysis of the informants' networks and beliefs.

Some of the general demographic data have already been discussed in relation to the 1991 Census data for Grange Park. It is important, for example, to take into account that the area tends to attract people in the 26 - 34 age range.[2] Only 2% of respondents were over the age of 64. Grange Park is therefore characterised by a fairly young population with 79% of the sample under the age of 45. The fairly even distribution for gender was also mentioned in the previous chapter together with the fact that the area is predominantly 'white' in terms of the ethnic origin of the residents. In parenthesis, it is also worth pointing out that families with children in this area are only just beginning to appear. The 1991 Census[3] records a total of 2,975 households for the area, just over two thirds of which had no dependent children, i.e. these households just consisted of 1057 couples (62 were the same sex), singles (298 male, 366 female) or three or more people living at the same address (299 households). The other third of households included 335 households with one child under sixteen years of age and 277 households with at least two children under sixteen years of age. These statistics cannot be directly compared to the Grange Park survey as a question was not asked about numbers of children in families during Stage One of the research. The figures have been included here, however, to give a clearer picture of the proportion of families with children in the Grange Park area.

The original intention was to obtain a sample of 'middle class' individuals from the general population. This has, on the whole, been achieved. The pie chart which

---

[2] See Table 2.3 on page 73 for the age frequency figures, and the discussion on page 74.

[3] Chapter Two (page 74) noted that the 1991 Census covered a slightly larger area than that covered by the survey. The census records 5,712 residents over the age of eighteen whereas only 3,002 residents over the age of eighteen were included in the survey.

follows clearly shows that respondents were predominantly either in managerial or professional occupations.

Figure 3.1   **(N = 289)**

OCCUPATIONS OF RESPONDENTS

Other 12%

Manual worker 6%

Supervisor 4%

Junior level
office 4%

Employer /
Manager 23%

Middle level
office 21%

Self-employed 5%

Professional 25%
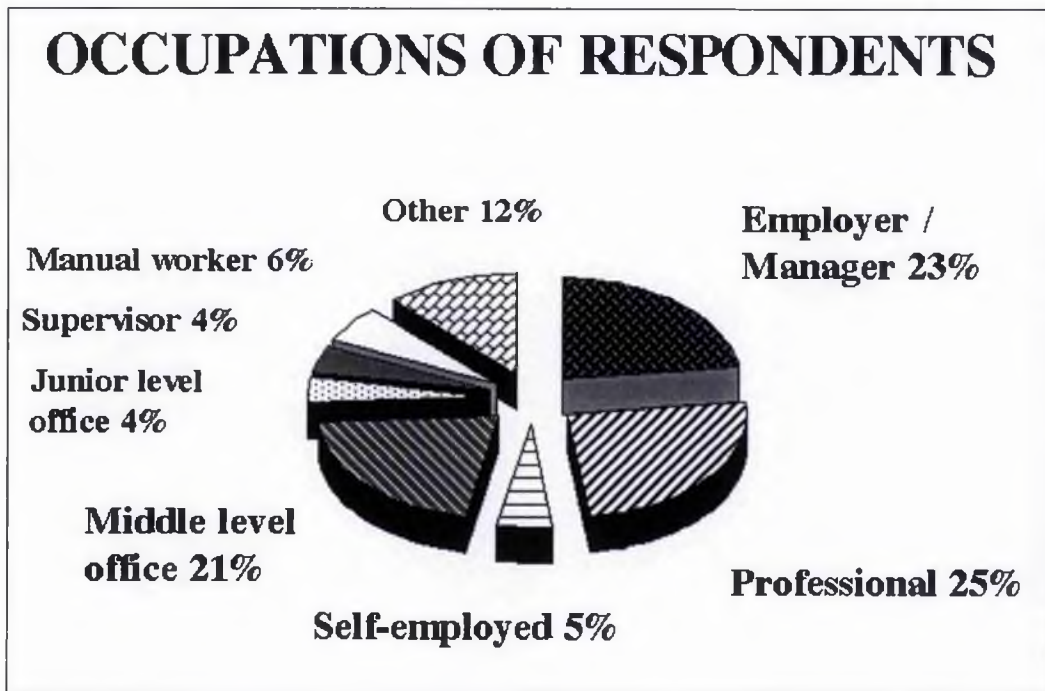
Only 6% of the respondents were involved in manual work. Moreover, 96% of the respondents in the sample were owner occupiers.

In terms of the general *values* (rather than beliefs) held by the respondents, traditional values appeared to be popular in Grange Park. In particular, the institution of marriage was held in high regard. Among those in the sample, 69% were married and only 15% of the couples were living as married. Furthermore, in response to the statement: "The marriage service should replace the words: 'till death us do part' with 'as long as our love shall last'" 51% of the respondents disagreed with the statement whilst 37% agreed. Of the 51% who disagreed, 77% were married, which arguably demonstrates their intention, at least, to keep their marriage vows even if their love for one another wanes in the future. It is possible, of course, that one reason for the low divorce figure (4%) was due to the young age cohort to which most of the

respondents belonged. A different picture might emerge if the survey were repeated in fifteen years time, with exactly the same people, to re-examine the divorce figures. Only 9% of the respondents were single.

The previous chapter drew attention to the fact that the first stage questionnaire was designed primarily to provide enough information about the beliefs held by the respondents to facilitate the selection of forty informants for further in-depth focussed interviews. Only one of the questionnaire items was therefore related to the networks of the informants, namely, the question which asked about previous religious upbringing. Useful questions on networks could not be asked on the questionnaire due to the complexity of the network analysis which follows and due to the sheer lack of space for such items on the questionnaire. It will be recalled that the questionnaire was kept as brief as possible to enhance the response rate. The question about religious upbringing will not, however, be discussed in this chapter. Rather, it will be crosstabulated with other questions and discussed further in Chapter Four. There are only two other issues to be discussed in the present chapter which are pertinent to the overall aims of the current research project. These are a) briefly to summarize the general beliefs held by people living in this area, and b) to ascertain if the beliefs held by the residents of Grange Park differ from those of the rest of Britain to any great extent. For the purposes of providing background information for network analysis, it would be of some interest to establish whether or not the general views held by the residents were typical of those held by people living elsewhere in the country. Attention will therefore now be focussed on the religious and secular beliefs held by those included in the general sample of 289 respondents. References will be made to the EVS surveys for 1981 and 1990 in Great Britain[4] where applicable.

---

[4] The European Values System Study Group has carried out two surveys (1981, 1990) "initially with data collection in most of the member countries of the European Community, but subsequently spreading to a number of other countries, including the United States" (Procter, 1993:261). The work has been described as the: "most comprehensive and up to date international study of beliefs and values" (Thompson, 1988:228). These surveys have included a range of questions on attitudes and values, including a section on religious belief and practice. The European Value Systems survey for 1981 included a sample of the British population consisting of 1,231 respondents. When the survey was repeated in 1990 it included a British population sample size of 1,484 respondents. "A further restudy is planned for the turn of the century" (Davie, 1994:27)

3.4.1 Summary of beliefs held by people living at Grange Park and a comparison with the EVS surveys

There are two aspects of the data in particular which cannot be compared to the EVS surveys. First, respondents from the Grange Park survey who opted for further interview needed to be divided by belief importance category for interview selection purposes. The following table shows the overall results when the entire survey was divided by belief importance category:

Table 3.1 Total sample divided by belief importance category

Importance categories	Total no. of respondents	Total no. of CAs	Total no. Male	Total no. Female
High (7-10)	74 (26%)	27 (10%)	32 (23%)	42 (29%)
Medium (4-6)	73 (25%)	3 (1%)	29 (21%)	44 (30%)
Low (1-3)	140 (49%)	4 (1%)	79 (56%)	61 (41%)
Totals	287 (100%)	34 (12%)	140 (100%)	147 (100%)

(2 Missing Cases)

Just under half the sample were in the low importance category. Nevertheless, just over half of the sample were in the medium and high importance categories and of these, 80% (117 respondents) were NCAs. Church attendance (among the respondents from the entire sample) is certainly not an adequate predictor either of the importance of God to the respondent (where the value of lambda is only .06)[5] or of the

---

[5] The lambda statistic was used on certain crosstabulations where it was necessary to ascertain how much help the independent variable was in each crosstabulation for predicting the dependent variable. The lambda statistic is called a proportional reduction in error measure because it indicates the percentage by which it is possible to reduce the error in predicting the dependent variable if the independent variable is known. If the value of lambda is one, perfect prediction is possible and the result is a 100% reduction in error. In this example, the lambda statistic is only .06. There is, therefore, only a 6% reduction of error in predicting the importance of God to the respondents, when church attendance is used as the independent variable. In other words, knowing whether or not a person attended church does not help in predicting whether God was considered to be important to these respondents in the current study.

importance of spiritual matters to the respondent (where the value of lambda is only .04). Religious or spiritual matters were therefore considered to be of personal significance to a high proportion of residents living in Grange Park who were not involved with religious organisations. This may constitute evidence of 'believing without belonging' (e.g. Davie, 1990a, 1990b, 1994, 1997a, 1997b) among this young, upwardly mobile population living at Grange Park. The Stage Two interviews gave much more insight into this issue, particularly in terms of how these beliefs were acquired and maintained. This is therefore discussed in more detail in the empirical chapters which follow.[6]

Overall, the results indicate that the women were somewhat more religious than the men. Moreover, if the belief importance score is known, it is a small but significant predictor of gender (the value of lambda is 0.2). Bearing in mind the total sample was divided: Male 48%, Female 52%, there were more women than men who regarded 'God' or 'spiritual matters' to be of medium or high importance to them. Conversely, there were more men than women with low scores. Given the findings of previous studies related to the issue of gender,[7] the above results were expected.

The second aspect of the data mentioned above which cannot be compared directly to the EVS surveys concerns the modified EVS question in which the respondents were asked to describe themselves with regard to their beliefs. In the current study they were given a number of options including an open category and *could tick more than one description if they so desired*. The following results were obtained:

---

[6] See Chapter Nine for an overall assessment of whether these results indicate beliefs beyond a mere nominal assent to the Christian religion or beyond residual or 'customary' beliefs (Hornsby-Smith, *et al*, 1985).

[7] Davie (1994:118) comments that: "gender almost always appear[s] as a significant variable, often the most significant, with respect to quantitative issues (how many individuals do or do not practice, do or do not believe)", and she proceeds further: "it is equally true that the nature - a more qualitative measure - of women's beliefs is different from that of their male counterparts. All such differences hold throughout the age range".

Table 3.2 Self-description of beliefs

Self-Description (N = 289)	Total % *	N = 140 (48%) Male %	N = 149 (52%) Female %
A believer in God	49	42	56
A believer in the supernatural	29	29	28
A Christian	39	37	42
A religious person	7	9	5
A convinced atheist	9	12	6
Unsure	28	29	27

* Multiple responses were possible on this question; hence, in each cell, the total percentages are given for the response to each item, for the 289 respondents.

Clearly, one half of the sample described themselves as believers in God. Very few described themselves as a convinced atheist. Furthermore, Table 3.2 shows that the respondents were reluctant to select the 'religious person' option to describe themselves, which confirms the wisdom of having avoided the words: 'religion' or 'religious' as much as possible in the questionnaire. These words seem to have a negative connotation. From this question it is clear that respondents did not necessarily equate belief in God with being 'a religious person'. It is rather puzzling that a higher percentage of men (9%) than women (5%) described themselves as a religious person, given that women "are almost always more religious than men" (Davie, 1994:117). However, more women than men used the self-description of a 'believer in God' and/or a 'Christian' and more men than women described themselves as a 'convinced atheist'. It is possible, therefore, that the label of 'religious person' may have been perceived to signify a rather more superficial faith (also see Appendix V, Question 2). Hence this could be one possible reason why fewer women chose to use this description.

In addition to this question about self-description, 18% of the respondents (16% of the men and 19% of the women) claimed to have had a 'religious' or 'spiritual' experience, of whom 67% were NCAs. Such claims were followed up with some of

the informants in the focussed Stage Two interviews.[8] This minimal amount of information from the latter two questions would, again, appear to give some degree of support for the thesis of 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994). But when indicators of *traditional* religious belief and practice from the current study are compared with the same indicators from the EVS surveys, *traditional* religion appears, at least on a surface level, to be in jeopardy. This forms the subject matter of the remaining paragraphs in this chapter.

Chapter One discussed the subject of traditional church attendance in relation to personal network relationships at some length. Traditional church attendance among the entire sample from Grange Park therefore constitutes important background information for the network analysis aspect of the current study. In Grange Park, 12% of the respondents claimed to be active CAs and 13% claimed to attend church at least once a month. The majority of these respondents were Church of England. A further 33% of respondents indicated they had been former CAs, again, mostly Church of England, the majority of whom stopped attending church over five years ago.

When compared with the EVS figures for Great Britain for 'attendance at least once a month' (i.e. 1981: 23%, 1990: 25%) church attendance was comparatively low among those living at Grange Park. It was suspected initially that one reason for the differences in the figures may have resided in the negatively skewed distribution of the age variable in the Grange Park survey. This was due to the age distribution in the general population in this area, the accuracy of which was confirmed by checking the sample data against the data for the 1991 Census. The value for skewness is .365 for the age variable, which is fairly significant. The majority of the respondents were quite young, i.e. 79% were under the age of 44. It is well known that traditional religious beliefs are higher among the older age cohorts. Davie (1994:121) states that: "Older people have always been more religious than the young". Thus, in order to compare these statistics (as well as other statistics from the Grange Park survey) with the EVS data, the age variable needs to be taken into account. Hence, the following

---

[8] This is discussed in Chapter Six.

figures from the Grange Park survey and the EVS surveys only include the responses of those aged between 18 - 44. When the statistics are modified in this manner, the figures for church attendance 'at least once a month' are, for the EVS Great Britain surveys: 1981: 20% and 1990: 18% compared with a mere 10% for the Grange Park sample. So, when the age variable is taken into account, church attendance in Grange Park is seen to be lower in comparison to the national average.

This may have been due, in part, to the extremely poor opinion most respondents held concerning the effectiveness of the traditional Church. Only 8% of the total sample (across all age groups) thought the Church was providing adequate answers to the moral problems and needs of the individual. Again, only 8% of the respondents thought the Church was providing adequate answers to the problems of family life. A mere 5% of the respondents thought the Church had any adequate answers to the problems of social life. A higher percentage did think the Church had answers to people's spiritual needs, although these respondents only amounted to 25% of the sample. Some of these responses were even lower for those under the age of 45. The following table compares the Grange Park statistics related to this question with the EVS surveys, but only includes respondents between the ages of 18 - 44 for all the surveys:

Table 3.3   Percentages of respondents, aged 18 - 44, indicating 'yes' to EVS questions 341-344

The Church is giving adequate answers to:	EVS 1981 (N = 550 - 568)	EVS 1990 (N = 585 - 618)	GRANGE PARK SURVEY 1996 (N = 228)
Moral problems	31	30	7
Family life	35	31	8
Spiritual needs	53	63	27
Social problems	N/A	25	4

Even with the adjustment of figures in the Grange Park survey to take into account the age variable, the differences in the percentage figures are striking. Sampling error in the Grange Park sample is highly unlikely to account for such huge differences in the figures. The Grange Park sample was of a reasonable size, thus reducing the standard error to an acceptably low level.[9] In fact, the statistics of most randomly selected samples will be close to the population parameters (de Vaus, 1991:61). It is therefore reasonably safe to conclude that the residents of Grange Park have a much lower view of the Church than is held on average throughout the country among this age range. It is important to add that these negative views of the Church were even shared by most of the CAs in the sample. Harding and Phillips (1986:43) have observed that, for the 1981 EVS survey, Church attendance was an important predictor for attitudes towards the Church. Of those attending Church regularly, "favourable attitudes towards the Church's role" prevailed. This is not so evident in the current study and certainly does *not* apply to all attitudinal questions on this subject. It only applies, very weakly indeed, to the part of the question which refers to people's spiritual needs, where the lambda statistic is .08 with Church attendance as the independent variable.[10] For all other crosstabulations on other sections of this EVS question, the value of lambda is zero with Church attendance as the independent variable. This indicates that Church attendance among the Grange Park respondents is not a predictor of the other attitudes towards the Church.

Prior to a brief discussion of possible reasons why such attitudes prevail in Grange Park, it would be useful to consider one more table of results which refer to traditional belief questionnaire items. Responses to *some* of these questions show a similar variation when compared with the figures given for the EVS surveys.

---

[9] The precision of estimates of population parameters is indicated by the standard error (Arber, 1993:78).

[10] In other words there is only an 8% reduction of error in predicting attitudes towards the Church if church attendance is used as the independent variable. Many of the CAs as well as NCAs therefore held negative views of the Church.

Table 3.4 Percentages of respondents, aged 18 - 44, indicating 'yes' to traditional belief questionnaire items

TRADITIONAL BELIEF QUESTIONS	EVS 1981	EVS 1990	GRANGE PARK 1996
9. Which, if any, of the following do you believe in?	(N = 623 - 702)	(N = 618 - 696)	(N = 228)
a) God	75	70	53
b) Life after death	56	47	46
c) A soul	64	67	43
d) The Devil	34	31	14
e) Hell	29	28	17
f) Heaven	56	53	37
g) Sin	70	69	22
h) Resurrection from the dead	n/a	31	14
i) Re-incarnation	31	30	19
10. Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?	(N = 732)	(N = 730)	(N = 228)
a) There is a personal God	27	26	25
b) There is some sort of spirit or life force	40	44	42
c) I don't really know what to think	22	17	22
d) I don't really think there is any sort of spirit, God or life force	11	13	11
Total	100	100	100
16. How important is God in your life?	(N = 747)	(N = 730)	(N = 228)
Not at all	20	22	33
2	9	9	15
3	11	13	11
4	8	10	8
5	15	15	12
6	9	8	2
7	7	8	8
8	7	5	7
9	4	2	1
Very	10	8	4
Total	100	100	100

'Question 10', concerning the nature of God, is the only question in Table 3.4 which shows a similarity across the EVS and Grange Park surveys. Apart from that question, in comparison with the EVS surveys, it is evident that fewer people in Grange Park regard God to be important in their lives. Moreover, the Grange Park percentages were systematically lower for all questions on traditional doctrinal orthodoxy, with the exception of the question about 'life after death' where there was only a 1% difference between the Grange Park survey and the EVS 1990 survey. A belief in life after death does not, however, necessarily require a traditional religious framework. The beliefs which have originated, for certain, within a traditional Christian framework, such as belief in hell, the Devil, and resurrection from the dead, scored particularly low percentages among the Grange Park respondents. Traditional religion in Grange Park, therefore, certainly appears to be less popular than in the country as a whole.

There may be a number of reasons which might account for this phenomenon. Could this be evidence of secularization, manifesting itself as a rapid decline of traditional religious belief since 1990? If this were merely a generational effect one would not expect to see such a dramatic decline in traditional religious belief for the Grange Park area - unless, of course, a rapid decline did in fact occur in traditional religious belief among the young between 1990 and 1996, the chances of which are somewhat remote. Having said this, the Church received a rather bad press during this period. A negative media image of organised religion might help to explain, to some extent, why the Grange Park respondents held low opinions of the Church. But this is not likely to account for the striking differences between the surveys in terms of responses to questions about traditional religious orthodoxy. A rapid decline of traditional religious belief within such a short time period is certainly unprecedented in terms of past statistical records, which places in doubt a simple explanation of secularization.

It was pointed out earlier in this chapter that Grange Park has been described as a 'dormitory village' where there is little sense of local community. A number of objections to the 'loss of community' thesis (Wilson, 1976, 1982) were raised, however, in Chapter One. It was argued that there is no necessary connection between

religion and local community (Beckford, 1989:110), that the world has not become more impersonal (Allan, 1996) and that 'community' still exists in the form of dispersed social networks (Crow and Allan, 1994:182). We still have close kinship and friendship relationships, but they are now spread more widely geographically. Weaknesses were also identified in Roof's (1978) localism thesis in the light of Lehman's (1986, 1990) multidimensional theory - subsequently confirmed by Eisinga, *et al.* (1990, 1991) - which argues that cultural localism is more predictive of religious belief and practice than social localism. Again, shortcomings to the urbanism thesis of Fischer (1982) were identified in Chapter One, with regard to the need to identify the beliefs and values held by kin[11] and also with regard to the fact that urbanism need not inevitably lead to the undermining of traditional religious beliefs.[12] These theories which might have been applied to the ostensible lack of community in Grange Park are therefore somewhat inadequate. Hence the emphasis, in Chapter One, was rather placed upon *the damage which modernity has inflicted upon network links between the churched and the unchurched and upon network mechanisms which further inhibit the transmission of traditional religious belief*. But before proceeding to the chapters of the thesis which analyse the empirical data further from a network perspective, it is important to consider other possible explanations for the differences between the Grange Park and EVS surveys.

Chapter Four explains the significance of early socialization in the lives of the Stage Two informants, since it was found (and reported in Chapter Five) that the majority of the informants were currently engaged in maintaining beliefs formulated during early childhood and adolescence. It is unlikely, however, that the actual geographical location of Grange Park had any influence on the early formulation of the respondents' beliefs. Most of the respondents were relatively new to the area having moved to Grange Park from all over the country.[13] Grange Park did not, therefore,

---

[11] See pages 11-14 for more details.

[12] Examples of thriving urban religiosity were given on page 14 of the current thesis.

[13] This information was gained through casual conversation with the Stage Two informants. In retrospect, it would have been useful to have included questions in the interview guide about where the informants had spent their earlier years, prior to their move to Grange Park.

form the location in which their initial religious or secular beliefs were formed.

One of the Stage Two informants, Caroline Abrahams, seemed to imply that the area attracts young people who are very progressive in their attitudes:

> That's why I was interested when you said 'Grange Park' because I think the people of Grange Park are new people. They're people who perhaps don't have traditional ideas that have come from black and white ... you know. (L45L6/400)

This may be related to their social class. It has already been shown that the Grange Park sample was drawn from a fairly 'middle class' population, in contrast to the EVS surveys which claim to represent the entire population. The Grange Park sample consists predominantly of young, ambitious, self-reliant, educated and highly mobile individuals pursuing various careers[14] which, in many cases, necessitate periodic housing moves.[15] Furthermore, Davie (1994:107) refers to the negative effect that higher levels of education generally have on traditional religious belief.[16]

The factors discussed above may, to some extent, help to explain the differences found in the Grange Park survey. However, as argued above, the most accurate method of obtaining an answer to this question of difference would be to pursue a line of enquiry which examines, wherever applicable, how the chain of traditional religious 'memory' (Hervieu-Léger, 1993, 1994) has been formed, maintained or has in many instances been broken (or which may be on the verge of being severed) among those living at Grange Park. As stated in Chapter One, socialisation theory and network analysis would be most appropriate for exploring this matter.

But religious belief in Grange Park has not completely disappeared, despite the many negative responses to traditional religious questionnaire items. Less traditional survey

---

[14] The effects of the professional working environment on traditional religious belief for those pursuing 'middle-class' careers is explored in Chapter Six.

[15] See Chapters Seven and Nine for a discussion of the effects of social mobility on traditional religious belief.

[16] This is discussed further in Chapter Nine.

questions, such as those about the meaning and purpose of life, prayer and meditation, and whether the respondents derived comfort and strength from their beliefs, produced percentage figures which were much closer between all the surveys (see Appendix XI). There were still some differences, such as fewer Grange Park respondents thinking about the meaning and purpose of life (23% compared with 31% for both EVS surveys). Nevertheless, slightly *more* Grange Park respondents found comfort and strength in their beliefs (39% compared with EVS 1981: 33% and EVS 1990: 34%). During the Stage Two interviews, however, it was confirmed that this particular EVS question was interpreted by some respondents to refer to their *secular* beliefs and not just to religious beliefs; hence the results may be misleading in this respect. The practice of prayer or meditation outside of religious services was about the same across all the surveys (around 44%). In terms of gender differences, female respondents in all of the surveys *always* scored higher than the men for these questions, which again confirms Davie's (1994:117) previously cited comment about this issue. For the question about the meaning and purpose of life there was only a 2% difference, however, between male and female responses for both the Grange Park survey and the EVS 1981 survey (but a 16% difference between male and female for the EVS 1990 survey). For the other less traditional questions the differences between male and female were between 10% to 30% across all the surveys. So, can these latter findings be considered as evidence of 'believing without belonging'? Clearly, there is one sense in which they can. But discussion of that question will be held in abeyance until Chapter Nine, since it is incidental to the main focus of the current study, viz. the testing of the network dependency hypothesis. Nevertheless, by pursuing a social network analysis of the Stage Two data, the incidental question of 'believing without belonging', specifically in terms of its nature, should be clarified as a result.

In summary, on the whole, Grange Park is characterized by a young, successful, middle class population who are very comfortable in the material sense. Grange Park does, however, lack a sense of local community. A 'dormitory village' is, thus, a very apt description of the area. Among the residents, traditional *values*, such as the institution of marriage, are popular. On the other hand, responses to some of the

questions about religious belief and practice are fairly high, but when a comparison is made with the EVS surveys, responses to questions about *traditional* religion in Grange Park are systematically lower. In particular, residents of Grange Park generally appear to have a much less favourable view of the Church than indicated by people in the country generally. Finally, the gender differences common to other surveys still feature in the Grange Park survey, with women scoring higher than men on the majority of religious belief and practice questions, whether traditional or not.

This chapter has presented a panoramic picture of the area selected for the current study and of the beliefs of those living at Grange Park. Some tentative suggestions have been made which might explain, in part, the low level of *traditional* religious belief and practice among these residents. But these explanations are not entirely adequate. A more focussed analysis is required to examine the chain of traditional religious 'memory' by assessing the extent to which social interaction within personal networks, both former and current, explains and accounts for the general data discussed in this chapter. The following chapter introduces this analysis of the networks of the 39 informants selected for the second stage of the research, commencing with former contacts in the informants' lives.

CHAPTER FOUR
CONSTRUCTING A NETWORK MODEL: FORMER CONTACTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It was argued in Chapter One that, in theory, personal networks provide a set of opportunities for social interaction between ego and alters from which ego formulates, maintains, modifies and transmits a religious or secular belief system. On the basis of this theory, a network dependency hypothesis was formulated and a methodology to test it was established in Chapter Two. The testing of this hypothesis will help to explain and account for the general picture of religion at Grange Park presented in Chapter Three. The current chapter is the first of five empirical chapters which report the testing of the network dependency hypothesis through the formulation of various testable propositions based upon that hypothesis.

This chapter commences by discussing the importance of former socialization in the initial formation of the informants' religious or secular beliefs. To discuss the formation of the informants' beliefs without a preliminary study of their earlier social relationships would be illogical. The informants' current networks and current religious or secular beliefs (the subject matter of the next chapter) clearly did not come into being independently of previous socialization. From a discussion of the socialization process, relevant propositions based on the network dependency hypothesis will be formulated. These will be considered initially with brief reference to the Stage One questionnaire data. A more focused analysis will then be attempted by considering the propositions in relation to the Stage Two interview data. Any gender differences in the data will be evaluated due to the gender differences identified in the previous chapter and due to the differences in the responsibilities of men and women for the handing on of traditional beliefs (Davie, 1996:10). Finally, the first part of the network model, based on the findings reported in this chapter, will be constructed.

4.2 SOCIALIZATION

In an attempt to explain religious behaviour, Argyle (1958) - discussing environmental factors - makes the following statement based upon the results of several surveys carried out by Cavanaugh (1939):

> There can be no doubt that the attitudes of parents are among the most important factors in the formation of religious attitudes. In several surveys of students in which subjects were asked what had been the most important influence on their religious beliefs, 'parents', 'home' or 'mother' were the most frequent answers given (Argyle, 1958:39).

The importance of these factors appears to remain constant. In a more recent survey by Chambers (1997:7) on Welsh churchgoers, the former influence of mothers on belief transmission was found to be highly significant in terms of the current belief outcome of his informants. This to some degree confirms Davie's (1994) speculative comment that:

> If the private [dimension of religiosity] is beginning to predominate in some - though by no means all - aspects of contemporary religiosity, the significance of women as transmitters of that religiosity may be increasing very rapidly indeed. (ibid.:119)

It is clear, however, that very few empirical studies exist which attempt to explain the links between former socialization and current religiosity. In their efforts to investigate possible links between childhood experiences and religiosity in later life, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) pursue a psychological model to explain specific conversion cases. Their research is not particularly relevant herein as the current study involves a broader range of types of belief and unbelief which require explanation and analysis. Nevertheless, Kirkpatrick and Shaver make the very pertinent point that: "little is known about the ways in which early parent-child relationships influence religious development. Empirical research on the topic is sparse" (1990:315). Therefore, although it has been established by previous research that there is an association between parental upbringing and levels of religiosity in

later life, the reasons why this should be so are still very much open to empirical investigation.

Berger and Luckmann (1971) are key exponents of the process of socialization and have made a significant theoretical contribution in this area. They argue that man, due to his biological constitution, is an 'unfinished' being. Unlike the rest of the animal kingdom, man is not intrinsically pre-programmed by instinct. He therefore constructs a world for himself, both material and non-material (externalization), in the form of culture which takes on the appearance of being something quite independent of human activity (objectification). This objectified world - which imposes a meaningful order upon experience (the nomos) and which is generally taken for granted in the sense of being in the universal order of things (the cosmos), with religion as "cosmization in a sacred mode" (Berger, 1969:26) - is sustained through human language and through social interaction. Individuals become a product of society through taking within themselves the objectified world through a process of learning and personal identification (internalization). The objectified meanings of society thus become the meanings possessed by, and expressed by, individuals. In short, socialization is the process through which the meanings objectively available in the social world are internalized by individuals.

According to Berger and Luckmann, primary socialization is "the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society" (1971:150). Secondary socialization is "any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society" (ibid.:150). This would include, for example, the internalization of role-specific knowledge related to specialized sub-worlds created by the division of labour and the social distribution of knowledge. In terms of primary socialization a child initially has no choice concerning which alters[1] are located in the social network into which the child is born. These alters are in charge of the socialization of the child and impose upon the child a world which the child comprehends as a given reality. The child

---

[1] Berger and Luckmann use the term 'significant others', but the word: 'alters' will continue to be used herein to maintain a consistency of terminology in the current thesis.

internalizes, and thereby takes personal possession of, the roles and attitudes of his or her alters. Moreover:

> The child does not internalize the world of his significant others [alters] as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world, the world *tout court*. It is for this reason that the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds internalized in secondary socializations. However much the original sense of inevitability may be weakened in subsequent disenchantments, the recollection of a never-to-be-repeated certainty - the certainty of the first dawn of reality - still adheres to the first world of childhood. (ibid.:154)

Berger and Luckmann then proceed to emphasize the tendency of primary socialization to persist. They argue that it takes "severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood" (ibid.:162). This may help, in part, to explain the association between parental upbringing and religiosity in later life. On the other hand, Berger and Luckmann also point out that as socialization is never complete the contents which have been internalized face "continuing threats to their subjective reality" (ibid.:166). The current study takes up this point and proceeds much further by formulating propositions about the specific outworkings of socialization in relation to later manifestations of religious or secular beliefs. These propositions incorporate the latter observation by Berger and Luckmann of continuing threats to subjective reality in the form of challenges to former socialization.

4.3 FORMER CONTACT PROPOSITIONS

To recapitulate, in Chapter One the first general heading for the propositions was that of the effects of early socialization on the initial belief formation of ego. From the network dependency hypothesis,[2] it follows that the informants' former social networks would have formed the initial arena in which religious or secular

---

[2] See page 58 for the precise wording of the network dependency hypothesis.

socialization took place. Based upon the network dependency hypothesis, and developing further the theory of Berger and Luckmann (1971), the first of the propositions related to former social contacts is:

P1: *During childhood and adolescence the beliefs and the behaviour of network alters - in the form of positive, neutral or negative exemplars[3] - will elicit a response of acceptance or rejection of the alters' belief system(s) by ego which will in turn affect the current religious or secular beliefs held by ego.*

In other words, it is postulated that as a child grows older it will begin to develop the ability to evaluate the belief systems held by network alters and modify its own beliefs in response to the beliefs and behaviour of others. This evaluation process will either involve the active or passive acceptance of the beliefs of alters or involve the rejection of their belief system or systems. Thus, it is proposed that the social networks of individuals are 'intrinsically associated' with their initial formulation of religious or secular beliefs in terms of a dialectic between, on the one hand, the positive, neutral or negative exemplars of network alters and, on the other hand, the acceptance or rejection of the belief system(s) of alters by ego in response to those exemplars. And, most importantly, it is proposed that this process is related to ego's current belief system.

Apart from this acceptance or rejection of past socialization there is also the question of whether CA and NCA networks are integrated or non-integrated. This question needs to be addressed in this discussion of former contacts as well as in the following chapter concerning the current networks of the informants. Chapter One argued that due to the processes of modernity, links between CAs and NCAs have gradually been severed, which led to the general proposition (cited on page 44) that:

P2 *A gulf exists between the personal networks of CAs and NCAs.*

In other words, it is proposed that there is little or no relational contact between

---

[3] Positive, neutral and negative as defined in Chapter Two on page 102 - this is not a value judgement.

traditional religious organisations and those outside of such structures. If this proposition is correct, one would expect to find in the accounts given by the informants a link between traditional religious upbringing and church attendance during childhood, adolescence and possibly into adulthood. Conversely, one would not expect to find many references (if at all) to church attenders in the interview data relating to childhood if the child was not brought up according to a religious faith. This relates to the argument of Currie, Gilbert and Horsley (1977) in terms of CA and NCA family networks:

> If one or both parents in a family are already [church] members, the children in the family will be very strongly disposed to regard membership as an ordinary, desirable, or necessary element of their world and identity. Furthermore, once they have become members, pressures toward integration of the family will strongly encourage them to retain their membership. And, though the particular circumstances of non-members' families will obviously vary, those circumstances are highly unlikely so to stimulate the acquisition and retention of church membership (1977:118-119).

Two further specific propositions therefore develop from proposition P2:

P3:   *If ego is a CA, it is highly likely that some form of network connection exists or existed with other CAs at some time during ego's past experience.*

P4:   *If ego has had minimal network contact with CAs and network interaction is predominantly with NCAs it is highly likely that ego will not hold traditional religious beliefs and will not be a CA.*

The latter three propositions need to be considered in relation to current as well as to previous network contacts. These particular propositions, therefore, will also be discussed in the next chapter.

Once these propositions were formulated the interview data were searched, using the NUD.IST computer program, to ascertain if there was any evidence either to support or to falsify the propositions. Prior to consideration of that data, the link between former socialization and current religiosity will be discussed briefly in relation to the

Stage One questionnaire data.

4.4 THE INITIAL SURVEY DATA

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that only one of the questionnaire items, concerning religious upbringing, was related to the networks of the informants. It is not possible to test all of the above propositions using the questionnaire data as there is insufficient information. Nevertheless, the question on religious upbringing can be used to test, to some extent, propositions P3 and P4. If crosstabulations of the data indicate a strong association between religious upbringing and church attendance and/or traditional religious beliefs it would add weight to the propositions. Conversely, if this association is not present in the data it would place the propositions under question. The table which follows on the next page shows the results of crosstabulating Question 7: *'Were you brought up with some form of belief / faith at home?'* with a number of other questionnaire items related to traditional religious belief and practice. Question 7 constitutes the independent variable and lambda is the statistic used to indicate how much help the independent variable is in each crosstabulation for predicting the dependent variable. As this is a very specialized measure of association - i.e. even if lambda is zero some other form of association may still be present (Norusis, 1991:318)[4] - the value for Cramérs V is also given in the table.

---

[4] Norusis, 1991:318, further states that: "No measure of association is sensitive to every type of association imaginable".

Table 4.1 Crosstabulation results of 'traditional' questionnaire items by those indicating 'Yes' or 'No' to Question 7 concerning religious upbringing.

N = 287 (2 missing cases) Brought up religiously? Yes: N = Male 84, Female 96 No: N = Male 49, Female 44 DK: N = Male 7, Female 7	Male %		Female %			
	N = 84	N = 49	N = 96	N = 44		
QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	**Y**	**N**	**Y**	**N**	**Lambda**	**Cramér's V**
Respondent is an active attender of a religious denomination or other religious group.	18	2	15	7	0 / 0	.25 / .11 ** / ns
Respondent used to be an active attender but no longer attends regularly.	43	14	48	11	.03 / .14	.31 / .28 **** / ****
Respondent believes in: God	65	27	68	36	.37 / .20	.38 / .29 **** / ***
Life after death	39	27	64	39	0 / .19	.13 / .25 ns / **
A soul	48	20	57	34	0 / .19	.27 / .21 ** / *
The Devil	18	0	20	7	0 / 0	.26 / .18 ** / ns
Hell	18	2	23	5	0 / 0	.23 / .23 * / *
Heaven	33	14	54	32	0 / .11	.21 / .20 * / *
Sin	27	16	29	11	0 / 0	.13 / .20 ns / *
Resurrection from the dead	24	6	17	5	0 / 0	.25 / .16 * / ns

Significance levels: **** p <.0001, *** p <.001, ** p <.01, * p <.05, ns: non-significant.

The figures for lambda and Cramér's V are given for male followed by female. So, to give an example reading across one row of the table for the third questionnaire item: 65% of males who were brought up with some form of belief/faith at home believed in God whereas only 27% of males who were not brought up religiously believed in God. Similarly, the percentages for females are 68% and 36%. The lambda statistic for the males in this row is .37 and is .20 for females. Finally, Cramér's V is.38 (p <.0001) for males and .29 (p <.001) for females in relation to this questionnaire item.

Proposition P3 will be considered first in relation to the above table. Proposition P3 states:

P3:   *If ego is a CA, it is highly likely that some form of network connection exists or existed with other CAs at some time during ego's past experience.*

The first question in Table 4.1 refers to the CAs in the sample. This section in the table shows that those brought up religiously were more likely to be CAs for both male and female, although in the case of females the relationship is not statistically significant. Of those who were not brought up religiously, more females (7%) than males (2%) were active CAs. From the questionnaire data alone it is not possible to ascertain if the latter observation for females was due to the network relationships of females in later life which led to their current church attendance. This will be examined further in Chapter Five in relation to the interview data. The lambda statistic does show, however, that religious upbringing is not a good predictor of church attendance in later life. This is most likely due to the fact that most people brought up religiously do not continue to attend church. Cramér's V nevertheless indicates a small but significant association between male religious upbringing and church attendance, but hardly any association between these two variables for females. The data for male CAs in the above table therefore gives some support for proposition P3, but in terms of the religious upbringing of females there appears to be less support for the proposition.

If the data are considered from a different perspective, however, and religious upbringing is crosstabulated with the total numbers of male and female CAs from the whole sample, clearer support for proposition P3 is evident. Fifteen males were brought up religiously out of a total of sixteen males in the sample currently attending church. And fourteen females were brought up religiously out of a total of eighteen females currently attending church. Thus, whilst religious upbringing is not a good predictor of church attendance in later life (as most people brought up religiously do not continue to attend church) CAs are nevertheless characterized, on the whole, by having come from a religious family background. Moreover, this religious family

background is more significant for males than for females, although, having said this, female CAs still predominantly come from a religious family. This constitutes strong evidence to support proposition P3. With regard to the CAs who were brought up religiously, it would be of theoretical value (from a network perspective) to examine which factors explain their remaining within religious organisations rather than departing from organised religion as is the practice of the majority who are brought up religiously. This matter will be pursued with reference to the interview data later in this chapter.

Concerning the second question in Table 4.1, religious upbringing is much more closely associated with former church attendance, as would be expected. If the respondents were brought up according to some form of belief or faith, almost half of these men and women attended church regularly earlier in life. This was probably involuntary in many cases. The decline in church attendance in later life would suggest that choice entered the equation. The analysis of the interview data considers this element of choice in later life both in terms of network contacts and in terms of the rejection or acceptance of earlier socialization. The other items on the table do not provide any further evidence to test proposition P3, but do provide some evidence to test proposition P4. Proposition P4 states:

P4:   *If ego has had minimal network contact with CAs and network interaction is predominantly with NCAs it is highly likely that ego will not hold traditional religious beliefs and will not be a CA.*

It is not possible to ascertain from the questionnaire data whether the network interaction of the respondents had been predominantly with NCAs. Only the interview data can give more insight into this matter. Nevertheless, the table does provide information concerning the beliefs of the respondents in relation to minimal network contact with CAs in earlier life in terms of respondents not having come from a religious background. In this respect - for both males and females from a non-religious background - in response to most of the questions about traditional religious beliefs, the percentages for these respondents were about half the value of the percentages occurring among respondents from a religious background. In other

words, a non-religious background is associated, to some degree, with a lower level of occurrence of traditional religious beliefs.[5] This is particularly apparent concerning beliefs in 'the Devil', 'hell' and 'resurrection from the dead', which seem to require a religious upbringing for the acceptance of such beliefs later in life, particularly so with regard to the male respondents. Only men brought up religiously believed in the Devil and no male respondents from a non-religious background held this belief. Similarly, only 2% of males from a non-religious background believed in hell. The percentage of women from a non-religious background holding these particular beliefs was only slightly higher than the men. For both men and women responding to these questions, the lambda statistic shows that religious upbringing is not a good predictor of traditional religious beliefs, apart from belief in God. Again, this is partly due to the small percentages involved. So knowing whether or not the respondents were brought up religiously does not particularly help in predicting whether they have traditional religious beliefs, apart, that is, from predicting whether or not they believe in God.

As with church attendance, however, Cramér's V indicates small but significant associations (together with some non-significance) between religious upbringing and traditional religious beliefs. This degree of association is fairly apparent in the table. To give just one example, of the 84 men brought up religiously, 48% believed in a soul whereas of the 49 men not brought up religiously, only 20% believed in a soul. With the women, religious upbringing seems to have been less influential concerning belief in a soul, although there was still a significant difference which might be attributed to religious upbringing. Of the 96 women brought up religiously, 57% believed in a soul whereas of the 44 women not brought up religiously, 34% believed in a soul. Proposition P4 is therefore supported by the questionnaire data, but only in terms of whether or not the respondents were brought up with some form of belief or faith. Nothing can be deduced from the questionnaire data concerning whether the respondents from a non-religious background had minimal contact with CAs in later life. That question can only be answered with reference to the informants' current

---

[5] The questionnaire data gives no indications of the mechanisms involved, whereas the interview data explores this issue.

144

networks; a matter discussed in Chapter Five.

Wellman and Berkowitz (1988) have argued for an alternative methodology which takes into account social structures, in the form of network relationships, which give rise to these variables studied at a quantitative level:

> Statistics and probability theory are seductive in their apparent ability to tease out the separate and conjoint effects of multiple variables. Yet, sociologists following this strategy can, at best, only *infer* the presence of social structure when they discover aggregates of individuals thinking and behaving in similar ways. By contrast, structural analysts believe that the main business of social scientists is to study social structure and its consequences. (1988:2-3)

Hence, for a more focused analysis, and to answer the questions raised from this brief study of the questionnaire data, attention will now be given to the interview data in relation to propositions P1 - P4.

4.5 THE INTERVIEW DATA - REACTIONS TO FORMER CONTACTS

4.5.1 Reporting the testing of proposition P1

Proposition P1 can be tested, first by considering overall patterns in the interview data related to former contacts and then by looking in more detail at individual cases. Proposition P1[6] outlines the network conditions of socialization into which each individual is born. The positive, neutral and negative exemplars were identified within the interview data on the four social dimensions of former contact outlined in Chapter Two.[7] This gave rise to the following table which summarizes all 39 interviews with regard to the former contacts of the informants:

---

[6] Given on page 138.

[7] See page 101.

Table 4.2 Number of social dimensions upon which exemplar types were mentioned

BELIEF IMPORTANCE CATEGORY	NATURE OF FORMER EXEMPLAR					
N = 39	+	+/-	neutral	-	TOTAL	AVE
CA (N = 9)	19	4	4	1	28	3.1
High (N = 10)	26	2	2	-	30	3.0
Medium (N = 8)	10	2	6	7	25	3.1
Low (N = 12)	1	1	6	30	38	3.2

For each individual informant, the occurrence of positive, positive and negative, negative or neutral exemplars was ascertained on each social dimension (but not the total number of occurrences on each dimension - just whether or not these types of exemplars occurred at all). The number of dimensions upon which these exemplar types occurred was then totalled for each belief importance category, giving the above table. Thus, to provide an example, the CAs (between them all) reported a total of nineteen social dimensions upon which just positive exemplars occurred.[8]

From this summary of the interview data in relation to former contacts it is possible to deduce the existence of a clear and obvious association between on the one hand positive, positive and negative, negative and neutral exemplars in earlier life and, on the other hand, current belief importance levels. Clearly, during their formative years, the CAs and the high belief importance level informants were confronted predominantly with positive exemplars. Negative exemplars were almost totally absent from the early socialization experiences of the latter two categories of informant. Conversely, the twelve low importance level informants reported a total of 30 social dimensions upon which negative exemplars occurred. And in the medium importance category there was, as expected, a more even spread of recorded dimensions across

---

[8] A table showing which specific social dimensions were involved with each exemplar type is given in Appendix VII.

the exemplar types. Proposition P1 is supported to some extent by the data presented in Table 4.2 but more details are required to confirm that these exemplars formed the social basis of a response by ego. From the perspective of proposition P1, it is not possible to deduce from the table *how* the positive and negative exemplars are associated with the belief importance levels of the informants, i.e. whether the belief systems held by the alters were accepted or rejected. For example, among the low importance level informants the interview data need to be examined in detail to ascertain if the negative exemplars were simply alters with secular beliefs which were subsequently accepted by the informants or whether the alters held religious beliefs but made such a negative impression upon the informants that the informants subsequently rejected those beliefs. Reference to Table 4.2 alone also gives no indication of the reasoning involved in any acceptance or rejection of the alters' belief systems. Neither is there any indication of the time scale involved in the acceptance or rejection of the belief systems of alters. Hence, the interview data will be discussed in order to answer these questions.

4.5.2 The nature of the acceptance or rejection of alters' belief systems.

To test proposition P1 further, there are four questions in particular which would be helpful in forming a framework for this section, two of which were raised in the previous section when discussing the questionnaire data. The first of these questions is:

1) With regard to the CAs brought up religiously at home, why have they remained CAs whilst the other informants who were brought up religiously at home are not involved with religious organisations?

It has already been shown that the socialization of CAs was predominantly associated with positive exemplars, i.e. alters who, by their beliefs and behaviour, made the adoption of religious beliefs appear attractive, relevant and tenable to ego. But, from the results given in Table 4.2, the same could be said of the HNCA category. Holding

147

the lower belief importance levels in abeyance, these two categories of CA and HNCA will first be contrasted to ascertain which factors account for the difference between current attendance and non-attendance at Church, despite high levels of importance attributed to religious beliefs. Attention will be focused on the extent to which the acceptance or rejection of alters beliefs, as featured in proposition P1, contributed towards the differences between the two categories of informant.

Seven of the nine CA informants and nine of the ten HNCA informants were brought up according to some form of belief or faith at home. If we first consider the CAs, among the seven CA informants who were brought up religiously, none of them encountered any negative exemplars at all during their early years, apart from Jennifer Reed. However, Jennifer's encounter with negative exemplars was restricted to her parents alone. Nevertheless, her parents held traditional religious beliefs. They simply did not attend church. This lack of encouragement towards church attendance was balanced, however, by the fact that Jennifer spent six months of her childhood living with her grandmother whilst her mother was in hospital. Her grandmother, she claimed, was a definite influence on her life, encouraging her to attend church, to become involved with numerous church activities and to adopt beliefs in spiritualism and faith healing. So, in essence, these seven CAs are similar in terms of a minimum encounter with negative exemplars.

This characteristic of an absence, on the whole, of negative exemplars is also true of the nine HNCA informants who were brought up religiously. Only Virginia Rothwell and Adrian Dempster mentioned the occurrence of negative exemplars, but, again these were minimal and confined to one social dimension. Virginia's parents were not particularly religious although she described them as 'proper' since they sent her to Sunday School. In Adrian's case, he attended Sunday School when he was at boarding school but found it very boring. But, apart from these two examples of minimal interference to an otherwise positive socialization process (towards the adoption of religious beliefs), the nine HNCA informants who were brought up religiously shared this absence of negative exemplars with the CAs, as is apparent in Table 4.2.

There were, however, a number of differences in the socialization of the CAs and HNCAs mentioned above which account for the lack of church attendance among the latter. These differences will be discussed systematically in the form of binary oppositions (CA characteristics followed by HNCA):

i) Parents mainly CAs / *Parents mainly NCAs or CAs who considered church attendance non-essential.*

One of the major differences between the CAs and the HNCAs was that most of the parents of HNCAs (whilst holding religious beliefs and bringing up their children according to a religious faith) were NCAs themselves. This did not apply to the CAs, most of whose parents were active CAs. Simon Lonsdale and Michael Hayward (who was brought up in a childrens' home), were the only two HNCAs who had parents/guardians who were CAs. Nevertheless, their parents/guardians did not regard church attendance as essential to the Christian faith (although Simon was forced to attend with his parents when he was younger). On one occasion early in Simon's life, his parents fell out with the local vicar (although they did return to church again at a later date):

> I was quite young ... so they thought well this is just a building [the church] we go to, to express our belief and we don't necessarily have to go to this building, not if we're not getting on with someone. That doesn't sound very Christian though does it? (H18L31/574)

At this early age the concept was therefore instilled in Simon that church attendance was not an essential component in the formation of strong religious beliefs. The evidence suggests that the parents' attitudes towards church attendance tend to be adopted and accepted by their offspring, thus supporting proposition P1. This was closely linked to a second group of three binary oppositions which are all interrelated:

ii) Informants immersed in the life of / *informants immersed in religion*
    the church *primarily at home/school.*

iii) Mainly voluntary unforced attendance / *often forced attendance at*
    at church *church.*

149

*iv) Positive experiences of church and   / negative experiences of church
      accompanied by enthusiasm   accompanied by non-enthusiasm.*

Apart from Mark Saunders, six of the seven CAs brought up religiously were immersed in the life of the local church and took great pleasure in church activities. As they grew older, these CAs were offered more and more freedom to attend of their own free will, but by that time they had acquired many friends in the church and their social life would have been curtailed to a large extent if they had withdrawn from the church at that stage. Jennifer Reed, Helen Frazer and David Hutchinson all made specific reference to the value of their church youth groups in providing them with good friendships and an understanding of the Christian faith. Jennifer's comments were typical of these CAs:

> I definitely went through a period when I was about fourteen or fifteen when I just wanted to be involved and I got into the choir and as I say into Crossbearers [the youth group] and things like that and joined in and got into my local community. And I was in the guides. I was always involved in things which revolved around the church. (C26M10/286)

The youth group was clearly important to Jennifer. She mentioned 'Crossbearers' no less than eight times during the interview. These activities provided strong network ties during the early years of the CA informant's lives which reinforced the practice of church attendance as part of the belief system which they adopted and accepted, not only from the example set by their parents, but also by other significant alters.

By way of contrast, the HNCA informants who were brought up religiously were not generally encouraged to become involved in church activities. They were mainly immersed in religion either at home or at school. If they *were* encouraged to attend church, it tended to be forced upon them. Peter Gregson, Michael Hayward and Adrian Dempster all attended boarding school where great emphasis was placed upon Christian teaching. Church attendance was compulsory, however, and this had the effect of putting them off church attendance in later life, even though they held strong religious convictions as a result of the Christian teaching they received. Despite not being involved with boarding school, Sylvia Clifton and Simon Lonsdale also

experienced this forced church attendance, hence there was less enthusiasm for church in later life. The practice of church attendance was therefore rejected partly due to the behaviour of others in forcing church attendance upon these informants and partly due to the attitudes and beliefs held about church attendance by parents and other alters, lending further support to proposition P1.

The CA informants also spoke about key role models who had influenced their traditional religious beliefs and practice. Commitment in the form of church attendance was closely associated with these role models, hence the following two binary oppositions are stated together:

v) *Positive CA role models* / *positive NCA role models.*

vi) *Traditional beliefs requiring* / *non-traditional beliefs in the sense of*
    commitment *requiring non-commitment (in terms of*
    church attendance).

All of the CA informants who were brought up religiously had established network links with positive CA role models who had made a significant impression upon them through the consistency of their behaviour and religious knowledge. Three examples will be given below, the first of which concerns Helen Frazer's account. Speaking of her experiences at the Baptist Church (charismatic) youth group she remarked:

> The leaders there were very special people. I think I could see that they had got something that I hadn't got. I think from that came the interest in wanting to find out. (C35M11/448)

Although Helen had attended church since early childhood, she became an agnostic until her involvement with the youth group. The positive exemplars of the leaders then renewed her interest in religious matters and initiated her desire to adopt church attendance as part of a lifestyle. David Hutchinson's account more closely typified that of most CAs since his beliefs had remained relatively congruent with the teaching of the Church throughout his life. Yet, as in Helen's experience, David said he learned most of what he knew about his faith from the "guy who ran the youth club"

(C26M27/545) at the Methodist Church which he attended from childhood. This led David to make what he considered to be a necessary 'full commitment' to the Christian faith, which included attendance at church. This was, again, typical of the CAs but not of the HNCAs. Jennifer Reed had a slightly different story to tell from the other CAs in that the caring behaviour of the Christians whom she knew provided her with positive role models which led her into a deeper involvement with church activities. There was one particular Christian girl whose practical support for Jennifer when she was bullied at school had made a deep and lasting impression upon Jennifer. This friend not only talked to her about religious belief, gave her attention and made her feel of value; she also introduced her to a wider network of positive role models at the church youth group. Jennifer made the following comment about these young people:

> The attitude is always it doesn't matter who you are or what you've done while you're there, you're just accepted. And I loved that, I really loved that type of attitude. You were just accepted for who you were and not for anything in particular. (C26M10/314)

For Jennifer, these experiences formed the basis of an acceptance of the caring values of the alters in her personal network together with the value of church attendance. All of these examples provide support for proposition P1.

Unlike the CAs, the role models among the HNCAs tended to place much greater emphasis upon the importance and the values of a Christian *way of life* and in some instances the alters in the networks of the HNCAs compared this with the often hypocritical lifestyles of church attenders. There was certainly an absence of positive CA role models among these informants. To give just two examples, Wendy Loveridge had been very impressed with the example set by her father, whom she said had led a "very Christian life ... that was his honour, his code of living" (H35M23/331) but who wasn't interested in church attendance in the slightest degree. With Adrian Dempster it was his mother who was very much against the Church whilst professing a deep religious faith:

I   And your mother, did she have quite strong beliefs?

R   Yep, she was a believer, she was anti-Church, pro-God, she was very anti the Church, she disliked the whole idea of getting dressed up in cloaks and robes and things. (H45M28/636)

Adrian (together with Wendy and the others in this belief importance category) responded to the beliefs and attitudes about church attendance held by these role models by adopting non-church attendance as a lifestyle, which again adds support to proposition P1.

Most of the HNCA characteristics highlighted by the above binary oppositions also apply to those who were brought up religiously in the medium and low belief importance categories (seven of the eight MNCAs and five of the twelve LNCAs were brought up religiously). As the belief importance category becomes lower, however, an increasing number of negative exemplars are introduced into the equation. Five of these MNCAs and four of the LNCAs were 'sent off' to Sunday School, but unlike the CAs they tended to be engaged in church activities without the involvement of their parents. Their parents held traditional religious beliefs but these tended not to be held very strongly at all. If the parents *did* hold strong beliefs the effect was invariably negative in the sense that they put their children off, not just of church attendance (as had transpired with the HNCAs) but of Christianity itself. This was linked with forced church attendance. Of those brought up religiously, two of the MNCAs and one LNCA were pressurized by their parents to attend church. The greater the resentment generated by this action the lower the belief importance level became. For example, in the medium category, Clive Willis, whilst not entirely closed to 'searching' for religious truth, said of his religious upbringing:

Well I think I was pushed into going [to church] when I had other things I wanted to do, basically. I'd probably more important things and I do feel a bit resentful that I was forced to go along every week. (M26M16/157)

And he said later in the interview:

I think that's where my parents went wrong in they forced me to go [to church]. (ibid.:690)

His response to this negative situation seemed to colour many of his responses to questions about religious belief. It had left him with doubts about matters of faith as well as with a very negative opinion of most churchgoers.

Proposition P1 does not fit with Clive's account quite so easily, however, since it does not involve an outright rejection of his parents beliefs but rather, a questioning of those beliefs. Proposition P1 therefore requires modification in the light of this finding by altering the wording relating to the response by ego to: *'... will elicit a response of acceptance, questioning or rejection'*.

The low belief importance category, however, does reveal an outright rejection of the parents beliefs under similar circumstances although the negative exemplars were more extreme. This involves two of the LNCAs who were brought up religiously, one of whom was forced to attend church up until the age of sixteen. The latter informant, Matthew Hayes, had three brothers, all of whom were brought up in the same way as Matthew. Matthew said of this experience: "I think we all pretty much disliked the idea of having to go to church every Sunday until we were sixteen" (L18M39/382). This was coupled with other negative exemplars such as the hypocrisy which Matthew witnessed within the church, which ultimately led to the rejection of his parents beliefs. This type of hypocrisy was also mentioned by James Murdoch. James attended a church youth group voluntarily for social reasons. Whilst there, he formed such a negative view of Christianity that his parents beliefs were also rejected. James had the following to say about his experiences:

> There was nothing to endear me to church people ... I found the hypocrisy hard ... there was no risk of me actually being drawn back into the church ... People being quite pompous. People being very judgemental – great one that you know ... I thought people weren't supposed to judge in that way. You know, married men having flirting with teenage girls and this sort of thing. Easy stuff, very easy stuff. It goes on all the time and as far as I was concerned it was not the way Christians are supposed to behave. (L35M34/568)

154

He went on to say:

> I know for certain one of my first girlfriends was stolen from me (and she would have been fourteen) by this eighteen year old youth leader. Now to me that's just not on. In fact I can say I don't blame him and all that, but that sort of thing I think is outrageous really. I think myself and some of my friends with similar views ... we're actually better behaved than some of the so-called Christians that we were mucking around with. (ibid.:583)

These exemplars encountered by James were indeed much more extreme than those mentioned by the MNCAs.

Nigel Grantham-Wright's early experiences involved similar negative exemplars but in contrast to the preceding two informants, Nigel's experience led to the acceptance of the secular world view of his father. Nigel was far from impressed with the behaviour of his uncle, who was a Baptist Minister at the church where Nigel had to attend Sunday School. This uncle had an extra-marital affair which led him to leave his wife and children and ultimately resulted in his complete disappearance. As a result of several negative experiences of the Church, Nigel described himself as: "a rebellious child" (L45M9/185). This reinforced his lack of religious beliefs. Even though he was sent to Sunday School, Nigel simply adopted the secular world view held by his father: "my father really believed in nothing ... very much like myself I would suggest" (ibid.:193).

All of the negative exemplars discussed above therefore help to explain why the belief importance levels decline among these informants who were brought up religiously and why proposition P1 holds true in terms of the questioning (as a result of the modification of proposition P1) or the rejection of their early religious upbringing.

The second major question related to the testing of the (now modified) proposition P1 is:

2) *What was the time scale involved in the acceptance, questioning or rejection of the belief systems of alters?*

To answer this question very briefly, in terms of the time factor involved, this tended to vary among the informants. As mentioned above in relation to the account given by Clive Willis, this can involve an ongoing process of questioning one's earlier socialization which is, thus, never fully resolved. The influence of alters in later life in terms of the final outcome of the informants' current belief importance levels will be discussed in the next chapter. Most informants, however, had formulated a belief system by adolescence but first impressions among relatives counted significantly. The following account by Jennifer Reed (a CA) will be discussed in a little more detail, since it illustrates a principle common to many of the accounts given by the informants. Jennifer Reed held on tenaciously to the spiritualist beliefs which were taught to her by her grandmother very early on in her life. Jennifer then adapted and synthesized these spiritualist beliefs (according to her own reasoning) with the subsequent teaching she encountered at school and at church. Even during the period when she discussed religious beliefs with her friends at the youth group she maintained her own set of spiritualist beliefs, sometimes concealing them in order to avoid conflict:

R. They were always praying to a God and I used to respect that - yes OK this is what you do but it wasn't generally my idea, you know.

I. Did your friend think the same as you?

R. No she thought there was a God. She definitely believed and prayed to a God. I used to pray to lost people and lost spirits - people I knew rather than a God. Rather than actually singing out to God I used to be thinking about other things other than just God - other people.

I. Was your friend aware of that?

R. Probably not, no, I used to keep it to myself. (C26M10/380)

Jennifer therefore claimed she did not "generally believe in a God" but rather, believed in heaven, an afterlife and a spirit world. She prayed to departed spirits. She did not feel that God, if he did exist, had the ability to hear everyone at one time, hence her desire to pray to the dead and from whom she felt she received answers to her prayers. Her reasoning partly reflected her grandmother's spiritualist beliefs but

also accommodated other ideas derived from her schooling such as her belief that the world evolved of "its own accord" rather than was 'created' in any sense of the term. When one considers Jennifer's beliefs in relation to her network relationships during her childhood and adolescence, there appears to have been a great effort made on her part to create and maintain an internal consistency to her religious belief system based upon the initial religious teachings she received from her grandmother. This *general* reasoning process typified many of the accounts across all the belief importance categories and is best explained with reference to Festinger's (1956, 1985) theory of cognitive dissonance. In fact, this issue arises from the data in relation to other issues discussed in later chapters. In this respect there is a requirement to draw upon Festinger's theory both with regard to the current discussion and to develop the thesis as a whole.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance concerns the striving of individuals towards consistency within themselves and is based on 'overwhelming' evidence from many studies which report such "consistency among one person's political attitudes, social attitudes and many others" (Festinger, 1985:1). The word 'cognitive' in Festinger's theory refers to any "knowledge, opinion or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about one's behaviour" (ibid.:3) and the word 'dissonance' refers to any inconsistency in the former. In addition, the word 'consonance' is used to replace the word 'consistency'. It is now possible to state the two main basic hypotheses central to Festinger's theory:

1. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance.

2. When dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance. (ibid.:3)

This theory of cognitive dissonance is therefore 'grafted-in' to some of the propositions which follow, both in this chapter and in the remaining chapters of the thesis. As a result of this discovery in the data, a further proposition is required:

P5: *During childhood and adolescence, the social basis of the acceptance, questioning or rejection of the beliefs of alters will be simultaneously fused to a psychological need in ego for the reduction of cognitive dissonance.*

Thus, the latter proposition is consistent with the data in that the *social* basis of that acceptance, questioning or rejection of the beliefs of alters is simultaneously fused to a *psychological* need for the reduction of cognitive dissonance.

Attention will now be given to propositions P1 and P5 in relation to the remaining informants who were *not* brought up according to some form of belief or faith. First, there remains the question of the two female CA informants who were not brought up religiously, the analysis of whose accounts should give some insight into the general question (raised in section 4.4):

3) With regard to the predominantly female CAs who were not brought up religiously at home (revealed in the questionnaire data), why have they now become CAs? Was early socialization still associated in some way with their current involvement in religious organizations?

The only evidence which can be cited to answer this question relates to the two CA informants mentioned above. It is a significant observation that both of these CAs who claimed on the questionnaire not to have been brought up religiously, i.e. Nicola Sims and Lindsay Kennedy, *did* have Christian CAs in their early networks. Nicola Sims's grandmother, aunt and mother were all Christians during her childhood and Lindsay Kennedy's parents were 'sympathetic' to the Christian faith. Lindsay also had neighbours who were CAs when she was a child, and they took her along to church. Yet both of these informants' made very clear statements that they were not brought up religiously. Nicola said: "I was raised as a total atheist. I was raised as a non-believer" (C26M35/251). Likewise, Lindsay commented: "I was a complete non-believer ... I had no religious leaning whatsoever" (C35M4/95) and spoke about her current beliefs as having been the result of a working of the Holy Spirit. Yet, later in the interview she revealed more of a certainty of the existence of God during her childhood: "I'd been taught a lot about Jesus and His life. I suppose that's why I had

a belief in God as such" (ibid.:227). Her earlier claim to 'no religious leaning whatsoever' was also negated to some extent by other later comments, such as:

> I can remember as an older teenager spending many hours staring up at the sky - 'are you up there?' 'are you really there?' - so I think all along I've been looking. When I was twelve years old I went to a church in Eastbourne with the school and I can remember sitting there in a great big old church in a Christmas assembly, and I'm staring up at this cross, and He was on the cross, and I was asking 'are you real?', so I suppose I was a searcher for most of my life. (ibid.:373)

Nevertheless, the informants have to be given the benefit of the doubt concerning the veracity of any claims not to have been brought up religiously. In parenthesis, when exploring possible links between religious alters early in childhood and the informants' subsequent religious beliefs it is extremely difficult to maintain an argument based upon that which is not said, when no concrete evidence exists to substantiate such an argument. However, according to Berger and Luckmann's (1971) view of the socialization process (discussed earlier in this chapter) these two informants *must* have accepted the views (whether religious or secular) of at least *some* of their alters during early infancy as *'the world'* rather than as one of many possible worlds.

Thus, the only argument which *can* be advanced in terms of these apparently contradictory accounts is the tendency of conversionist[9] accounts (documented by Towler, 1984) to under-emphasize to some extent the positive influence of others during the years prior to their conversion in order to increase the dramatic impact of their accounts of a 'changed life'. This is not to suggest that these informants were deliberately and consciously trying to mislead. It is simply a matter of where the emphasis is placed when a conversionist generally gives an account of the experience of the 'new birth' in Christ. Towler (1984) draws attention to this element of 'having

---

[9] Lindsay regarded her experience as a conversion and although Nicola said she would not describe her own experience as a conversion she mentioned a 'turning point' in her life which could be equated with such. She was also baptized and confirmed into the Church of England much later in life than most people. In one sense Nicola's account does not strictly fit the conversionist type described by Towler, 1984, yet in many ways her account shares similar characteristics in terms of the contrast made between the former life as an unbeliever and the present life as a believer.

been saved' together with the need continually to draw and re-draw the boundary between the saved and the damned, and the painting of a picture of life prior to conversion in 'lurid colours'.

On the basis of this discussion it is still difficult to ascertain whether the accounts of these two informants are consistent with proposition P1. For these CAs there would still appear to be, at the very least, a questioning of the religious *and* secular beliefs of alters within their early networks and therefore proposition P1 would apply in this respect. This questioning was virtually resolved later in life through further interaction with religious alters in their more recent and current networks - although this constitutes the subject matter of the next chapter. The tendency among conversionists to downplay the influence of religious alters in early childhood would certainly be consistent with the reduction of cognitive dissonance and the production of consonance in their view of religious conversion, vis-à-vis their own life history. This reasoning process did not apply during their childhood, however, hence proposition P5 is difficult to apply to this particular period of their lives. To arrive at any firm conclusions about proposition P5 in this respect, further focused interviews with these two conversionists would be required on this subject to determine the exact nature of the questioning process in relation to the beliefs of alters within their networks. It may be the case that proposition P5 does not apply to religious converts who were *not* brought up religiously, but it has to be acknowledged that this tentative conclusion has been reached based on insubstantial evidence which applies to only *two* cases.

In relation to propositions P1 and P5 only one significant question remains concerning the former contacts of the informants:

4) Did the NCAs who were not brought up religiously at home accept, question or reject the beliefs of alters during early childhood and adolescence?

In contrast to the CAs discussed above, the patterns in the data are much clearer with regard to these informants. This group of informants involves just one MNCA and seven of the twelve LNCAs. The parents of the MNCA (Emma Gordon) did not hold

religious beliefs but they nevertheless sent Emma to Sunday School as a matter of convention. Emma claimed not to have been influenced by Sunday School but she did develop a 'Wordsworthian' type of spirituality during her childhood by wandering in the hills of the Lake District with her 'best friend' - a CA who used to share these beliefs with her. Emma questioned conventional Christian beliefs when she attended University but she still retains the 'spirituality' she developed in early childhood which particularly manifests itself whenever she takes similar walks in the countryside. The above propositions therefore remain consistent with this informant's account.

The seven LNCAs not brought up religiously responded to the predominantly secular beliefs of their parents by adopting these beliefs themselves - the parents of six of these seven informants were not religious at all. Moreover, the adoption of secular beliefs was reinforced by negative exemplars encountered by at least three of these informants. For example, among this group of informants, Caroline Abrahams was forced to attend Sunday School, which resulted in a very negative experience. She lamented: "It's a bit like introducing a child to Dickens too early - you can actually turn them off if it's not relevant" (L45L6/257). The comments of Ian Lewis, serve as a useful summary of the characteristics which typify this group of informants. He had this to say about his response to his early parental upbringing: "I was from an agnostic household, as I still am myself ... their religious beliefs, if they had any effect, made me follow in their footsteps" (L35L7/414). Furthermore, efforts were made by these LNCAs to maintain the consistency of their secular beliefs whenever challenges of a religious nature entered the equation, confirming once again Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Ian Lewis, for example, commented that whilst he didn't have an entirely closed mind to religious belief: "I am also a human being with this terrible need to put it all in boxes and sort it out" (ibid.:193). Thus, the exact opposite occurred to those who endeavoured to maintain the internal consistency of their religious belief systems, i.e. the same principle was applied to the maintenance of secular belief systems. Propositions P1 and P5 therefore apply to the adoption of secular beliefs as well as religious beliefs.

4.5.3 Reporting the testing of propositions P2 - P4

In effect, this chapter has already discussed evidence related to early socialization which supports propositions P2 - P4.[10] Table 4.2 provides some useful data in support of proposition P3 due to the predominant association of positive exemplars with CAs and negative exemplars with LNCAs. This needs to be considered in relation to the above evidence which shows that a) CA parents and CA role models were mainly associated with CA informants, whereas b) NCA parents and NCA role models were mainly associated with NCA informants. There was also a gradual absence of CAs in the networks of informants in the lower belief importance levels until at the lowest importance level there was an almost total absence of CAs during the informants' early socialization. These findings give further credence to propositions P2 - P4. Chapter Five reports the further testing of these propositions in relation to the more recent and current networks of the informants.

4.5.4 Gender and belief transmission during childhood

A specific question about the gender of the main transmitter of religious beliefs within the parental home was not asked during the interviews although in retrospect this may have been useful. Nevertheless, of the 28 informants who were brought up religiously at home (regardless of whether the beliefs were rejected in later life), the predominant alters involved with the positive exemplars discussed in this chapter were as follows: eight of these informants mentioned their mother as the main influence, two informants made reference to the influence of their fathers and two informants said their grandmothers were highly influential. Ten of these informants mentioned the influence of both parents and the remaining six informants did not speak about either parent as being particularly influential. Mothers, as a singular influence, are therefore more predominant among this interview sample although the joint influence of both parents appears to be equally important. This may, in fact, be a more accurate

---

[10] See pages 138-139.

indication of the involvement of mothers than if a specific question had been asked on this issue since it was left to the informants to raise the matter only if it was significant to them.

4.6 CONCLUSION

With the exception of converts who were not brought up religiously (where the evidence is not entirely conclusive) there appears to be overwhelming support for each of the propositions advanced in this chapter. A number of binary oppositions have been cited to explain the differences between the early experiences of CAs and NCAs. Furthermore, a dialectic has been identified between, on the one hand, network opportunities in the form of positive, neutral or negative exemplars of network alters and, on the other hand, the responses of ego to those exemplars in the form of an acceptance, questioning or rejection of the beliefs of alters. It has been further identified that the social basis of the response by ego is simultaneously fused with a psychological need in ego for the reduction of cognitive dissonance. In most cases, early experiences of socialization had a profound affect on future belief outcomes by providing a foundation for current religious or secular belief. Primary socialization thus needs to be considered as a crucial phase of individual development in terms of the formation of a religious or secular belief system. The next chapter will explore how the nature of the dialectic (mentioned above) changes once the foundation for a belief system has been laid in the life of each individual informant.

On the basis of this conclusion, and prior to the next chapter, the first stage of a network model can now be presented. Although this appears to be very simple, the model will be extended in the next chapter to take into account current networks (which has the effect of making the model more complex).

4.7 A NETWORK MODEL: FORMER CONTACTS

Figure 4.1

OPPORTUNITY SET 1:[11] FORMER CONTACTS	EGO: INITIAL BELIEF FORMATION	EFFECT ON CURRENT BELIEF SYSTEM OF EGO
Predominantly predetermined alters with some limited selection of alters by ego.		
Positive, neutral or negative exemplars.	Acceptance, questioning or rejection in response to exemplars.	

---
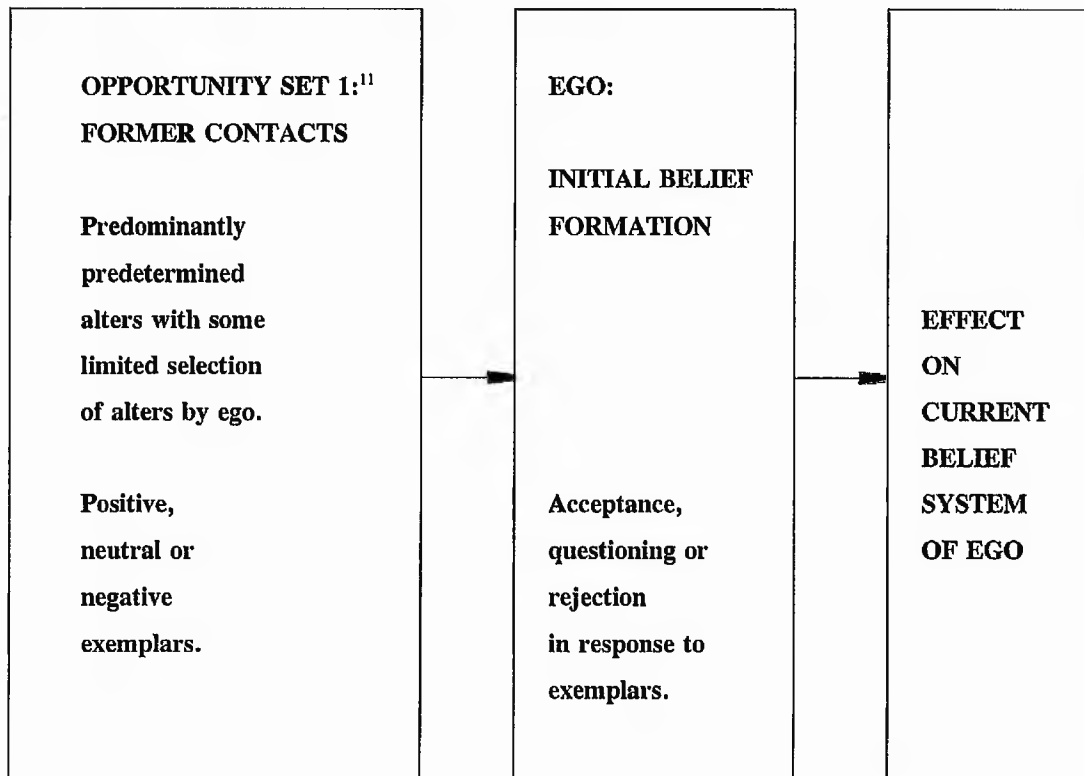
[11] 'Opportunity Set 1' refers to the first of two major sets of opportunities for the formation of social ties between ego and alters. The second set of opportunities relates to all subsequent potential network alters (i.e. the source of current network contacts). This is explained in the next chapter and is included in the developed 'social network model' which appears on page 193.

CHAPTER FIVE

ELABORATION OF THE MODEL: CURRENT NETWORKS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

It was argued in Chapter Four that the informants' early socialization provided a foundation for the formation of their religious or secular beliefs. The belief formation of the informants was found to be the result of a dialectic between alter exemplars and ego responses to those exemplars, thus supporting the network dependency hypothesis formulated in Chapter One. The present chapter explores how this dialectic is generally replaced by a process of belief maintenance[1] once the overall ego response is established. It is proposed that, generally speaking, the maintenance of the established ego response (as the ongoing basis of current beliefs) has a profound effect upon ego's choice of current network alters (whenever the selection of alters is an option).[2] This process of religious or secular belief maintenance is further proposed to have, simultaneously, both social and psychological components, i.e. social in terms of the availability and choice of network alters and psychological (again, drawing upon Festinger, 1985) in terms of the avoidance of cognitive dissonance and the pursuit of cognitive consonance which simultaneously affects the choice of network alters.

The present chapter will therefore explore the issue of current networks through the formulation of two more testable propositions, both based on the network dependency hypothesis, one of which is directly linked to the above argument concerning the process of religious or secular belief maintenance. The testing of these propositions will then be reported, along with propositions P2 - P4[3] (on the relationship between CAs and NCAs) which are also relevant to this chapter. Reporting the testing of the

---

[1] The current chapter will focus on that which occurs in the majority of cases. Exceptions, in the form of radical belief modifications by ego, are discussed in Chapter Seven.

[2] See note on selected and non-selected alters in 'Terms and Abbreviations'.

[3] See pages 138-139.

latter propositions continues one of the main themes of enquiry presented in Chapter One, namely, the postulated severance of network links between CAs and NCAs. At the end of the current chapter, the social network model which was partially constructed in the previous chapter will be developed to illustrate the overall picture of current network interaction in relation to former contacts. Finally, as in the previous chapter, any gender differences in the data will be given due consideration wherever it is relevant.

5.2 THE BELIEFS OF EGO AND CURRENT NETWORK ALTERS

At the end of Chapter One the following area of general enquiry for the present chapter was specified as:

ii) The relationship between the religious or secular beliefs held by ego and the religious or secular beliefs held by current network alters.

The main focus of this chapter will therefore be upon the religious or secular beliefs of both ego and alters in relation to the informants' current networks. On this particular issue the literature is very sparse indeed. In fact it is almost non-existent. In Chapter One it was pointed out that the work of Roof (1978) and his critics (e.g. Lehman, 1986, 1990; Eisinga, Lammers and Peters, 1990, 1991) on the subject of localism and the work of Fischer (1982) on urbanism, all omit an ego-centred network analysis of the beliefs held by ego and alters within personal networks. White (1968), Welch (1981), Herman (1984), Ellison and George (1994) and Bradley (1995) all discuss various types of networks inhabited by CAs but, again, provide no evidence to clarify if there is an association between the religious or secular beliefs held by ego and alters. Studies on religious conversions by Lofland (1965), Stark (1965), Lofland and Stark (1965, 1966), Heirich (1977), Cavendish, Welch and Leege (1998), Miller (1995), Gartrell and Shannon (1985), Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson (1980, 1983), Olson (1989), and Kox, Meeus and Hart (1991) come closest to the objectives of the current thesis since they all mention, to *some* degree, the importance of socialization

and the importance of social contacts in the process of conversion. But, as indicated in Chapter One, none of these studies involve an examination of ego-centred social networks in relation to all types of belief through to unbelief, neither is any attempt made to examine the interrelationship between early socialization and current networks. It needs to be stressed again that the present thesis is unique in this respect. The following propositions related to these issues are therefore without precedent.

5.2.1 Current network propositions

Propositions P2 - P4[4] on the lack of interaction between CAs and NCAs have already been outlined in the previous chapter. Closely associated with these propositions is the following proposition P6 which concerns the relational proximity of alters within the networks of the informants. It would be useful first to reiterate the network dependency hypothesis to retain a tight focus on the overall thesis. The network dependency hypothesis states:

> *Personal social networks are intrinsically associated with the content and expression of each individual's system of religious belief or unbelief and form the primary social arena wherein religious belief or unbelief is formulated, maintained, modified and transmitted.*

If personal social networks form the primary social arena for the *maintenance* of religious or secular belief systems (the subject matter of this chapter), then one would expect those alters who are highly relationally proximate to ego (according to the measures of relational proximity outlined in Chapter Two) to share similar belief systems. Common sense would suggest that if these belief systems are radically different between ego and HRP alters[5] it would be much more difficult for ego to maintain a coherent and consonant belief system. Furthermore, Allan (1989:59-60) discusses the importance of friendship for the sense of identity it provides, which

---

[4] See pages 138-139.

[5] See list of 'terms and abbreviations'.

leads to relationships based upon equality and similarity:

> One further aspect of friendship's role in cementing identity stems from the equality that lies at the heart of these relationships. In essence, spending time socialising with others in relationships which are culturally defined as both voluntary and equal leads to an identification with those others. Despite any difference in temperament or personality there might be between you, the fact you are friends is taken as indicative of similarity (ibid.:60).

This might be extended to time spent socialising with kin, as well as with friends. In adulthood people generally socialise with kin on a voluntary basis and can sometimes become alienated from one another if differences become too acute.[6] A further logical extension of Allan's observations is that ego is likely to select alters with similar beliefs, whether religious or secular. The assumption of ego and HRP alters sharing similar belief systems requires verification however, in the light of empirical evidence, hence the testing of proposition P6. Thus, if the network dependency hypothesis is true, it follows that:

P6:   There will be a similarity between the religious or secular beliefs held by ego and the religious or secular beliefs held by current network alters who are highly relationally proximate to ego.

The testing of this proposition and propositions P2 - P4 will be reported first. Subsequently, a further proposition (P7) will be formulated in relation to the issues raised above concerning the social and psychological components involved in the process of belief maintenance. The present chapter will then report the testing of proposition P7 prior to the elaboration and completion of the social network model, based upon this discussion.

---

[6] One example from the current data concerns Peter Gregson distancing himself from his brother when his brother became a 'born again' Christian.

5.2.2 Reporting the testing of proposition P6

When reporting the testing of the propositions featured in the previous chapter it was possible to draw upon the data obtained from the initial 500 questionnaire survey. This is not possible in the present chapter due to the lack of current network questions included in the questionnaire.[7] On the other hand, the interviews were used to collect a considerable amount of data related to the current networks of the informants. The following Table 5.1 summarizes some of the key data in this respect, which is relevant to the testing of proposition P6 together with the other propositions featured in this chapter.

Table 5.1 requires a brief explanation prior to its presentation. The mean scores given in this table are derived from more detailed tables featured in Appendix VIII. It will be recalled from the list of terms and abbreviations that 'religious alters' are all individuals within the social network of ego with some form of religious beliefs. As discussed in Chapter Two, the informants were questioned about the strength of these beliefs held by the alters in their networks, which were then classified as strong, moderate or weak. Table 5.1 refers to these classifications and to the categories of high, medium and low levels of relational proximity between ego and alters. The latter categories are based upon the measurements of relational proximity given in Chapter Two. The final two columns of Table 5.1 refer to a) the numbers of informants (as a proportion of the total number of interviewees in each belief importance category) who said they do not know the beliefs of at least one other person in their network and b) the numbers of informants (as a similar proportion) who said they never discuss religious belief with at least one other person in their network. It would also be useful to reiterate that the numbers within the informants' networks are based upon a) three or four people with whom each informant was in contact most frequently and b) three or four people in whom each informant confided the most. These numbers were not applied rigidly, however, but were used as a general guide. Thus, if the informants mentioned more than four people of each type,

---

[7] The reasons for omitting network questions on the questionnaire were given in Chapter Two.

these were given the same amount of attention and their scores, etc, were entered into the calculations for Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 follows on the next page:

Table 5.1 Current network mean scores

	No. of Religious Alters/ No. in Network			Relational Proximity of Religious Alters			Belief Strengths of HRP Alters	Religious Alters Strength of Beliefs			No. of CAs in network/ No. in network		No knowledge of beliefs/ No. in category		Never discuss beliefs/ No. in category
	FRACTION		%	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW		STRONG	MODERATE	WEAK	FRACTION	%	FRACTION	%	FRACTION %
CA N = 8	3.6/4.9		74	2.9	0.8	0.3	2.3 S 0.5 M 0.1 W	2.9	0.5	0.8	24/39	62	1/8	13	2/8 25
HIGH N = 10	3.5/6.1		57	2.9	0.3	0.3	0.6 S 1.4 M 0.9 W	1.0	1.5	1.0	9/61	15	7/10	70	7/10 70
MEDIUM N = 8	3.1/7.0		45	1.9	1.1	0.1	- S 1.4 M 0.5 W	0.8	1.8	0.8	9/56	16	3/8	38	5/8 63
LOW N = 12	2.3/5.4		43	1.7	0.7	-	0.4 S 0.3 M 1.0 W	0.7	0.4	1.3	11/65	17	8/12	67	11/12 92

171

Proposition P6 will now be considered with reference to the above summary table and to the general interview data. The focus of proposition P6 is on the similarity of beliefs between ego and current HRP alters. Table 5.1 gives some indication of underlying belief similarities in this respect. From the first section of the above table it is clear that the proportion of religious alters in the networks of the informants is much higher among CAs (74%) decreasing to 57% among HNCAs, and down to 45% among MNCAs and 43% among LNCAs. The proportion of religious alters among HNCAs is still considerably higher than the proportions of religious alters in the lower belief importance categories, which one might expect if proposition P6 is true, although the factors of relational proximity and strength of religious beliefs have yet to be entered into the equation. In parenthesis, there is no direct comparison between these percentages and the average number of CA alters in the informants' networks because, apart from the 62% of CA alters in the CA informants' networks, *all* of the other categories indicated very low percentages of CA alters in their networks, i.e. between 15% - 17% (see fifth section of the table). Thus, informants within the NCA categories tended not to involve CAs among those whom they contacted most frequently or among those in whom they confided the most.[8] Nevertheless, before proposition P6 can be tested fully, the relational proximity scores need to be taken into consideration.

The second section of the table is more directly relevant to proposition P6, where the data show that the average number of religious alters who were highly relationally proximate to the informants is much higher for both the CA and HNCA belief importance categories, with both categories scoring an average of 2.9 alters. This contrasts with the 1.9 and 1.7 average scores for the respective lower belief importance categories. For these lower categories the religious alters were therefore kept at a greater 'social distance' in terms of measures of relational proximity, which is again consistent with proposition P6.

Almost inevitably, the alter with the highest relational proximity to ego was generally

---

[8] This, incidentally, supports propositions P2 - P4 although these propositions will be discussed further on.

the partner[9] of ego. In the majority of these relationships, the partners shared the same belief system. In about 25% of the cases, whilst sharing the same beliefs, one of the partners had slightly stronger beliefs than the other. Rather surprisingly there was no difference between male and female - in some instances the male had slightly stronger beliefs than the female and vice versa. With regard to the partners who shared the same beliefs, there were, however, two exceptions: Nicola Sims and Lindsay Kennedy. Both of these informants were CAs but they became Christians *after* they were married. Lindsay, for example, said that whilst her husband remained sympathetic to her beliefs, it caused her a certain amount of difficulty in the relationship. She commented:

> Now my husband, he isn't a Christian yet. He's come so close. He won't be long sort of thing. He's gone from an agnostic to a believer but he just doesn't believe in his heart yet - but he will. (C35M4/179)

Lindsay was obviously anxious that their beliefs would eventually be in alignment. The high degree of relational proximity of this relationship was most likely working in her favour in terms of the achievement of this belief alignment (in the sense that her husband would be subjected to constant interaction with Lindsay who would challenge his own belief system). Nevertheless, her own belief system was strengthened and supported through several Christian friends who were also highly relationally proximate to Lindsay. The importance of these friendships to balance the difficulties she experienced in relation to her husband's beliefs is concisely captured in her comment about her close Christian friend Beverley who shared similar thoughts and feelings about similar social circumstances: "Beverley and I have comforted one another in our spiritual widowhood" (45). The phrase: 'spiritual widowhood' clearly indicates the sense of isolation which both felt from their husbands with regard to their beliefs. The interview also conveyed the intensity of the desire felt by several of the informants to be 'at one' with their partners with regard to their belief systems.

The mutual 'belief support' which Lindsay gained from her relationships with HRP

---

[9] The word: 'partner' refers also to the spouse of ego.

alters was likewise experienced by Nicola Sims and, in fact, between ego and HRP alters on all belief importance levels regardless of whether the belief was religious or secular. It was simply the social details surrounding the mutual support that differed. On the whole the relationships between HRP alters and ego served to maintain the belief system of ego irrespective of the type of belief held by ego. The following typical examples from the data clearly illustrate how lower belief levels can be maintained with relative ease through interaction with like-minded HRP alters. The experience of Emma Gordon, an informant in the MNCA category, was typical of other informants in this category although she reported an exceptionally wide network of alters. She mentioned nineteen most frequent or most intimate alters, only one of whom was a CA and only three others had religious beliefs. Furthermore, the latter four alters were reported to be in low relational proximity to Emma. This high number of alters has been used here to illustrate a principle common to the other accounts of the informants, namely, that alters with dissimilar beliefs tend to be kept at a 'social distance' (as mentioned above) whereas HRP alters tend to hold similar belief systems to ego. Those in high relational proximity to Emma tended to participate together in walking - an activity about which Emma enthused as a child. Emma was the informant mentioned in Chapter Four who had a 'Wordsworthian' type of spirituality which she acquired during childhood whilst walking in the Lake District with a friend who shared similar beliefs. It was mentioned by Emma that during these walks with her current network alters (who also shared similar beliefs), people occasionally brought up the subject of spiritual matters. She remarked: "Something will spark a conversation and we'll have a debate about it" (M26M8/108). The HRP alters in Emma's current network therefore enabled the same type of social situation she had experienced in childhood to continue into adulthood and thereby facilitated the maintenance of the spiritual beliefs she had acquired many years earlier.

The maintenance of the agnosticism of Caroline Abrahams, Ian Lewis and William Remmington and others in the low belief importance category likewise may be explained in part by the lack of HRP religious alters in their current networks. For example, even though two alters with strong religious beliefs were mentioned in the current network of Caroline Abrahams, they were both on low levels of relational

proximity, reflecting a pattern common to the majority of interviewees in this category. The above data therefore supports proposition P6 along with the associated argument that difficulties are minimized in maintaining a belief system when religious alters are highly relationally proximate among CAs and HNCAs but are kept at a social distance for the lower belief importance level informants.

This social distancing does not merely involve the low relational proximity of religious alters among the lower belief importance categories. Discussion of religious belief also declines as the belief importance levels diminish. The final column of Table 5.1 shows that a staggering 92% of low belief importance level informants have never discussed religious belief with at least one of the alters in their networks compared with just 25% of CAs when the same criteria is applied. Similarly, the penultimate column of Table 5.1 shows a similar gap between the percentages of CAs (13%) and LNCAs (67%) who have no knowledge of the beliefs of at least one of the alters in their networks. Thus, CAs tend to know what other people within their close networks of most frequent and most intimate contacts believe whereas religious belief is talked about far less among NCAs, whatever the belief importance level. Therefore the beliefs of many NCA alters remain unknown to the NCA informants. This lack of discussion of religious beliefs coupled with the low relational proximity of religious alters among the LNCAs in particular, results in few challenges to the belief systems of LNCAs, at least, from a religious perspective. When LNCAs do discuss the subject, they tend to discuss *unbelief*, thereby reinforcing their agnosticism, atheism or whichever secular world view they hold, which again provides support for proposition P6. Ian Lewis, for example, discussed with his mother their lack of belief in an afterlife, even when she knew she did not have long to live:

> Basically we're in tune with what we both think and during our lengthily discussions (as lengthy as her health permitted) we didn't make any headway at all, and still ended up completely in the dark. The hospice chaplin came round and she gave him very short shrift, because like me, she's quite annoyed by people who know that they know. This tiny little speck, this person that you couldn't even see if you were on a rocket ship going to the moon - this little speck knows on my behalf my way to eternal life. And we think that's laughable if you are in a good mood or insulting if you're in a bad mood ... I still haven't got a clue. And I don't believe anybody has a clue. But I do

believe there are large numbers of people fooling themselves - here's a controversial thought - fooling themselves with a faith, because they need so much to cling on in this world to something. (L35L7/149)

The above quotation also illustrates how other people holding religious beliefs (in this case the hospice chaplin) are generally given very little time by LNCAs, if at all, for discussions about religion.

Tim Knight, another LNCA (who incidently did not know the beliefs of *any* of the alters in his network) said that his wife had more time for religion than he did himself but that they never discussed the subject, hence making the maintenance of his agnostic position that much easier. Tim similarly curtailed a discussion about religion with a new neighbour immediately the subject was introduced. This incident took place when he and his family moved to a new area:

> This bloke came around the day we moved in. And I just thought he was being friendly. He said he came from up the road and how traumatic moving was ... and I thought oh, what a nice bloke. And then it came. [He said] I think sometimes we need, we need to put our faith in someone. I thought, you ******* ! (L35M19/565)

Tim was angered by this incident. This was not entirely due to the introduction of religion into the conversation *per se*. This neighbour would also appear to have transgressed an unwritten social norm: that one does not immediately discuss religion with a stranger, unless of course they are carrying out a genuine research project![10] Although there were exceptions, the majority of the LNCAs were generally defensive about engaging in lengthy discussions about religion with alters. With some informants in this category it appeared that the subject of religion was regarded as a potential threat to be avoided, reflecting Festinger's (1956, 1985) argument about the need to avoid situations or information which might increase cognitive dissonance.[11]

---

[10] More details on this subject are given in Chapter Seven which discusses various relational mechanisms which inhibit the transmission of religious belief in the modern world.

[11] This issue will be held in abeyance here although it will receive attention further on in relation to another proposition (P7).

Other factors also lend support to proposition P6. The overall strength of the religious alters' beliefs varies across the belief importance categories. The fourth section of Table 5.1 shows an average of 2.9 alters indicating strong religious beliefs among the CAs compared to just 0.7 alters on average among the LNCAs. Section three of Table 5.1 concerns the belief strengths of the HRP alters and, when considered along with the detailed information from which the figures for section three were derived, provides the most revealing information in this respect. The LNCA category is virtually an inverted version of the figures given for the CA category, i.e. most of the HRP alters in the CA category were SRAs[12] whereas most of the HRP alters in the LNCA category were WRAs. Moreover, in the CA category *every* informant reporting HRP religious alters in their networks had at least one SRA in their network and in the majority of these cases *all* of the HRP religious alters had strong religious beliefs. This gives further credence to proposition P6 and has a bearing on propositions P2 - P4 which now follow.

5.2.3 Reporting the testing of propositions P2 - P4[13]

Each of these propositions will now be considered in turn. The first states that:

P2   *A gulf exists between the personal networks of CAs and NCAs.*

Section 5.2.2 drew attention to the differences in the proportions of CA alters in the networks of CAs and NCAs. These differences, shown in Table 5.1, are quite striking (CAs 62%, NCAs 15% - 17%). It was also mentioned above that the majority of informants in the CA category had networks in which *all* of the HRP religious alters had strong religious beliefs. Most of these alters also attended churches although not necessarily the same church as ego. In fact very few ego / alter relationships in the CA category were centred on a single church. Most CA informants were in contact

---

[12] SRA refers to Strong Religious Alter, i.e. a religious alter with strong religious beliefs. See list of terms and abbreviations for other category abbreviations.

[13] See pages 138-139.

with alters who attended other churches and therefore, on the whole, the only network ties were between ego and alter rather than between alter and alter. The key point here is that CAs tended predominantly to interact with one another irrespective of which church they attended. Far less social interaction took place between these CAs and NCA alters in their networks, apart from Lindsay Kennedy and Nicola Sims whose husbands were NCAs. The latter informants nevertheless had the support of other HRP CAs to help them to maintain their religious beliefs.

One might have expected the networks of CAs to have been more densely knit[14] than NCA networks but this was clearly not the case in Grange Park. Mark Saunders was the only exception in this respect. Mark attended a local Charismatic Community Church where relationships among church members did tend to be more closed to the outside world and where there was more likelihood of Mark developing a dense personal network. It was mentioned in section 5.2.2 that informants in the NCA categories tended not to involve CAs in their close networks. This could also be due, of course, to the possibility that CAs lack the will to involve NCAs in *their* networks. This did appear to concern Mark Saunders somewhat. Speaking about the Church in general, Mark commented:

> If anything I think it's a bit too insular. It tends to look inward rather a lot.
> I think it needs to look outward. I've got a note up here: God is challenging
> us outside the Church, not inside. And I just remind myself of that. I think
> we need to take ourselves to the people ... I do believe as a Church we can
> sometimes be very inward looking, very much of a clique, and sit very
> comfortably where we are. Thank God I'm saved sort of thing. But there's
> such need out in the world. I think we need to take the church to the people.
> (C35M22/664)

This tendency of CAs to be inward looking towards those who hold similar beliefs may help to explain why the CAs had far more CA alters in their networks than the NCAs even when these CA alters were from churches other than the church attended by ego.

---

[14] It was mentioned in Chapter Two that network density refers to connections between alters.

The NCA categories are very similar in terms of the numbers of CA alters involved in their networks. In the HNCA category there was a high percentage of religious alters involved in their networks but *very* few of these were CAs, thereby continuing a trend encountered during their earlier formative years. In the medium belief importance category the 'social distancing' of CAs has already been mentioned with reference to Emma Gordon's personal network, where only one alter out of a total of nineteen was a CA of low relational proximity. The informants in both the medium and low belief importance categories tended to keep CAs at a social distance. All of these observations provide unequivocal support for proposition P2.

Indeed, Adrian Dempster in the HNCA category felt that a gulf between CAs and NCAs not only existed but would possibly eventually lead to the demise of traditional religion, hence he stressed the importance of a need for religious education in schools:

> Everyone used to hate it [religious education] when I was at school but at the end of the day it was the only chance I ever had in my life to pick up that culture. And if it's no longer taught, when do those people pick up that culture? ... I think if you don't have that bridge of education at school ... you will either be a family that goes to church or a family that doesn't go to church. People have still got this entrenched belief that they ought to get married in a church, they ought to get Christened and they ought to get, have a church service when they die, a burial service or whatever ... if education takes that away from people then even that will start failing. And that is the one time I think when churches do pick up some of their followers. Which is sad. If you are a family of churchgoers then you will be a churchgoer, and then you will do that out of habit and then perhaps your children will become that. So you will have these two entirely different societies, churchgoers and non-churchgoers and they don't impact on each other. So because they don't have realistic perceptions of the value of one against the other, people won't make the move between them ... we do have that as an issue. (H45M28/863)

Evidence of a gulf between CAs and NCAs therefore not only exists in the data concerning the numbers of CA alters in the networks of the informants, but also in terms of some of the comments made by the informants, such as those of Adrian Dempster and Mark Saunders, about the lack of interaction between the Church and those outside it.

179

Moving on to the next proposition, P3 states:

P3:   *If ego is a CA, it is highly likely that some form of network connection exists*
        or existed with other CAs at some time during ego's past experience.

The above discussion certainly provides evidence of social interaction between CAs and CA alters within current networks. In Chapter Four, it was also observed that the majority of CAs had contact with other CAs during childhood and adolescence. There were, however, two CAs who were converts whose interaction with CAs during these formative years was somewhat unclear. The question remains of whether a network connection was formed between CAs and these two respondents which ultimately led to their current church attendance. A closer study of these converts' accounts would also help to answer the other question raised in Chapter Four which concerns the 7% of females from the stage one questionnaire survey who were not brought up religiously but who are now current CAs, namely: what led to them becoming CAs?

Religious alters were very much involved in Lindsay Kennedy's conversion and subsequent church attendance. Lindsay's doctor seemed to be the final link in a chain of events which were all related to network contacts with religious alters. Lindsay deemed her doctor to be a fine Christian example who had prayed with her non-Christian father the day before her father died. The doctor subsequently informed Lindsay: "We've been praying together and your father has given his life to the Lord".[15] Lindsay then reflected on what he had done:

> I'll be eternally grateful to him for that. So he was a man who had an
> influence I suppose, that doctor. He practised what he preached ... He was
> wonderful. He had no inhibitions about it. Came straight out with it. Turns
> out he was Pentecostal. (C35M4/528)

Two months after this incident Lindsay became a committed Christian herself, which constitutes convincing evidence of network influence, not only from her interaction with the doctor but from her previous network encounters at school, Sunday School

---

[15] C35M4/514

and with a Christian friend of ten years duration. From her comments earlier in the interview, these network contacts were linked with her search for faith which in one sense had the effect of making her much more receptive and welcoming of the doctor's rather forthright approach. Such an approach could well have met with a much more negative response from *some* of the informants in the lower belief level categories when one takes into account their negative interactions with religious alters. From the previous quotations from Tim Knight and Ian Lewis, for example, it is highly unlikely that if they had been in the same situation their reaction to this doctor would have been favourable. In Tim's situation the mere mention of the word 'faith' was sufficient for him to object to the conversation with his neighbour. Likewise, Ian and his mother had no time for the hospice chaplin. Notwithstanding the emotional circumstances of the doctor's visit, Lindsay Kennedy's previous positive encounters with religious alters, over a considerable period of time, arguably predisposed her to a positive encounter with her doctor at that particular moment.

Two aspects of Nicola Sims' account were very similar to that given by Lindsay. First, there were some CA alters involved in her life prior to her own enthusiastic involvement with the church. She was in contact with a female curate *and* a female priest who was a member of her family, both of whom had a profound effect upon her thinking. Commencing with the curate, Nicola related the following:

> She was taking me for the confirmation lessons and she became a friend as well. She and I used to have long, long chats, and she was just very sensible in things. And also in my husbands family we have a priest, a lady priest ... some of the things she has said, yes, have, have made me think. She's very open to questioning. Very open to, like the Jesus bit. My mother-in-law was saying to her, you know, that's sometimes a bit difficult to believe isn't it and she says absolutely. There was no shock or anything. No absolutely, of course it's difficult to believe it. She said, sometimes I don't believe in it at all. And yet she's a priest, an ordained priest ... But she's a very devout faith, really, a very deep faith ... And she's a very nice lady. (C26M35/865)

Nicola, whose occupation was in the field of science, seemed to be very much relieved that it was possible to engage in a religious faith whilst having doubts and being able to deal with those doubts. This female priest seemed to perform the same

function as the doctor in Lindsay's account, in the sense that they legitimated for these two informants the physical and metaphysical move from NCA to CA. Secondly, there was also a death involved which precipitated the turning point in Nicola's experience, in this case, the death of her baby son. Very shortly after he died, Nicola had a spiritual experience of his presence in the room. This experience was also instrumental in giving her sufficient belief in the spiritual realm to become a CA.

Of course, these two case studies cannot account for the 7% of female survey respondents who had more recently become CAs, but there may be some general principles involved here. The involvement of a stressful experience and contact with religious alters (along with the evaluations of the belief systems by the religious alters themselves) were the main factors involved in these two conversion accounts. This made the adoption of a personal religious faith more credible to them having given them the basis for an alternative sense of root reality. This is consistent with the findings of Heirich (1977) when testing the logic of 50 previous studies of conversions. It is also consistent with the thesis of Gartrell and Shannon (1985) on the evaluations of beliefs by alters, and with the thesis of Snow, *et al* (1980, 1983) on the role of social networks. The stressful experience of death or impending death would appear to be insufficient in itself to cause a religious response unless religious alters had been involved to a considerable degree in the lives of these respondents. The views of Ian Lewis discussed above illustrates the likely type of response to this type of situation if religious alters are not involved either in current networks or as former network contacts.

Finally, proposition P4 states:

P4: *If ego has had minimal network contact with CAs and network interaction is predominantly with NCAs it is highly likely that ego will not hold traditional religious beliefs and will not be a CA.*

This proposition has already been addressed in part by the above evidence. Table 5.1 clearly shows minimal contact between NCAs and current network CAs and it was discussed above that if CAs *were* included in the networks of NCAs they tended to

182

be kept at a social distance. Proposition P4 therefore holds true in terms of non-church attendance being associated with current minimal social interaction between NCAs and CAs.

Proposition P4 also holds true with regard to the likelihood of the informant not holding traditional beliefs if there has been minimal contact with CAs. This aspect of the proposition needs to take into account former network contacts with CAs, however, since not all of the NCAs held non-traditional beliefs - hence a brief reference is required to former network contacts at this juncture. *All* of the NCAs with traditional beliefs mentioned contacts with CAs during their childhood and/or stated that religious education had been given a high priority in the schools which they had attended. On the other hand, of the sixteen informants who held non-traditional beliefs, fourteen were characterized by minimal contact with CAs during childhood as well as during adulthood.[16] These data therefore offer convincing confirmation of proposition P4.

5.3 EXPLAINING BELIEF SIMILARITIES BETWEEN EGO AND ALTERS

From the above discussion, and from further detailed examples of the data which follow in this section, the empirical evidence related to the beliefs of ego and alters suggests the tendency of ego to select like-minded current alters whenever selection is an option. This is consistent with Fischer's (1982) network study of 1,050 adults living in fifty northern California communities, in which he states:

> By adulthood, people have *chosen* their networks. This idea of choice is an important matter. It often seems in sociology and social commentary that individual agency does not exist ... the source of people's actions is assumed to be social institutions and forces ... Network analysis stresses individual agency ... We each *build a network* - which is one part of *building a life*. And in all this activity, we make choices as best we can to attain the values we

---

[16] The current belief types (together with definitions of these belief types) of the 39 informants are given in two tables in Appendices IX and X. The table in Appendix X indicates whether or not there was minimal contact between the informants and CA alters during childhood.

hold dear. Of course these are hardly free choices; they are constrained. In building networks we are constrained by the pool of people available to us ... by the available information ... by our own personalities ... by society's rules and by social pressure (1982:4).

And he continues:

Within their constraints and their preferences, people tend to build networks composed of others very similar to themselves in background, position, personality, and way of life ... People tend to associate with people like themselves (ibid.:6).

The data from the current study suggest that this extends to people's religious or secular belief systems. The reason why people choose to associate with others like themselves, Fischer argues, is because: "People are more at ease with like-minded others: the relationships are more rewarding and comfortable" (ibid.:181). This does not, however, give a fully sufficient and satisfactory explanation of why this selection of like-minded others takes place.

The use of Festinger's (1956, 1985) theory of cognitive dissonance again facilitates a more convincing answer in that he argues there is a human need to reduce cognitive dissonance by avoiding situations or information which might increase that dissonance and to pursue cognitive consonance. This would, of course, involve the avoidance of *alters* who might create such situations or be a source of such information. It would also involve the seeking of alters who would reduce cognitive dissonance and maintain cognitive consonance. This explanation leads to the formulation of another proposition (P7) to test with the data:

P7:   *Ego will have a tendency to select like-minded alters in order to reduce ognitive dissonance and to maintain cognitive consonance, thereby maintaining the earlier established response of ego to the exemplars of alters.*

In other words, it is proposed that the established response of ego to the exemplars of alters, discussed in Chapter Four, continues to be maintained in the majority of cases through ego's choice of like-minded network alters in later life (subject to the

184

constraints mentioned above by Fischer). Again, the fusion of sociological and psychological factors is clear, since it is proposed that the maintenance of the established response of ego also involves the avoidance of cognitive dissonance and therefore the avoidance of alters who might create that dissonance. It is not possible, of course, to observe the motivation of the informants directly. Indeed, the informants probably did not know what motivated their actions. But, within each account, one might expect to observe several conditions if the data are consistent with proposition P7: a) the beliefs of ego should be consistent with the earlier response of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood, b) the religious or secular beliefs of ego's chosen current network alters should be similar to the current beliefs of ego, particularly if those alters are in close relational proximity, and c) there should be evidence of ego's tendency to express reservations about - as well as to avoid or to keep at a social distance - alters who do not share the same belief system. There may also be other indications, such as d) if alters with different belief systems *are* admitted to the network of ego, this may be dependent upon certain conditions imposed by ego or by mutual agreement, such as the decision not to discuss religion, and e) there may be some more general instances whereby informants avoid information or situations which are contrary to their beliefs.

Chapters Four and Five have already provided numerous examples which are consistent with some of the above conditions. Chapter Four was replete with evidence supporting condition a), and the current chapter has provided much evidence in support of condition b). The following specific examples from the data place an emphasis on condition c).

Among the low belief importance level informants, the pattern (although not the details of the experience) which can be observed in Ann Williams' account is typical. Ann was not brought up to say prayers, to attend church or to attend Sunday School and religion was never discussed in her family. She had previously encountered a number of negative exemplars which had put Ann off organised religion and Ann had developed an agnostic outlook on life. This is consistent with the first condition noted above. The second condition, of a similarity between the beliefs held by ego and HRP

185

alters, is also applicable in this account. Ann remarked that she did not need the Church because she had her friends and family around her, all of whom held similar beliefs, apart from her husband who was slightly more anti-religious than Ann was herself. The third condition, concerning reservations about - or the avoidance or social distancing of - alters who do not share the same belief system as ego, can be observed in Ann's comments about some highly religious alters whom she met at a conference which she attended annually in relation to her son's hereditary, distressing, and unfortunately terminal, illness. She said that these religious alters insisted on leaving any future pregnancy decision 'in the hands of God' rather than considering terminating a pregnancy if the foetus was discovered to have the same disease from which her present child was suffering. Ann commented:

> I sometimes can't see their point of view and I'm thinking: how can you? [not consider termination of the pregnancy] - because we can be tested once you're pregnant now, once you know you are a carrier you can be tested at 11 weeks - I just can't understand that way of thinking.   (L26M33/198)

She also felt this type of religious reasoning created a barrier to the development of any friendship with such people. She said: "that's not my way of thinking and never in a million years probably [could I] relate to them anyway" (ibid.:200). Ann felt uncomfortable in their presence, hence, even though they were 'compelled' to meet each year at this conference, Ann maintained a social distance from them. This encounter also had the effect of causing Ann to continue to avoid taking religious belief seriously as she had done in the past. Such behaviour is consistent with proposition P7.

Tim Knight (the LNCA discussed above) was similarly uncomfortable engaging in any conversation at all with religious alters, hence his lack of knowledge of the beliefs of those within his personal network. The anger he felt towards his neighbour when religion was introduced to the conversation may be an indicator of this psychological need to avoid information which increases cognitive dissonance. Tim's agnostic stance which he had developed earlier in his life seemed to be placed under threat by encounters with religious alters which may well explain why he avoided such people.

In contrast to the LNCA category, the informants in the HNCA category were generally quite comfortable in the presence of religious alters due to the high degree of importance they attributed to their own beliefs (but they were not comfortable in the presence of CAs). It will be recalled that due to the NCA exemplars encountered during childhood and adolescence, they were generally not interested in Church religion and there were very few CA alters in their personal networks. If they encountered very zealous religious alters they therefore tended to avoid them or to view them with apprehension. The Christian beliefs of Peter Gregson, for example, were fairly traditional, having spent most of his formative years at a boarding school where these beliefs were taken seriously. Due to his traditional and fairly orthodox position, Peter expressed reservations about alters from either extreme, i.e. highly religious or atheist. During Peter's teenage years, whilst still at public school, both his close friend and his brother became ardent evangelical 'born-again' Christians. Peter described these conversions as 'disturbing' and 'quite a shock'. They also tended to be very forceful when sharing their views:

> I think I probably felt an aversion to it. Slightly insulted. But then again, that would always be the case if anybody tried to force their views upon me no matter what it was about. But particularly, probably with religion, because it's so personal, that somebody else trying to force their views upon you, I did not appreciate. I was uncomfortable with it. And that led to an initial loss of friendship with my friend, and to a certain extent with my brother as well. It alienated us, whereas before we had been quite close. It did alienate us for some time. (H35L2/266)

The former relationship Peter had with his brother was only restored when his brother's beliefs gradually came back into alignment with Peter's beliefs:

> He went through that and got it out of his system to the extent that he's still quite religious but nowhere near the same extent as the Evangelical Church he used to go to. (ibid.:158)

The same thing happened between Peter and his former close friend. The argument that cognitive dissonance led to this alienation and that a reduction in dissonance facilitated a reconciliation would be consistent with the data and offers a convincing

187

explanation. This is reinforced by Peter's equal aversion to atheists who challenged his belief system:

> Strong atheists do annoy me to a certain extent ... They tend to be very opinionated and I suppose because somebody is questioning your own beliefs ... it's so fundamental that it's annoying. (ibid.:316)

The generation of anger or annoyance in these examples indicates that dissonance between the beliefs held by ego and alters was sufficient to cause a degree of psychological discomfort.

In the MNCA category, it would be useful to cite Sarah Rogers' experience, as she had become a CA since receiving the initial questionnaire. Her experience is pertinent to this discussion in the sense that she was able to become a CA whilst retaining cognitive consonance by continuing to believe in an eclectic amalgamation of traditional Christian beliefs, spiritualism and yogic philosophy. All of these beliefs had been developed earlier in her life through early socialization and through contact with alters who attended yoga classes. Sarah was well aware that such beliefs would be condemned by many Christians holding more orthodox beliefs. There were four main reasons why she was able to maintain her idiosyncratic belief system whilst attending the local Evangelical Church. First, Sarah wanted to get her daughter baptized so she went to see the local vicar. This vicar was very amenable and created a favourable impression. She then started to attend church at his invitation. The reason for her positive view of the vicar was due to his accommodating attitude. Jennifer Reed (a CA mentioned previously, who went to the same church as Sarah) had similar spiritualist beliefs and she related the vicar's reaction to her own views:

> He was fine about it, he just says as long as we've all got something to believe, as long as we all have some faith, which makes us feel a better person, then that's fine. If that's what you want to pray to [i.e. departed spirits rather than God] then you pray to it, so he was very good about it. (C26M10/395)

The views of both Jennifer and Sarah therefore remained unchallenged by the vicar.

Second, there was no conflict in Sarah's mind concerning her own ideas, which she believed were perfectly consistent. For example, she commented that: "in yoga, when you talk about the universal energy, well what's the difference between talking about that and talking about God, there is no difference".[17] Third, whilst she talked with other Christians at her church she avoided discussion of her own beliefs:

> I've spoken to quite a few very committed Christians and seen a few articles in the local newspaper that sort of condemn yoga as something that you couldn't possibly do if you're a Christian ... I tend to keep the fact that I do yoga quiet ... it's something private to me and for me personally it's not conflicting views.   (M26M3/567)

The differences between Sarah's beliefs and those of many of the church members therefore prevented them from forming any close relationships. This may well reflect the need to avoid situations which cause cognitive dissonance. It also leads to the fourth and final point, that Sarah tended to interact the most with like-minded alters such as her friends from the yoga class. These four points meet condition d) which concerns the strategies adopted by ego when alters with different belief systems are admitted to the network of ego. It also illustrates the threat, felt by many CA Christians, from beliefs which they perceive to be contradictory to the doctrinal dogmas to which they subscribe. These CA Christians therefore either avoid or conceal alternative beliefs for fear of condemnation by their fellow CAs.

Even though the examples cited above are congruent with proposition P7, the question still remains as to why a significant difference in the beliefs of ego and alters should cause psychological discomfort. Berger (1969) and Berger and Luckmann's (1971) explanation of the social construction of reality is useful here. Given that socialization is never complete and that beliefs which have been internalized face "continuing threats to their subjective reality" (1971:166), psychological discomfort in the face of cognitive dissonance may be due to the potential exposure of the informants' belief systems for what they may well actually be in essence, viz. social constructions rather than 'given' absolutes. It is therefore a *sine qua non* to maintain the illusion of 'given

---

[17] M26M3/575

truths' about any particular belief system, if indeed illusion is the correct term. If Berger is correct, that "the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation" (1969:17), then 'disruptions' to conversation in the form of conflicting and dissonant views held by alters may well indeed be enough to cause ego's world "to totter and lose its subjective plausibility" (ibid.:17). Hence, any threat by alters which has the potential to dismantle the belief system of ego is either avoided or strategies are devised by ego to diminish the threat as much as possible.

When testing proposition P7 and indeed all of the network propositions in this chapter, no clear differences were identified either in terms of age or gender. These network principles apply to the informants irrespective of such variables. Moreover, there were no clear differences between the types of alters in whom the informants confided the most and the types of alters with whom they interacted most frequently. In fact, the two groups of alters (i.e. most frequent or most intimate) were *one and the same type* for 26 of the informants. In other words, those alters with whom they interacted most frequently were also the alters in whom they confided the most. For the remaining twelve[18] informants there was an equal balance of alters who were regarded *either* as most frequent *or* as most intimate alters, all of whom held similar beliefs to those held by the informants.

5.4 ELABORATION OF THE SOCIAL NETWORK MODEL

The propositions discussed above, which were built upon the propositions developed in Chapter Four, provide sufficient information to develop the model (presented at the end of Chapter Four). This model illustrates the overall picture of current network interaction in relation to former contacts (an area of enquiry where there is a dearth of sociological literature). Prior to the presentation of the model, the various levels of relational proximity between ego and alters requires further clarification. The following figure (5.1) illustrates various zones of relational proximity which are built

---

[18] No information was available concerning one informant on this issue.

into the social network model. The zones are based upon the previous measures of relational proximity divided into the three respective categories of high, moderate and low levels. The following measures therefore apply to the zones:

Relational Proximity Score

Zone 1:   17.0 - 22.0

Zone 2:   14.5 - 16.5

Zone 3:   6.5 - 14.0

Zone 4:   The realm of the stranger.

Zone One, being the closest zone to ego, therefore represents those alters in highest relational proximity to ego. Zone Four has also been added to Figure 5.1, which represents the 'realm of the stranger' - in other words, people who are completely unknown to ego or those who were previously known by ego but who now have no contact at all with ego. Figure 5.1 follows on the next page:

Figure 5.1   Zones of relational proximity
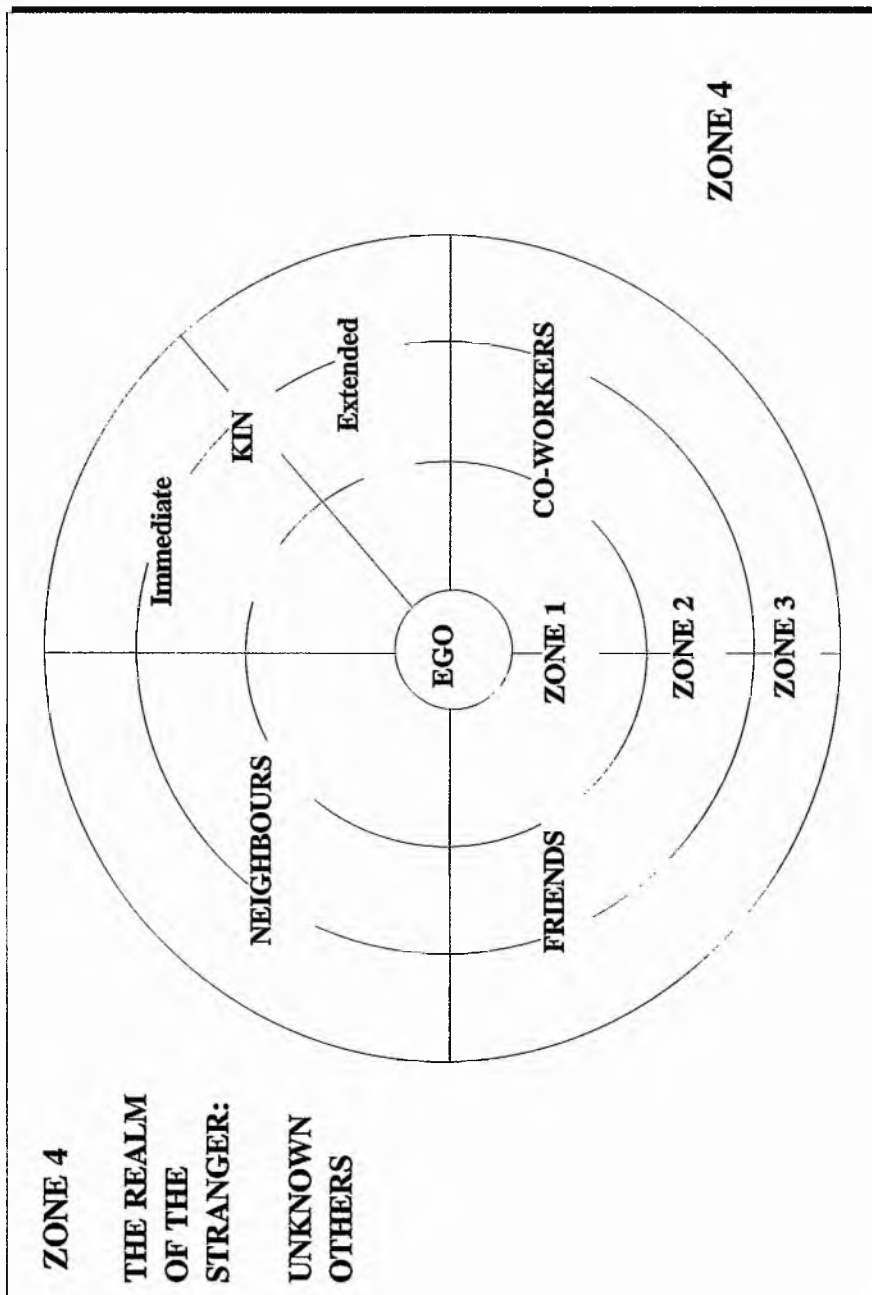
(N.B. Immediate and extended kin refer to the entire segments).

This figure was derived from Wellman and Berkowitz (1988:27) but it has been modified to accommodate the three levels of relational proximity used in the current research together with Zone Four representing the 'realm of the stranger' (Giddens, 1994a, 1994b). These zones are combined, together with elements from the partially constructed model presented in Chapter Four, to form the social network model which follows on the next page.

Fig 5.2   A SOCIAL NETWORK MODEL OF FORMER AND CURRENT CONTACTS

CURRENT UNSELECTED NETWORK ALTERS

From Opportunity Set 2

ZONE 1

ZONE 2

ZONE 3

ZONE 4

RELEGATED

REMAIN

CURRENT SELECTED NETWORK ALTERS

To maintain initial ego response to exemplars of alters

OPPORTUNITY SET 2

POTENTIAL NETWORK ALTERS

EGO:

INITIAL BELIEF FORMATION

ACCEPTANCE QUESTIONING OR REJECTION in response to exemplars

OPPORTUNITY SET 1

FORMER CONTACTS

Predetermined with some limited selection by ego

POSITIVE NEUTRAL & NEGATIVE EXEMPLARS

EGO RELATIONAL ZONES

N.B. The direction of causality remains the same, even though the arrows from the 'Current Unselected Network Alters' box are in the opposite direction. This is merely to simplify the appearance of the diagram.

193

5.5 CONCLUSION: CURRENT BELIEFS AND CAUSALITY

The subject of causality, in particular, arises in relation to this social network model. A key question concerns whether religious or secular belief follows on from network choices or forms the basis of network choices. The model shows that initially, ego is very limited in terms of choice of network alters. Ego is initially 'born into' a network which is largely predetermined. Religious or secular belief, therefore, does not precede the initial network. This network (Opportunity Set One)[19] is 'given'. Chapter Four has already shown that empirical evidence from the current study supports propositions related to the argument that early childhood in particular constitutes a crucial phase of socialization. It is during this period that the initial formulation of ego's belief system tends to be dependent upon a dialectic between the exemplars set by alters within 'Opportunity Set One' and ego's responses to those exemplars in the form of acceptance, questioning or rejection of the alters' belief systems. It was further reported in Chapter Four that the current data are consistent with the theory that this initial belief formulation process is accompanied by ego's desire to reduce cognitive dissonance and to maintain cognitive consonance.

The present chapter has reported the finding that, in the majority of cases, once ego's belief system has become established, the dialectic discussed above is replaced by an ongoing process of belief maintenance. This involves the interaction of ego with like-minded HRP alters, again, in order to reduce cognitive dissonance and to maintain cognitive consonance, which thereby maintains the earlier established response of ego to the exemplars of alters. The beliefs formed by early responses of ego to the exemplars of alters thus constitute one of the main criteria for making choices of current alters in later life and thus orientate ego's subsequent network decisions in a particular direction. Choice can only take place, however, where opportunities exist for the exercise of choice, hence the difference between Opportunity Set One (where

---

[19] The term: 'Opportunity Set' has been derived from Elster (1990). Elster has argued that all actions are filtered by certain constraints which he terms: 'the opportunity set' from which actions are subsequently chosen or even unconsciously selected (sometimes the opportunities available will be so few that the element of choice is negated entirely). Network relationships arguably present a series of constraints and could similarly be described, in theory, as opportunity sets through which the religious or secular beliefs of ego are filtered. Chapter Four explained that two major 'Opportunity Sets' are used in the model, which represent the sources from which social ties are formed between ego and alters.

choice is extremely limited) and Opportunity Set Two (where many more potential network alters are generally available for selection by ego).

It was found that most informants either accepted or rejected the beliefs of alters within Opportunity Set One and continued to maintain that response with regard to the selection of alters from Opportunity Set Two. The only caveat expressed in relation to this model concerns the experiences of converts. The converts interviewed for the current study, it will be recalled, were characterized by an initial questioning in response to the exemplars of alters. They then maintained that questioning until a solution could be found to resolve the questioning. The discovery of a solution, however, was also dependent upon the beliefs held by the alters available to ego within Opportunity Set Two. The belief outcome of the convert may therefore vary according to the types of alters available who espouse a solution. Furthermore, even when a convert becomes a CA, the evidence from the current study suggests the convert will still tend to interact only with CAs (and others outside the Church) who hold similar beliefs and will tend to avoid CAs who provide information, or who create situations, which increase cognitive dissonance in the convert.

With reference to the four zones in the model, most belief maintenance occurs in Zone One through the interaction of ego with HRP alters. It has been discussed above that unselected alters *who hold different beliefs to ego* are generally kept at a social distance and are therefore generally not found in Zone One. Some current selected alters are relegated to Zone Four (the realm of the stranger), particularly if such relationships begin to cause an increase in cognitive dissonance.[20] The risk of such relegation is mentioned by Giddens (1994) in terms of the modern need to avoid situations which create conflict and which threaten to destabilize friendships. Friendships can be relegated to Zone Four with ease in the modern world. Some of the alters who are potentially available to ego remain in Zone Four and some alters from Opportunity Set One remain in Zones One to Three. Finally, movement of alters between zones is always possible, either in a centripetal direction towards ego or in

---

[20] This issue is discussed in Chapter Seven.

a centrifugal direction away from ego. This movement may be initiated by either ego or alters. Alters, for example, may create social distance from ego for the same reasons that ego will create social distance from alters.

The current chapter has concentrated on the progression of ego from belief formation to belief maintenance and the concomitant quest of ego for the maintenance of cognitive consonance and the reduction of cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, empirical evidence has been cited which gives convincing support for propositions P6 and P7 which have been based on the latter argument. The next chapter will focus on how *personal networks* in particular, rather than religious institutional structures or local communities, function as plausibility structures for the maintenance of religious beliefs. Chapter Six will also explore a proposition about the function of the personal network as a plausibility structure for religious or spiritual experience as well as for various forms of secular belief.

CHAPTER SIX
CURRENT NETWORKS AS PLAUSIBILITY STRUCTURES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

It has been established that personal current networks tend to be formed through the choices made by ego of HRP alters who share similar religious or secular beliefs to ego. Personal networks, constructed in this manner, result in discrete social structures which facilitate the maintenance of belief plausibility. One important question which arises from this observation is the *extent* to which these personal networks constitute plausibility structures, i.e. whether the plausibility structure extends to social support beyond this boundary of the HRP personal network. This question will be addressed in the present chapter through reporting the testing of proposition P8, outlined in section 6.4, which concerns the primacy of the personal network - over and above the social institution or the local community - as the principal plausibility structure.

In Chapter One, the definition of a plausibility structure was given as: a 'social base' through which a particular social construction of reality, i.e. a world view, is maintained, whether that world view be religious or otherwise (Berger, 1969). Chapter One then discussed Roof's (1978) thesis - that local community involvement creates a plausibility structure for the maintenance of traditional beliefs - and drew attention to subsequent research which has challenged that thesis, i.e. Lehman (1986, 1990) and Eisinga, Lammers and Peters (1990, 1991). The latter researchers found that cultural localism is more predictive of religious belief and practice than social localism and that local communities cannot automatically be deemed to constitute plausibility structures. This confirmed Beckford's (1989) view that there is no necessary connection between religion and local community. However, little research has been conducted on *personal networks* as plausibility structures, apart from the literature cited in Chapter One on conversions. Moreover, no studies at all have been carried out which have considered personal networks as plausibility structures for all types of religious and secular beliefs.

This chapter will consider these issues further, first by discussing briefly the precarious nature of personal religious or secular beliefs within a pluralist society. The testing of proposition P8 will then be reported in relation to the empirical data collected for the present study. This includes a brief examination of the density and composition of the informants' networks to ascertain if these factors in any way affect the maintenance of belief plausibility. Finally, proposition P9 - concerning networks as plausibility structures for all types of belief - will be outlined. The testing of this proposition will then be reported in relation to empirical data on the religious or spiritual experiences of informants and on the secular beliefs of informants.

6.2   THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF BELIEF PLAUSIBILITY IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY

Davie (1994:51) has stated that: "a limited pluralism is probably the best way to describe the religious life of Britain" which is characterized by 'very marked' regional variations both within Christianity and between faiths (ibid.:66). According to Berger (1969:137) "the key characteristic of all pluralistic situations ... is that ex-monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations", thereby giving rise to a 'market situation' in which religion becomes a commodity. This tends to erode traditions and, due to the number of alternatives available, "plunges religion into a crisis of credibility" where "there are always 'all those others' that refuse to confirm the religious world in question" (ibid.:150). The origin of this pluralistic situation is traced back to the Reformation by Bruce (1995a:12), which in certain respects echoes Berger's (1969:127) view that "historically speaking, Christianity has been its own gravedigger" although Berger argues that the roots of the secularization process in particular began in the Old Testament (ibid.:113).

In terms of the contemporary situation, Davie mentions the 'considerable diversity' which applies both within and outside Christianity (1994:69). She highlights the diversity of sects and new religious movements in this country and the impact of globalization where: "the existence of religious pluralism is by no means an unusual

phenomenon in an increasingly interconnected and mobile world" (ibid.:64). Specific issues further divide individuals involved within the Christian religion:

> Such differences as do exist, moreover, become more rather than less complex once liturgical predilections or attitudes to ecumenism are taken into account. More recently, the changing role of women - both lay and ordained - has provided a further dimension in the discussion (ibid.:71).

In such a society, no one single overarching authoritative discourse stands in the place of 'divine truth'. Moreover, religious belief has largely been relegated to the private sphere, characterized by subjectively held views, as opposed to the functional rationality of the public sphere. Within the private sphere, therefore, there exists a need to reinforce personal belief systems if they are to survive. These belief systems hang tenuously on a delicate thread of plausibility, thus reflecting the view of Berger (1969:29) that: "all socially constructed worlds are inherently precarious".

Berger further argues that "the plausibility structure ... may in some cases be no larger than the nuclear family" but since the modern family is a fragile institution, individuals *must* seek "more broadly based plausibility structures" (ibid.:133). But unlike Berger, who argues that these plausibility structures are typically "churches or other wider religious groupings" (ibid.:133) the contention of the current study is that the most typical plausibility structure is that of the personal network rather than the local community or religious institutions. The testing of proposition P8 has therefore been included in the current study due to the need for empirical verification of this argument.

6.3 NETWORKS, RATHER THAN COMMUNITIES OR INSTITUTIONS, AS PLAUSIBILITY STRUCTURES

Proposition P8, which is unprecedented, and is based on the network dependency hypothesis, states the following:

P8   *Personal networks, rather than institutional structures or local communities,*
       form the principal social unit in which the plausibility of religious or secular
       belief is maintained.

The current study has already drawn attention to the diverse idiosyncratic belief systems formulated by each of the informants which arise from their unique life histories painted on the canvas of their former and current social networks. There is no one common denominator underlying these diverse beliefs which would in any way indicate that they are derived from the local community. This is consistent with the former description, by Chris Hansford, of Grange Park as a 'dormitory village' where no sense of local community exists. The only unifying factor common to all of the accounts of the informants is the similarity between the beliefs of ego and HRP alters within *discrete* networks.

Other indicators which would help to ascertain the extent of the personal networks of the informants and which would serve to confirm the level of community or institutional involvement, are those of network density and network composition. Attention to these issues will also serve to test proposition P8.

6.3.1 Network density

It was reported in Chapter Two that network density (the connectedness of the people within a given network) was soon discovered not to be an important factor at all in determining the nature of the informants' social networks. Their networks were more like 'personal stars' (Allan, 1996:119) in the sense that very few alters knew one another and if any alters *did* know one another, the informant tended to be the main catalyst. In other words alters within these networks would not have met together on any occasion were it not for the presence of ego. The only alters who did meet independently of ego tended to be couples known by ego or work colleagues known by ego who were thus constrained to meet with each other regularly. Network connections were therefore predominantly only between ego and alter rather than alter to alter. It was mentioned in Chapter Five that even among the CA informants few

ego to alter relationships were centred on a single church. Hence most of the alters within the networks of the CAs did not know one another since, if they too were CAs, they tended to be involved in different churches to the church attended by ego. With the exception of Mark Saunders, a CA informant cited in the previous chapter, the CA networks therefore tended to be as loose knit as the networks of the NCAs.[1] It follows that high network density is an irrelevant factor in the provision of social support for the plausibility of the informants' beliefs.

Chapter One discussed the rather diffuse and ambiguous concept of 'community' (Bott, 1971; Halsey, 1974; Hornsby-Smith, 1989; Crow and Allan, 1994) and argued that community in the neighbourhood sense can only truly exist if everyone has knowledge of everybody else within a given area. Bott's (1971:99) view of community as "cohesive social groups" considered in terms of the "network of actual social relationships they maintain" was therefore cited for its appropriateness to the current study. It was further argued that - outside the existence of religious 'communities' as identified by Hornsby-Smith's three distinct elements of religious community[2] - communities based upon neighbourhoods within cities can hardly be said to exist at all. The interview data related to network density, discussed above, confirms this argument in the sense that the informants' network relationships were not characterized by 'cohesive groups' wherein alters knew each other. Community, therefore, was not a factor in the maintenance of religious or secular belief plausibility. It was rather, the predominantly one-to-one relationships between ego and alters which facilitated the maintenance of belief plausibility, which thus supports proposition P8.

---

[1] Church networks (or, more appropriately, personal networks within churches) will be discussed further on in this chapter.

[2] See page 52 of Chapter One. It is questionable whether even many 'religious communities' exist according to these criteria, since Hornsby-Smith himself reaches the following conclusion in relation to Catholic parishes:

> In spite of attempts to promote community-like characteristics, the empirical evidence indicates in general considerable variations in the beliefs and values of parishioners (Hornsby-Smith, 1987:47-66); that parishes are too large to provide meaningful interaction for more than a small minority of parishioners (Winter, 1973; 1985); and that relatively little, and then only intermittent, social support is provided to members in need. The quest for sociological community at the parish level in modern, mobile, industrial, and urban societies seems doomed to failure. To that extent the critics of parishes and advocates of small basic Christian communities are correct in their analysis (Hornsby-Smith, 1989:93).

Prior to consideration of religious institutions in relation to proposition P8, the composition of the informants' networks needs to be considered since it adds further support to this proposition.

6.3.2 Network composition

Wenger's (1989) study on networks of carers in rural north Wales is useful in this respect. Wenger has identified five types of network composition:

1. The local family-dependent support network.
2. The locally integrated support network.
3. The local self-contained support network.
4. The wider community-focused support network.
5. The private restricted support network.

If the support element is eliminated from the above typologies and their order is rearranged, one might derive the following types:

1. FAMILY: mainly close kin.
2. INTEGRATED: consisting mainly of family, friends and neighbours.
3. WIDER INTEGRATED: networks containing at least 20 most frequent and/or most intimate alters (i.e. a higher number of friends and kin than in the 'integrated' category).
4. LOCAL SELF-CONTAINED: few kin, mainly neighbours.
5. PRIVATE RESTRICTED: absence of close kin, apart from partner, few friends or neighbours.

For the purposes of this study, the fourth type on Wenger's list (moved to third position on the modified list) has required additional modification as there was little

community involvement among the informants, as discussed above. Furthermore, when asked if they belonged to any local clubs, societies or voluntary organisations, 23 informants said 'no', five just belonged to health/sports clubs, three were scout/youth club leaders, one was involved in a mother's group, one was a freemason and three others belonged to organisations such as Greenpeace or the RSPB but with very little active involvement. Only Emma Gordon could legitimately be described as a 'wider community-focussed' individual in the sense that she was a local councillor, as well as having an unusually large network of most frequent and most intimate family and friends.

Moreover, it would be misleading to include most of the CAs in a 'wider community focussed' category since, although they attended church there was *minimal interaction* between these informants and other CAs *within the same church*. As stated previously, the networks of the CAs mainly consisted of HRP CA alters from other churches (i.e. alters who did not know each other) together with other NCA alters with strong religious beliefs. A problem primarily arises with Wenger's fourth type due to use of the word: 'community', the ambiguous nature of which has already been emphasized (e.g. Hornsby-Smith, 1989; Crow and Allan, 1994). In the discussion which follows in the next section on Church religion, it will become clear that even the CA informants in the current study fail to meet Hornsby-Smith's criteria for 'religious community'.[3] If Hornsby-Smith's definition of religious community is employed here, then to include the CA informants in a 'community focussed' category would be as misleading as stating that individuals attending a football match or going to the cinema once a week were 'community focussed'. Wenger's fourth type has therefore been modified to: 'wider integrated'. Also, Wenger's references to 'local' were not applied to the latter modified types. Family, friends or work colleagues within the informants' networks were not necessarily local at all. In fact most were located outside the Grange Park area.

The information for network composition was obtained through a general question

---

[3] See page 52.

which informants were initially asked, concerning the *total* numbers in their networks whom they contacted most frequently or in whom they confided the most. When the five modified typologies were applied to the data, the following results were obtained:

Table 6.1   Network Composition

Church Attender (N = 9)			High Belief Importance Level (N = 10)			Medium Belief Importance Level (N = 8)			Low Belief Importance Level (N = 12)		
10	1	(22 family)	30	1		8	3	(39)	13	2	
35	2		32	2		36	3	(21)	33	2	
4	2		23	2		3	2		37	2	
11	2		15	3	(26)	17	2		6	2	
18	2		26	2		5	2		39	2	
1	No information		31	3	(24)	16	2		21	2	
24	2		38	3	(28)	14	2		20	3	(39)
27	3	(27)	2	2		29	2		7	4	
22	3	(20)	25	2					19	3	(43)
			28	2					34	2	
									12	4	
									9	2	

In the above table, each interview number is given, followed by network composition type 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5, i.e. 1: Family, 2: Integrated, 3: Wider Integrated, 4: Local Self-Contained, 5: Private Restricted. These numbers are followed, in brackets, by the total number of most frequent and most intimate others if 20 or more.

In terms of network composition, therefore, there appears to be no particular emergent pattern among these informants, apart from the fact that the family type was reported only by two informants (in the CA and HNCA categories) and the local self-contained type was reported by just two LNCAs. Whether there is any significance

in this distribution is difficult to ascertain, however, given the low numbers involved. Nevertheless, the 'wider integrated' types are evenly spread across all categories and most informants are characterized by the 'integrated' type. This latter finding was echoed by Wenger's study, even though her research focussed on support groups for older people. Not one of the informants can be classified according to the 'private restricted' type.

The important point here is the additional support for proposition P8 provided by the data presented in Table 6.1 in that most of the informants' networks were characterized by the 'integrated type'. This consisted, in the main, of a moderate number of family and friends but which included *very few neighbours*.[4] Network composition thus highlights, again, a lack of integration of the informants' networks *with the local community*, hence community support for the plausibility of religious or secular beliefs did not enter the equation. The institutional aspect of proposition P8 will now be given more detailed attention in relation to the interview data, in the form of a discussion about Church religion and plausibility structures *within* and *between* churches.

6.3.3 Church religion

Roof has argued that:

> The social context of the believer plays a crucial part in helping create and maintain a plausible belief system. Individuals who are well integrated into a believing community are better able to believe themselves, for out of the group they receive social support and reinforcement in their definitions of reality (1978:31).

---

[4] Twenty of the 39 informants said that *no neighbours at all* were involved in their social networks. A further two informants included just one neighbour in each of their networks; seven informants included just two neighbours in each network and the other eight* informants included three or more neighbours in each of their networks. Twelve of the seventeen informants who *did* include neighbours in their personal networks placed their neighbours in the category of 'most frequent' contacts rather than in the category of 'most intimate' contacts. Moreover, most neighbours only made contact with one another through their children, who acted as a catalyst. See pages 116-117.

* No data concerning neighbours were collected from two of the informants.

In this extract Roof emphasizes the 'group' and the 'believing community' without a close analysis of the relationship between the beliefs and the personal networks of his informants. On the one hand, plausibility structures among CAs might legitimately be discussed in terms of the 'group' or the 'believing community' in the sense that the Church *can* provide closely linked networks of religious individuals who all know one another and who all hold beliefs which they share in common. In other words, 'the group', as defined by Roof, may provide the social support for belief reinforcement. On the other hand, the current study has already shown that most of the informants have low density current networks and that, apart from the example of Mark Saunders from the local Community Church, most others - including the other remaining CAs - have fairly loose-knit networks. These networks among CAs, on the whole, are not reliant on individual churches for the provision of a 'believing community' in Roof's terminology. This matter will be pursued in some detail with reference to the interview data.

By sheer chance, three of the selected informants for the second stage of the current study, i.e. Sarah Rogers, Jennifer Reed and Lindsay Kennedy attended the same local church, yet their beliefs differed significantly. These informants have featured quite prominently in previous chapters. Nevertheless, it would be useful to compare the accounts of these informants in some depth.

a) Differences in belief

The lack of provision of an overall plausibility structure by the local (evangelical) Church of England is quite evident from the diversity of beliefs held by Sarah, Jennifer and Lindsay. These differences in belief were by no means tempered by the vicar of this church, whose accommodating and liberal views were outlined in Chapter Five. Lindsay was the most conventionally evangelical of the three, since she believed that acceptance of Christ's atoning death on the cross was the only way to personal salvation and that hell was reserved for the unrepentant sinner. She reported a personal conversion experience and made constant references to 'the Lord' during the

interview. She also spoke about the Christian life in terms of a cosmic confrontation between God and Satan. Lindsay read copious amounts of Christian literature and often listened to Christian teaching tapes and Christian music. The worship aspect of church was also highly important to Lindsay. In fact, she felt there was room for improvement within the local church: "You need to look at having a little bit more of an openness to the Holy Spirit within the church service so that you are there for God" (C35M4/632). Sarah believed "in God and Christ" (M26M3/36) but, as stated in Chapter Five, she combined that belief with spiritualism and yogic philosophy together with a belief in reincarnation, all of which views she regarded to be perfectly consistent. Sarah also differed from Lindsay in that the social dimension of church life was given greater priority. The notion of 'being there for God' did not have the same degree of emphasis in her account. In complete contrast to Lindsay and Sarah, Jennifer had no belief in God whatsoever and believed the world evolved rather than was created by God. But she did believe in heaven and a spirit world and prayed to departed souls. Unlike Lindsay and Sarah, she placed an even greater emphasis upon the social dimension of church life and only attended church once a month.

In summary of these diverse beliefs, Lindsay had a tendency to pose the question: 'what does *God* want me to think?'. Hence, in addition to discussions with other 'conventionally minded' Christians (most of whom belonged to other churches), the plausibility of her beliefs was reinforced by frequent reading of the Bible and by the use of other Christian media.[5] On the other hand, the beliefs held by Sarah and Jennifer were founded on the question: 'what do *I like* to think?'. The plausibility of their beliefs tended to be maintained primarily through discussions with like-minded friends (again, predominantly outside the parameters of the local church) and through the reading of associated literature. Thus, the social origins of their beliefs have come into focus and hence form the subject of a closer analysis.

---

[5] The influence of the media will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter Eight.

b) Sources of belief

Speaking about her belief in reincarnation, Sarah commented:

> I like to believe in it. I think I find it comforting ... I find the thought of
> death, and that being the end, very scary. So I suppose it suits me a bit to
> think of reincarnation. But again, I think it's to do with the people I've met,
> mingled with, when I've done yoga. And I've met many people who say to
> me 'I've known you in a past life'. One particular very good friend of mine
> ... we seemed to have known each other for years when we first met and she
> believes in reincarnation and it just made me think. (M26M3/154)

It is highly likely the official doctrines professed by the local church did not include
a belief in reincarnation. In fact, it was mentioned in Chapter Five that Sarah felt
virtually compelled to keep this belief to herself for fear of condemnation by other
more conventionally-minded Christians within the church congregation. The traditional
Christian gospel *could* have met Sarah's need for the comfort of a belief in life after
death, but she chose to maintain the alternative belief in reincarnation, partly due to
the former exemplar of similar beliefs held by her mother during Sarah's childhood,
partly through interaction with alters outside the church who held a belief in
reincarnation, and - in contrast to Lindsay's reading of the Bible and Christian
literature - partly through the reading of books on yoga and positive thinking. The
reading of this type of literature tended to follow on, first, from an established lack
of Christian reading during childhood, i.e. "we'd never read the Bible at home ... I
never had books about Bible stories" (ibid.:242) and second, from yogic and positive
thinking literature introduced to her by the yoga organisation to which she belonged.
Likewise, Lindsay's use of Christian media to support the plausibility of her beliefs
tended to be encouraged by her friends located outside the local church.

Jennifer's beliefs in the spirit world, acquired mainly through the example set by her
grandmother during childhood, were fairly simplistic. She was content not to question
these beliefs, nor to develop them any further, hence her lack of use of any type of
media to support her beliefs. Jennifer was the most independent thinker of the three:

> I suppose it's the regimented bit that I don't like sometimes with religion. You've got to be this, you've got to be that. I want to think my own things. Have my own opinion. If it's slightly different from the norm, so what ... I don't particularly want to follow anything. I'd rather follow my own spirit as it were. (C26M10/855)

The plausibility structure for the maintenance of Jennifer's belief in the spirit world was restricted to a few friends and relatives, again, outside the local church, who had very similar beliefs to herself. The local church therefore had very little impact upon her beliefs. This may well explain why she only attended church once a month, in order to protect her beliefs from any challenge which might arise through interaction with others likely to discuss alternative beliefs (thus - referring to the earlier theory of Festinger (1956, 1985) - maintaining cognitive consonance).

The evidence, then, indicates that even the local church did not provide the CA informants with an overall plausibility structure to maintain their religious beliefs. From these three accounts, it would appear that their relationships with alters *outside* the church had a greater bearing on maintaining the plausibility of their beliefs. Within the local church itself, these informants tended to interact only with like-minded members of the congregation and even then, the numbers involved were few. This finding is consistent with the research of Herman (1984) cited in Chapter One, where sub-networks of individuals holding similar beliefs were discovered within a single congregation.

Moreover, the data which refer to the local church do not fit Hornsby-Smith's three key variables of religious community, namely: "shared beliefs and values, frequency of interaction, and the provision of reciprocal social support" (Hornsby-Smith, 1989:92). The CA informants from the current study shared few beliefs and values with other individuals within their own churches. They rarely included other church members from the same church within their most frequent or most intimate relationships which in turn tended to exclude any provision of reciprocal social support and mutual aid between the informants and members of their church (or if such provision had occurred, it was certainly not mentioned during the interviews).

Finally in this section, with reference to the social network model on page 193, the plausibility structure for the maintenance of CAs' religious beliefs therefore tends to be located within zone one of a CAs' personal network, consisting solely of alters who are highly relationally proximate to ego. This, in some instances, is supplemented by a limited number of alters from within the same church, but they tend to be located in zones two and three. All of the evidence discussed above provides considerable support for proposition P8.[6] Proposition P9 will now be examined, first in relation to the religious or spiritual experiences of the informants.

6.4 THE PLAUSIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Proposition P9 has been derived from the theoretical discussion in Chapter One. It attempts to address the previously cited question posed by Stark and Bainbridge (1980b:1389) viz.: "is all religion sustained by social networks?" and extends beyond that question to ask the same of other secular belief systems. Proposition P9 therefore states that:

P9   *Personal networks provide plausibility structures for all types of religiosity or non-belief.*

As the CAs have been discussed in the previous section, attention will now be focused on the religious or spiritual experiences of the HNCAs and the MNCAs. Religious or spiritual experiences were reported by just over half of the informants who were selected for the Stage Two interviews in both the high and the medium belief importance categories. A close examination of the social circumstances surrounding the issue of plausibility of these experiences should yield significant dividends both in terms of the testing of proposition P9 and in gaining insight into the plausibility structures of informants in these categories. The LNCA informants will be discussed

---

[6] Further research is required to confirm the accuracy of the reference to 'institutional structures' in proposition P8, since three informants from the same church espousing different beliefs does not logically mean that many or most CAs do not share the same beliefs within the same church or that CAs do not interact with one another within the same church.

in the final section of this chapter in relation to the issue of plausibility structures for the maintenance of secular beliefs, since seven of the twelve LNCAs held secular beliefs and only two LNCAs reported a religious or spiritual experience.

The plausibility structures for the religious or spiritual experiences of the HNCAs and MNCAs will be explored by answering the following four questions: a) What types of religious or spiritual experiences were reported by these informants? b) Who was involved at the time, i.e. were the informants alone or with others? c) To what extent did the maintenance of beliefs formed by early responses of ego to the exemplars of alters affect these religious or spiritual experiences? And, returning to one of the questions formulated at the beginning of this chapter: d) To what extent did the informants share these experiences beyond interaction with HRP alters and were any difficulties encountered if they endeavoured to do so?

a) Types of religious or spiritual experience.

Definitions of 'religious' and 'spiritual' have already been given in Chapter Two. In addition to these definitions, five dimensions of religious commitment have been proposed by Stark and Glock (1968:9): belief, practice, knowledge, experience and consequences. A further six dimensions of religiosity have been identified by Smart (1971): the social (bureaucratic), the doctrinal (giving rise to divisive issues), the mythological (stories giving rise to beliefs according to which people live), the ethical (the moral code), the ritual and the experiential. Hay (1987) has argued that all of these dimensions can be identified to varying degrees within the secular realm, apart from the experiential dimension which deals with the intentions of the persons involved: the "inner experience of the sacred or the holy" (ibid.:72), without which the other dimensions would "not be religious" (ibid.:72). This is clearly an essential dimension, but it requires further sub-division into types of experience and, for the purposes of this study, needs to allow for 'spiritual' experiences which might be more adequately described as 'paranormal' rather than 'religious'. Smart (1973) has further discussed two major sub-divisions of religious experience: the 'numinous' - a term

211

originating from the theologian-philosopher Otto (1950) - and the 'mystical'. The 'numinous' is defined by Hay (1987:91) as involving "the feeling of being in the presence of someone or something sacred or holy" and the 'mystical' as being the experience "that, in an extraordinary way, all things are One". But the latter distinctions are not particularly helpful and, again, this is still inadequate for classifying the religious and spiritual experiences of the informants included in the Grange Park sample. Indeed, Hay (ibid.:166) acknowledges the shortcomings of the latter sub-divisions himself when discussing the range of experiences reported in his own surveys.

For the purposes of the current study, the religious or spiritual experiences of the informants in the HNCA and MNCA categories are more adequately classified by dividing them equally between two overriding types of experience: a) dramatic/supernatural and b) non-dramatic/interpretive. The dramatic/supernatural experiences were reported by a total of eleven informants from the Stage Two sample, two of whom were HNCAs and three of whom were MNCAs. The experiences of these HNCAs and MNCAs all involved the presence of deceased persons, either known or unknown to the informants. These deceased persons were either perceived visually or their presence was sensed. Furthermore, only females reported these types of experiences.[7] On the other hand, from the entire Stage Two sample, the non-dramatic/interpretive experiences were reported by nine males and just one female. Three of these informants were HNCAs and two were MNCAs. The non-dramatic experiences of the HNCAs and MNCAs were either spiritual interpretations of the natural world or spiritual interpretations of events in their lives. This leads to the question of the social context in which these experiences occurred and whether this was related to the gender differences identified between the two types of experience.

---

[7] Possible explanations for this gender difference are given further on in this section.

b) The involvement of other people in these experiences.

Among the HNCAs and MNCAs, five of the informants were with others at the time of the experience and five informants were alone at the time. These instances of being alone or with others were equally divided between the dramatic and non-dramatic types and were equally divided across the age ranges and between male and female. The only insight, gained from this finding, into the plausibility structures of these informants concerns the fact that when the informants *were* with others at the time of their experiences, they were with HRP alters. But the involvement or non-involvement of HRP alters at the time of the experiences does not fully account for the overall plausibility structures involved and in no way helps to explain the gender differences mentioned above. One factor in particular which is related to the social environment does appear to be significant, however, in terms of gender. This concerns the effect of responses of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood.

c) Religious or spiritual experiences and early responses of ego to the exemplars of alters.

In the light of Chapter Four, it is hardly surprising to report the finding of an association between ego responses to the exemplars of alters during childhood and the current religious or spiritual experiences of ego. Informants in the dramatic/supernatural category of experiences either lacked a traditional religious upbringing and/or they were involved with alters (particularly mothers and grandmothers) who encouraged the practice of necromancy during childhood. Thus, in later life these informants had no hesitancy about attempting to contact departed spirits. Virginia Rothwell, for example, was not from a traditional Christian background. When she found herself in a situation of grief over the death of her husband her course of action was to attempt to contact his spirit through a medium, which would have been condemned within traditional Christian networks. On the other hand, *all* of the HNCAs and MNCAs in the non-dramatic/interpretive category of experiences came from very traditional Christian backgrounds. Indeed, informants

such as Peter Gregson expressed an aversion even towards less formal and less traditional forms of Christianity. There was also no mention at all, among these informants, of mothers or grandmothers with necromantic beliefs. The current practice of contacting the dead did not, therefore, feature in their accounts. The following diagram summarizes these differences:

Figure 6.1

NON-DRAMATIC / INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCES	DRAMATIC / SUPERNATURAL EXPERIENCES
NON-DRAMATIC / **INTERPRETIVE EXPERIENCES**	**DRAMATIC /** **SUPERNATURAL EXPERIENCES**
VERY TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND	TRADITIONAL FOUNDATION NOT ESTABLISHED
NO ENCOURAGEMENT TOWARDS NECROMANCY	ENCOURAGEMENT OF NECROMANCY

The fact that grandmothers and mothers were predominantly involved in the transmission of the non-traditional necromantic beliefs may help to explain why only females were featured in the dramatic/supernatural category. It is possible that females, rather than males, have a closer relationship with their grandmothers and mothers, not only during childhood but throughout life. A link was certainly discovered by Chambers (1997) between mothers and young women in relation to belief transmission and reinforcement. This argument also adds weight to the conclusions of Cavanaugh (1939), Argyle (1958) and Davie (1994), mentioned in Chapter Four, and also Walter (1990), concerning the significance of women in the transmission of religiosity. Indeed, Davie (1994:119) suggests that the *content* of the beliefs which women "choose to transmit may equally well be affected". The findings of the current study related to necromantic beliefs certainly lend support to this particular speculation. Of course, this does not explain why the grandmothers and mothers originally held these beliefs. On this question the debate is still wide open

214

among psychologists and sociologists. Walter (1990) argues that it is unlikely that any one theory, be it psychological or sociological, will be applicable in every case. In the words of Davie: "The evidence remains impressionistic; the case is far from proven" (1994:121).

d) The sharing of religious or spiritual experiences beyond networks of HRP alters

In the light of Chapter Five, it is also hardly surprising to report that the plausibility structures for the sharing of these experiences (together with the maintenance of associated beliefs) appear to be restricted to ego and like-minded HRP alters. The reasons for this become much clearer when the focus of attention is upon religious or spiritual experience due to difficulties associated with communicating such experiences beyond HRP alters. This section will explore these difficulties.

In Chapter One, Giddens' (1994a) argument was cited concerning the dominant mode of functional rationality which exists in the developed, industrialized West and the incompatibility of religion with most everyday situations in the modern world. Whilst Giddens acknowledges that some people may adopt a religious response to ontological insecurity and epistemological uncertainty, he nevertheless argues that, on the whole, scientific rationalism supplants religion through reflexively organised knowledge "focused upon material technology and socially applied codes" (ibid.:109). With regard to paranormal phenomena, Wooffitt further observes that:

> There is a powerful cultural scepticism about people who claim to have encountered paranormal phenomena: not only do such experiences provide an implicit challenge to common-sense understanding of the world, they also undermine the pronouncements of the scientific orthodoxy (1992:1).

Religious or spiritual experiences are therefore not easily accommodated in the modern world. Difficulties may therefore arise in terms of maintaining the plausibility of experiences which are against this dominant mode of thought or communicating these experiences to others who do not share the same interpretations of reality.

215

With regard to the communication of these experiences, many of the Stage Two informants in all of the belief importance categories (who reported religious or spiritual experiences) tended to articulate the 'spiritual' within a scientific or rational discourse. This was even characteristic of the CAs. Given that the focus of this particular section is on the HNCAs and the MNCAs, the citation of two quotations from the CAs would nevertheless be appropriate here. The first concerns the scientific language used by Sanjay Patel (a Hindu) to describe his religious experiences. During the interview, Sanjay quoted Newton's second law of motion: "to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" (C26M24/157) and when summing up his religious experience he commented:

> It is belief, but a belief founded on a moral. Certain axioms. If you don't have axioms to a mathematical equation you can't prove anything. So to be able to experience a religious experience there has to be a set format for you to follow to realize whether it's true or false. Otherwise it's just dogma. (ibid.:153)

Similarly, Graham Appleton (another CA) gave an account of his own religious experience using academic language, thus intermittently using Latin phrases to embellish his account and quoting Rudolph Otto's concept of the 'numinous' (discussed above). In the HNCA category Virginia Rothwell spoke about her spiritual experience of contacting her deceased husband (through a medium) by employing a scientific/legal discourse. She discounted the spiritualist beliefs of her mother-in-law through lack of evidence whereas her own beliefs were supported by what Virginia considered to be convincing factual information:

> But she [Virginia's mother-in-law] had got no real evidence of that whereas my evidence is the reality of what was actually told to me [whereas] I knew she had never verified the information she had.   (H35W15/314)

Most of these interviews gave the impression that the spiritual dimension has to be articulated within a rational framework if it is to be accepted by others beyond like-minded HRP alters. Returning to the theory of Festinger (1956, 1985), there may well be a sub-conscious anticipation within ego of the creation of cognitive dissonance in

the minds of others who are not highly relationally proximate to ego if spiritual experience is introduced into a conversation. This may be linked to an assumption (even if inaccurate) that the thinking of others is generally dominated by the rational. The sharing of religious experience may therefore be considered by ego to be diametrically opposed to the rational due to its subjectivity and due to the elusiveness of scientific verification of spiritual or paranormal phenomena. Hence scientific language is used to communicate these experiences to redress the balance and to make the accounts more palatable.

Moreover, these experiences were not generally discussed in the working environment. This was generally perceived to be an hostile arena in which opposition to spirituality and religion was often encountered. Michael Hayward, an extremely dedicated religious HNCA was very defensive about sharing his spiritual experiences and beliefs with others at work:

R   Well I think I'm frightened of what people are going to say - they're going to take the mickey. Because being in a big place like I work in, three or four hundred people, that's the Post Office, the Royal Mail, things get around and then they start taking the mickey. So really you should be able to take that but some people can't. I don't think I would be able to, I would get upset.

I   Have you known other Christians that have been treated in a bad way at work?

R   Well I've got a friend at work, he's in the Salvation Army and they tend to pull his leg a bit. I tend to keep a low profile. But it doesn't affect my beliefs, they're still very strong.

Emma Gordon, an accountant in the MNCA category, also mentioned this need to be defensive about religious belief and experience within her business environment where the accountants in her office were expected to exhibit self-reliance. She said that failure to have done so would have caused 'raised eyebrows':

R   In a professional environment where I work, it's definitely seen as being very odd, and it's sort of derogatory.

I   So they were talked about after they had left the office?

R   Yea, precisely. You'd listen in and think, hey, hang on a minute. You didn't perceive that person in the same light twenty minutes ago. But because you've just found out that they are highly religious ... you're now looking at them as being somebody that you don't respect as much as you did ... And then I think the view is then taken that those particular individuals were seen as a soft target. They were seen as people who suddenly you could basically get one over. It was quite enlightening really.

In this office environment, religious belief was deemed to be synonymous with inadequacy, thus indicating a concomitant need for a psychological 'crutch'. To speak of religious belief or experience in academic and rationalized terms would thus demonstrate, at the very least, a certain degree of cultural complicity whilst simultaneously deflecting attention away from personal subjectivity. The more 'experiential' the account, the less credible it would have most likely appeared within such an environment. This finding is consistent with Wooffitt's observation that: "The mere act of claiming such an experience can lead to assumptions of, at best, crankiness, or worse, some form of psychological deficiency" (1992:2). Emma Gordon's account would suggest the possibility that environment supersedes gender in this respect. The same degree of self-reliance was expected of her as it was of the men.

In at least six of the accounts of religious or spiritual experience (particularly the most dramatic) the informants prefaced their comments with a qualification of their state of mind prior to the experience. Lindsay Kennedy's preambulation was typical:

> I wasn't expecting it [the religious experience], I wasn't seeking it, and I wasn't hallucinating. People can put all sorts of titles on it - I know it was God.   (C35M4/96)

Wooffitt found exactly the same phenomena in his study of the organization of accounts of the paranormal, namely, the defensive design of utterances in accounts of supernatural experiences. This involved the need of each informant to justify his or her state of mind prior to the description of the experience in order to warrant the status of the accounts "as *factual* descriptions" (1992:1). This structure to conversations may be due to a general need to retain personal credibility not just in

218

a society dominated by a scientifically based scepticism but in a society which is fundamentally pluralist. Again, with reference to Festinger (1956, 1985), ego may tend to avoid sharing the religious or spiritual experience with alters (if the belief systems of alters are perceived to be unable to accommodate the supernatural) in order that ego might maintain cognitive consonance within ego's own belief system. This method of telling the account of the experience may also serve to lessen potential social conflict between ego and alter (which Giddens argues needs to be avoided in the modern world due to the ease with which alters can retreat to the realm of the stranger).

These factors of a) the articulation of religious or spiritual experience within a scientific or rational discourse, b) the avoidance of conversations about religious or spiritual experience in the workplace, and c) the defensive organisation of accounts, are all symptomatic of plausibility structures which are restricted to ego and HRP alters. Proposition P9 therefore remains highly credible in the light of the data discussed herein.

6.5 THE PLAUSIBILITY OF SECULAR BELIEFS

The network plausibility structures discussed above not only support strong religious beliefs - these structures are just as applicable for maintaining and reinforcing the plausibility of less strongly held religious beliefs or non-belief, primarily through interaction between ego and like-minded HRP alters. As several examples from the empirical data were cited in Chapter Five, it would only serve to labour the point if more examples were given in this section. The only difference between those with strong religious beliefs and those with weak religious beliefs or no religious beliefs at all is that the latter receive fewer challenges to their belief systems when interacting with others within the public sphere, such as within the working environment. Unlike the strategies discussed in the previous section for the communication of religious or spiritual experience, non-belief requires none of these defensive strategies. So, for example, unbelief and personal qualities such as 'self-reliance' (discussed in relation

to Emma Gordon's comments about the office environment) tend to complement one another.

Chapter Five has also already discussed evidence related to the tendency of ego to select like-minded HRP alters in order to maintain the established response of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence. This applies equally to the LNCA informants with secular beliefs. Thus, informants in the LNCA category included far fewer religious alters in their networks and tended to keep them at a social distance if they did feature in their networks. Religious beliefs also tended to be weaker among alters known by ego within the LNCA category. Moreover, Chapter Five highlighted the fact that discussion of religious belief declines as the belief importance levels diminish and that when LNCAs do discuss the subject, they tend to discuss *unbelief*, thereby reinforcing their agnosticism, atheism or whichever secular world view they hold. Wuthnow (1985:194-196) has made a similar observation about the plausibility structure (in the form of face-to-face communication activity) required by scientists to maintain the norms of science which Wuthnow argues are in opposition with the norms governing conduct in everyday life.[8] Thus, all of the above findings from the current study support proposition P9.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter commenced by drawing attention to the precarious nature of belief plausibility. This was argued to have originated from competing discourses within an increasingly pluralist society devoid of a single overarching authoritative cosmos. It was then contended that neither the local community nor religious institutions typically provide the plausibility structures which are now necessary for the maintenance of

---

[8] For example, Wuthnow states the following:

> Scientific theorizing is nonpragmatic, universalistic, governed by norms of personal detachment, oriented toward the past and the future of the problem at hand, revocable in the sense that hypotheses are subject to constant revision, and dominated by an attitude of critical scepticism. By comparison, everyday reality is pragmatic, particularisticaly oriented to the here and now of the individual, governed by norms of self-interested involvement ... oriented toward standard linear time, irrevocable, and dominated by a 'willing suspension of doubt'" (ibid.:195).

personal beliefs. Rather, in the modern world, personal networks arguably constitute the most typical plausibility structures.

Attention to network properties such as network density and network composition subsequently revealed that local community was not a factor in the maintenance of the plausibility of the informants' religious or secular beliefs. The maintenance of belief plausibility was, rather, the product of one-to-one relationships between ego and HRP alters (consisting mainly of family and friends, but few neighbours) within discrete networks located in the private sphere. Moreover, even the local church did not function as a plausibility structure for the maintenance of the beliefs held by the CA informants. Relationships formed between ego and alters outside of the local church had a greater bearing on maintaining belief plausibility.

Likewise, the plausibility of the religious or spiritual experiences of the informants tended to be maintained by discrete networks consisting of ego and HRP alters. The types of experiences reported by the informants tended to originate from the exemplars of alters during the childhood and adolescence of ego, reflecting the findings of Chapter Four. Problems were identified in terms of the communication of these experiences by ego beyond HRP alters, which had the effect of restricting the related plausibility structures to the close networks of the informants. The functional rationality of the public sphere tended to heighten a tension between the rational and irrational such that religious or spiritual experience was found not to be compatible with the working environment. Various defensive strategies were therefore adopted by the informants to overcome, to some extent, the opposition generally encountered in a pluralist environment dominated by scientific scepticism. Similar plausibility structures consisting of ego and like-minded HRP alters applied to the maintenance and reinforcement of weak religious beliefs and non-belief, although no challenges to the latter type of beliefs could be identified within the public sphere. In summary, if the above findings are related to the social network model, the plausibility of all types of belief and unbelief tends to be maintained predominantly within Zone One, with little extension beyond this, thus supporting propositions P8 and P9.

This chapter has introduced the problematic of the communication of religious beliefs beyond HRP alters. This will be developed in the following chapter through exploring the dynamics of the interface of those holding different beliefs, including CAs and NCAs. Chapter Seven will therefore focus on the transmission aspect of the network dependency hypothesis and identify various relational mechanisms within social networks which either facilitate or inhibit the transmission of religious belief.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CURRENT NETWORKS
AND THE
DYNAMICS OF BELIEF MODIFICATION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The testable propositions discussed in the previous empirical chapters have, on the whole, focused upon belief formulation and belief maintenance. Chapter Four explored one major aspect of belief transmission: that of the response of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence. One might question, however, whether personal beliefs are ever modified or changed once responses to the exemplars of alters in childhood have become established, particularly given the fact that the informants tended to select like-minded current alters with similar beliefs. The present chapter therefore concentrates attention on the transmission and modification aspects of the network dependency hypothesis[1] by identifying various mechanisms involved in the transmission and modification of beliefs within *current* networks. The chapter is divided into two main sections: that which facilitates and that which inhibits religious belief transmission within personal networks, since these two aspects of transmission are likely to have an effect on personal belief modification or change. Particular emphasis will be placed on the communication of beliefs at the interface between those holding radically different beliefs.

Following a brief outline of the concept of relational mechanisms, four propositions of mechanisms which facilitate the transmission of religious belief and a further seven propositions of mechanisms which inhibit the transmission of religious belief will be formulated. The testing of each of these propositions will be reported in relation to the empirical data collected for Stage Two of the current study.

---

[1] See page 58.

Chapter One defined 'relational mechanisms' as:

> *Mechanisms which involve specific types of social interaction in the context of relations within personal networks.*[2]

Each mechanism performs a catalytic function similar to that outlined by Elster (1990:3):

> To explain an event is to give an account of why it happened. Ultimately, this takes the form of citing an earlier event as the cause of the event we want to explain, together with some account of the causal mechanism connecting the two events.

The propositions formulated in this chapter therefore specify particular mechanisms (i.e. social conditions) which are generally present when religious belief is transmitted, or is prevented from being transmitted, between individuals within current networks.

There is a minimal amount of literature available which is directly related to the subject of religious belief transmission when considered both in the context of modernity and in terms of specific relational mechanisms within current personal networks. The literature discussed in Chapter One on religious conversions does identify certain general factors involved in the process of conversion, such as socialization and encapsulation (Heirich, 1977; Gartrell and Shannon, 1985). The mechanisms which follow, however, refer to much more *specific* relational conditions which facilitate or inhibit religious belief transmission by drawing upon concepts such as Giddens' (1994) 'transformation of intimacy', Schluter and Lee's (1993) concept of 'relational proximity', and Berger and Luckmann's (1971) argument about the incompleteness of socialization with its concomitant threats to individual subjective reality, all of which have been discussed in previous chapters. The concepts discussed by these writers apply to mechanisms which either facilitate or inhibit belief transmission. First, mechanisms which arguably facilitate belief transmission will be

---

[2] See pages 104 and 112.

outlined in the form of propositions, all of which are, again, *unprecedented* in the literature related to this subject.

7.2 NETWORK MECHANISMS WHICH FACILITATE RELIGIOUS BELIEF TRANSMISSION

Propositions P10 to P13 concern that which facilitates belief transmission, modification and change within current networks and are based on these aspects of the original network dependency hypothesis.[3] This section reports the testing of these propositions mainly with data related to informants who had experienced a religious conversion since adolescence, as it will be recalled from Chapter Five that most informants (other than the converts) did not change their beliefs but rather maintained an established response to the former exemplars of alters. *All* of the informants from Stage Two of the current study were, however, asked questions about one of the mechanisms which follow, concerning the social condition of the establishment of trust between ego and alters. The latter data will therefore also be included in the following discussion.

The first proposition which facilitates belief transmission is a logical development of the work of Currie, Gilbert and Horsley (1977), who make the following historical comparison:

> Since new church members cannot be made of persons quite ignorant of a church and its teaching, the *preparation* of a secularized population for church membership becomes a very lengthy process. In the eighteenth century, and in part of the nineteenth, churches could still directly recruit a population sufficiently educated in religious and Christian things to know at least the outline of the Bible, the doctrines associated with Jesus, and the significance of the churches' concept of salvation. By 1800, however, the number of people so educated was rapidly decreasing (ibid.:122).

Currie and his colleagues then refer to the churches' attempts to provide a religious

---

[3] See page 58.

socialization through the adoption of Sunday schools which subsequently proved to be inadequate to reach a sufficient proportion of the population. They conclude:

> In recent years many Sunday schools have virtually collapsed, and there is no evidence that the churches have found a satisfactory means of re-organising their methods of indirect recruitment (ibid.).

The following proposition P10 is therefore based on this need in the modern world to precede recruiting activity by a *period of religious socialization* in which religious beliefs become plausible to the potential recruit. This echoes certain aspects of the work of Heirich (1977)[4] and Gartrell and Shannon (1985),[5] and also incorporates Schluter and Lee's (1993) concept of relational proximity[6] and Berger's (1969) concept of a plausibility structure.[7] Finally, the list of terms and abbreviations defines a 'religious agent' as an individual holding religious beliefs who seeks to transmit those religious beliefs to others. Thus, P10 states:

P10:   *A high level of relational proximity between ego and religious agent, whilst not essential, contributes towards transmission efficiency, since it is generally necessary for the agent to provide a plausible cosmology consistent with the agent's lifestyle within the context of an established relationship between ego and agent.*

A high level of relational proximity also permits the establishment of trust between ego and agent. Giddens' (1994a, 1994b) concept of the 'transformation of intimacy' will be discussed further in the next section on propositions which inhibit belief transmission. However, within this concept, Giddens argues that trust between individuals in the modern world needs to be 'worked at'. Instead of a trust which was formerly dependent upon the close proximity of individuals within small communities, there is now a requirement for trust to be 'won'. This building of trust forms the

---

[4] See pages 17-19.

[5] See page 20.

[6] See pages 96-98.

[7] See page 8.

second social condition which may be associated with religious agents:

P11:   *Trust and respect are required between ego and religious agent if there is to be any modification or change of belief system in either direction, i.e. in the belief system of ego or the agent.*

In terms of the third proposition, P12, Potvin and Sloane, in their study of parental control and religious practice, argue that:

> In the early years of adolescence the fact that religion may be based on relations of constraint and authority appears to create no special problem ... and he or she accepts what the reference group believes ... As the adolescent matures ... he or she begins the search for a new form of identity ... of which religion appears to be an integral part ... it is not surprising that control becomes dysfunctional at this stage of development (1985:12).

This is congruent with the finding reported in Chapter Four, of an association between forced church attendance during adolescence and an aversion held by some informants to church attendance and to churchgoers in later life.[8] The desire of the individual for freedom of choice during all later stages in life arguably extends to this issue of transmission agency. In other words, if the agent does *not* allow ego to take the initiative, religious transmission is likely to become dysfunctional. Freedom to choose is deemed to be precious currency in the modern world. We are presented with consumer choice in the material realm. There appears to be an equal demand for choice in the spiritual realm. Indeed, Thompson argues that:

> Theoretically (whether 'market theory' or 'post-modernist theory'), each local church, or group of churches in a locality, should be free to offer a range of products or services to suit as many tastes as possible, whilst seeking to avoid spreading confusion and unpredictability ... It can be argued that it is this kind of internal differentiation and pluralization in a national church like the Church of England that has enabled it to maintain its status as an ecclesia type of religious body, rather than becoming one denomination among others (1991:9).

---

[8] See pages 153-154.

Having stated this, there remains the question of the agent's power or charisma. On the basis of Potvin and Sloane's argument, a charismatic agent is more likely to be of influence if the agent's charisma evokes a curiosity in ego to find out more about the source of that charisma, as distinct from any direct force exerted upon ego by the agent. This may in fact be a potential test of charisma - the greater the charisma, the greater the curiosity aroused in ego. A charismatic agent may present a forceful argument but is unlikely to employ direct force in his or her efforts to win converts. On the basis of the above discussion, proposition P12 therefore states:

P12:   *For any modification or change to occur to ego's belief system, ego generally has to become an enquirer of an alternative belief system under ego's own initiative.*

Finally, it will be proposed that an *effective* religious agent will adhere to the conditions outlined in propositions P10 to P12. Hence:

P13:   *An effective agent (whether Christian or otherwise), adhering to propositions P10 to P12, will be required for the occurrence of a change or modification in the belief system of ego.*

In other words, if this type of agency is not present, it is unlikely that a change or modification will occur in the belief system of ego. These propositions therefore place emphasis on the strength of exemplars over and above mere rhetoric on the part of effective agents within current networks. Each of these propositions will initially be discussed in relation to the converts from Stage Two of the current study. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the general comments, related to proposition P11, made by informants from within the entire Stage Two sample.

7.2.1 The Stage Two conversionists

The table in Appendix X shows that seven of the Stage Two informants have been classified as conversionists, all of whom were CAs. However, only three of these

informants (Nicola Sims, Lindsay Kennedy and Mark Saunders) made a significant change or modification to their beliefs in later life. The remaining four conversionists (Helen Frazer, Paul Tomlin, Sanjay Patel and David Hutchinson) were brought up with some form of belief or faith at home. These four informants were characterized by a turning point in their lives when they made a decision to commit themselves to a faith which they had been taught from childhood, hence their classification as conversionists. Nevertheless, these four conversionists simply accepted the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence and therefore cannot be considered as examples of informants who made any significant change to their belief system as a result of interaction with alters within their current networks. Indeed, Chapter Four discussed the example of David Hutchinson who was typical of most of the CAs since his beliefs had remained relatively congruent with Church teaching throughout his life.

All that can be said of these four informants is that, at the time of making their commitment to their respective faiths, there was a religious alter, or alters, involved who encouraged the informants to make that commitment. In this sense these alters could be regarded as effective agents, particularly as they fulfilled the social conditions outlined in propositions P10 to P12. In other words, in each of the accounts given by these four converts, the alters in their networks (i.e. those who could be regarded as agents in this process) were highly relationally proximate; they provided a plausible cosmology which was consistent with their own lifestyles; they had established strong relationships with the informants, based upon trust and mutual respect; and finally, none of the converts were forced into making a decision of commitment - it was undertaken entirely according to their own initiative. This is further augmented by the findings of Chapter Four: that church-attending parents of the informants together with church-attending role models (whose beliefs and behaviour were perceived by the informants to be consistent) were generally present in the former networks of the CA informants. The CAs also tended to be characterized by voluntary church attendance during their formative years.

Although the above discussion illustrates these principles of effective agency in the transmission of religious belief, the changes or modifications to the beliefs of these

four conversionists are not sufficiently radical to merit their use as examples of a variation from the general pattern of the maintenance of the established response of ego to the former exemplars of alters.

To illustrate such a variation, the accounts of Lindsay Kennedy and Nicola Sims (the two conversionists who claimed not to have been brought up religiously) and the account of Mark Saunders need to be analysed further. In one sense, Mark Saunders' experience resembles that of the four conversionists discussed above in that Mark's upbringing was not entirely devoid of religion. During Mark's childhood, both of his parents had what he described as "a nominal faith without having a full and proper understanding of what Christianity means" (C35M22/428). Nevertheless, given his parents nominal religious beliefs, his acquisition of a Christian education at school, and his comment that: "God was knocking on my door for many, many years past" (ibid.:160), Mark was already favourably predisposed towards Christianity.

Mark subsequently met Jill, his wife-to-be, while they were attending university. Jill also had a nominal faith and they both decided to attend church together. After attending a "fairly impersonal" (ibid.:332) Evangelical Church, Mark and Jill moved to their current local Community Church as a result of encouragement from one of Mark's friends: "We then spoke to a friend, actually a friend of mine who had been sharing with me his faith for a few years prior to this" (ibid.:334). Thus, Mark's friend had talked to him about Christianity for a considerable period of time prior to his 'conversion', thereby emphasizing the period of socialisation required as argued by Currie, *et al.* (op.cit.). It was at their current Community Church that both Mark and his wife were converted.

Several of the mechanisms mentioned in propositions P10 - P13 therefore apply to this account of events which led to Mark's conversion, i.e. a firm, trusting relationship had become established on a high level of relational proximity between Mark and his friend, thus allowing religious belief to be discussed between them. It is also significant that no belief modification took place whilst Mark and Jill attended the Evangelical Church, most likely due to its 'impersonal' character. There was

therefore, at that time, a lack of development of close personal relationships with others who, if the circumstances had been different, may also have transmitted their beliefs to Mark and Jill.

At their current church, Mark and Jill established much closer friendships with other Christians. It was during this time that Mark and Jill were converted as a result of a friendship which developed within the church itself:

> I remember we had a chap who was clearly an evangelist, it's true to say, within the church, who sort of took us under his wing really when we started going to the church. And he came over one evening asking if he could come round one night and we said yes that's fine. He said he wanted to talk through a few things and the rest I don't remember but he clearly explained what it is to become a Christian and asked if we wanted to. And I said yes, and my wife said yes. (ibid.:372)

Again, propositions P10, P11 and P13 apply to this extract from Mark's account. Proposition P12 also applies since freedom of choice is evident here. This is endorsed by Mark's later comment that: "I haven't been forced fed Christianity" (ibid.:469). The beliefs of Mark Saunders were merely modified, however, and in some ways consolidated rather than changed by these encounters with effective agents. This was due to the fact that, as stated above, Mark was predisposed towards Christianity through his earlier experiences with religious alters.

Chapter Four highlighted the fact that the other two converts, Lindsay Kennedy and Nicola Sims, tended to under-emphasize the extent to which religious alters were a feature of their former networks.[9] Nevertheless, Lindsay and Nicola did not accept the beliefs of the religious alters in their former networks but, rather, they questioned the beliefs of these alters. These questions were certainly not resolved during that period in their lives. A resolution was only achieved through the more recent contact which both of these informants had made with effective agents within their networks.

---

[9] See pages 159-160.

For example, two effective agents can be identified in the account given by Lindsay Kennedy. Chapter Five pointed out that Lindsay's doctor was considered by Lindsay to be a fine Christian example who had prayed with her non-Christian father the day before he died. She said that: "He practised what he preached ... He was wonderful" (C35M4/528), which is consistent with propositions P10, P11 and P13, since the doctor had won Lindsay's deepest respect through their established relationship and through the example of his behaviour. Lindsay also had a Christian friend, Pamela, of ten years standing. Pamela was highly relationally proximate to Lindsay. Lindsay therefore had an opportunity to assess the quality of Pamela's lifestyle, along with her religious beliefs, over a considerable period of time. This time factor also allowed a mutual trust and respect to develop between them. Moreover, Pamela was instrumental in inviting Lindsay to the church where Lindsay was converted shortly after her first visit:

> Just before she invited me to the church service I had gone to her - again, it's strange I should go to her - but I saw her as a sort of person I could trust in a way. She's twelve years older than me, so she's a bit of a mother figure or a big sister figure. And I poured my heart out. (ibid.:232)

Lindsay therefore trusted Pamela to the extent that she was able to 'pour her heart out' to her. In addition, Pamela was careful not to force her beliefs onto Lindsay. In the following interview quotation, Lindsay relates how she retained the initiative in conversations with Pamela about spiritual matters. Lindsay avoided bringing up the subject of the Holy Spirit because at that time Lindsay considered the third person of the Trinity to be rather alien and enigmatic:

> I certainly didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit ... So that was all quite strange and quite weird and a bit wacky to me. I think that was why I didn't pursue it with her, because I thought it was a bit odd. But I know since, that all that time she'd been praying for me and David [my husband]. (ibid.:227)

Thus, all of the requirements of propositions P10 to P13 were met with regard to this relationship which contributed significantly to Lindsay's subsequent conversion.

Chapter Five also foregrounded the interaction between Nicola Sims and two effective

agents: a female curate, and a female priest who was a member of Nicola's family.[10] Just one example will be given here of the high level of relational proximity and the trust which developed within one of these relationships. Nicola was able to communicate freely with the curate without fear of reproach due to the nature of her questions and doubts about Christian belief. Nicola commented that she and the curate had: "long, long chats and she was just very sensible in things [i.e. the curate was open to questioning Christian dogma]" (C26M35/865). Nicola commented that this curate not only took her for confirmation lessons but that "she became a friend as well" (ibid.). In fact, both of the relationships mentioned by Nicola were consistent with propositions P10 to P13. Certainly, Nicola's questioning was only resolved through contact with effective agents much later on in her life. Nevertheless, as with Lindsay, Nicola may have been predisposed towards the adoption of the Christian faith in later life due to the religious alters who were featured in her former networks.

The fact that there were some religious alters involved in the lives of Nicola, Lindsay and Mark during childhood and adolescence does lead to the question of whether beliefs *ever* change to any great extent from those learned during a person's formative years. Clearly, all of the conversionists from the sample appear to have been predisposed, at least to some degree, towards the beliefs they adopted later in life. A brief discussion now follows of the current research findings concerning the general views of the informants on the subject of trust in relation to the reception of an alternative world view.

7.2.2 General views on the establishment of trust

The evidence cited above is certainly consistent with propositions P10 to P13. Nevertheless, the discussion in this chapter has only focussed on the conversionists from the sample. In order to consider these propositions further, the views held by the whole sample also need, at the very least, to be explored. All of the informants

---

[10] See page 181.

were asked specific questions which relate mainly to proposition P11 about the requirement for trust and respect prior to any belief change or modification. Proposition P10 does, in addition, enter the equation here, since the personal lifestyle and the example set by alters vis-à-vis their beliefs were closely related to the discussion with each informant about trust.

One caveat needs to be borne in mind, however, with regard to these data. Due to the fact that most of the informants had not changed their beliefs since adolescence and were in the process of maintaining an established response to the earlier exemplars of alters, these discussions were, by definition, hypothetical (i.e. with regard to the operation of these mechanisms in the process of belief modification). Hence the reason for having placed more emphasis on the accounts of the conversionists. On the other hand, it was considered necessary to find out how important it was to each informant to establish trust in a person before taking any notice of what they might have to say about religious matters. It was reasoned that this type of question would clarify what people *might* consider to be necessary requirements for any *possible* modification to their belief system. This information could then be juxtaposed with that which was *actually* required in terms of the modification of the beliefs of the conversionists.

From the total sample of 39 informants, 34 expressed views on this subject. Of these 34 informants, nineteen (56%) said that trust was a necessary and important element in the process of considering that which a person might have to say about religious matters. The main reason for this was an association, formed in the minds of the informants, between the trustworthiness of an individual and the credibility of their beliefs. Jennifer Reed went so far as to say that: "if I didn't trust them then I'd disregard it [i.e. what they had to say about religion]" (C26M10/651). Graham Appleton also emphasized the personal aspect of discussing religion:

> Because you're dealing with something that's very unique and personal, I think to open up at that level one would need to be able to trust the person you are talking to. (C26L1/263)

Also typical of these nineteen informants were the comments of David Hutchinson, who said: "I've gained my most knowledge from people that I have gained trust through and I have got to know" (C26M27/634). These informants were divided more or less equally between male and female. A further seven informants thought that the lifestyle and example set by religious alters was more important than the establishment of trust in these alters, although the nineteen who thought that trust was important also considered lifestyle to matter as well.

In terms of statistical significance, nineteen informants is too small a number to make any firm conclusions about emergent patterns in the data. Nevertheless, one observation which may be of some *theoretical* significance is that, among these nineteen informants, the number who thought that trust was important diminished according to belief importance level (i.e. 89% of the CAs thought that trust was important, compared with 40% of the HNCAs, 38% of the MNCAs and 33% of the LNCAs). One reason for this finding may be due to the fact that as the belief importance levels became lower, an increasing number of informants expressed the view that their minds were already oriented in a particular direction concerning their religious or secular beliefs and that trusting a person would not make any difference to their opinions. Furthermore, six of the informants, four of whom were LNCAs, expressed the view that the religious knowledge or information which a person was able to impart was more important to them than any development of trust in that person. The possibility of acquiring religious belief or a religious lifestyle was more of an intellectual issue (and, in part, linked to the maintenance of cognitive consonance) than a matter of trusting an individual at this stage in their lives. With these informants, this was generally due to a firmly established response to the former exemplars of alters, as discussed in Chapter Four. Matthew Hayes remarked:

> There are so many religious beliefs held by so many respectable people ... people who actually live what they believe and believe what they live, that they can't all be right so there's going to be a large proportion who are going to be wrong. Somebody's going to get really disappointed sooner or later. (L18M39/475)

The content of the beliefs of alters, together with the intellectual reasoning (or lack of it) on the part of alters to substantiate such beliefs, was therefore paramount in the account given by Matthew. This was typical of the other five informants who emphasized the importance of knowledge over trust. This is not to imply that CAs are not concerned about intellectual arguments. Indeed, Sanjay Patel (a CA) was one of the six informants mentioned above. Sanjay said that the personal example set by an individual:

> would influence it [whether to consider the beliefs of another] to a degree, but then at the end of the day I would still have to fundamentally ask myself certain key questions which, if they didn't stack, I would have to say sorry my mate, you might be there, but not nearly there for me ... The credence of their knowledge is the most important thing. (C26M24/769)

For most of the CAs, however, whilst intellectual issues entered the equation, trust was nevertheless considered to be the most important issue. Trust tended to be required by these informants possibly due, in part, to the personal nature of the subject under discussion. To confide in another about religious matters arguably involves a certain degree of personal vulnerability and therefore requires trust between the two parties. This vulnerability may be experienced more acutely by those who are more open-minded towards the serious consideration of the beliefs of another. Most of the LNCAs were not prepared to allow this to take place.

Another informant, John Greaves, commented: "I don't know whether a level of trust would come into it too much. It would be whether or not I *wanted* to believe" (M35M29/542). Ultimately, of course, the human will would be an element in any decision to adopt an alternative belief. And primary religious or secular socialization tends to have a profound effect on the human will, again, as argued in Chapter Four.

This brief discussion of the views of the whole sample is therefore useful in that it presents a wider picture of the function of trust in the lives of these informants. For some of the informants, particularly those in the lower belief importance categories, their predominantly secular beliefs were already firmly entrenched in the sense that

236

they continued to maintain their response to former exemplars, hence trust in others (with regard to religious belief transmission) was less important to them. Other informants were more open-minded to the possibility of modifications to their beliefs. Due to this slightly more flexible attitude, trust was more important to them and was linked to the credibility of the religious alter(s). For even the slight changes and modifications in the beliefs of the conversionists, the mechanisms defined by propositions P10 to P13 were clearly required. The discussion will now centre on mechanisms which inhibit religious belief transmission.

7.3 NETWORK MECHANISMS WHICH INHIBIT RELIGIOUS BELIEF TRANSMISSION

Several references have already been made to Giddens' (1994a, 1994b) discussion of the 'transformation of intimacy'. The essence of Giddens' argument is that trust between individuals has shifted from fixed normative codes rooted in the local community to the need for the building of trust between relatively isolated individuals who can, in most instances, easily withdraw their friendship and retreat to the realm of the stranger if they so desire. There is, therefore, an ever present threat of rupture to personal relationships. Hence there exists a need to avoid situations which are likely to produce conflict within personal relationships (Giddens, 1994a, 1994b). Cottrell's (1985) empirical findings support the theorizing of Giddens in this respect. This particularly applies whenever the subject of religion enters the equation:

> Religion is seldom discussed. The majority of respondents felt that subjects such as religion were best avoided firstly because it was possible to hurt other peoples' feelings, and, secondly, because it led to the possibility of conflict (ibid.:329).

Martin has further suggested that: "increasing mobility may itself produce a need to play down differences between people. In the absence of a shared environment individuals are forced to find common ground in order to maintain social interaction" (1967:111). And, again, this whole argument relates to Festinger's (1956, 1985)

237

theory of cognitive dissonance in terms of the psychological need to avoid situations of potential conflict where cognitive dissonance is likely to occur.

Thus, the first of the mechanisms (derived from the above discussion and based on the network dependency hypothesis) which, it is proposed, inhibits the transmission and modification of religious belief is:

P14   *In order to avoid situations of conflict which threaten to destabilize friendships, ego will tend to prevent, or to place restrictions upon, the access of dissimilar alters[11] to ego's personal network, particularly with regard to Zone One.[12]*

Some of the evidence discussed in Chapter Five already supports this proposition. For example, the majority of informants selected like-minded HRP alters for social interaction within their current networks. The former established response of ego to the exemplars of alters formed one of the main criteria for this selection process. It was also found that ego tended to keep alters at a social distance if they held different beliefs to ego. Section 7.2 has further shown that high levels of relational proximity were conducive to changes and modifications in the beliefs of the conversionists. Due to personal network access restrictions, the resultant *low* levels of relational proximity between ego and dissimilar alters would therefore limit any potential for change or modification to occur in the belief system of ego.

The current study has also produced evidence which supports the view that differences in beliefs do cause relationships to become unstable. Chapter Five pointed out that some of the current alters in ego's network were relegated from Zone One to Zone Four, particularly when the relationships led to cognitive dissonance within ego. The alienation of Peter Gregson's brother and of Peter's close friend, are two such examples in this respect.[13] This may well be the main reason why access restrictions

---

[11] 'Dissimilar alters' is a term used hereafter to refer to alters holding different beliefs to those of ego, as given in the list of terms and abbreviations.

[12] See pages 191-193 for an explanation of the four zones.

[13] See pages 187-188.

to the network of ego tend to take place, in order to avoid such conflict if possible.

The general views of the informants were also sought on this subject by asking 36 of them if, in the future, they would be prepared to admit to their personal network alters holding different beliefs to themselves. Of these 36 informants, 21 said that they would admit dissimilar alters to their personal networks. When further questioned, however, it transpired that *none* of these 21 informants had any such alters in their close current networks. This was not particularly surprising in the light of the general findings of Chapter Five, together with previous research findings on attitudes and behaviour[14] and the conditional answers which the majority of the 21 informants gave to this question. Jennifer Reed's comments were typical. She said she probably would admit dissimilar alters to her network, but nevertheless expressed reservations:

> I don't suppose I would be so willing to accept their views ... I probably wouldn't accept them too easily ... Their view and my view - we would probably have to compromise. I wouldn't like that. (C26M10/678)

One of the main conditions expressed by these informants was that they would not allow an alter to force their beliefs upon them in any way at all. Again, Melanie Salmons' comment was typical: "I suppose there is a condition, that they don't try and force their beliefs onto me" (L18M13/449). Matthew Hayes articulated what the consequences would be if any alter attempted to force their beliefs:

> If they choose to enforce that upon others and after a rejection by others they continue to attempt to enforce that upon, and to push that onto others, they'd probably get ejected from that circle relatively quickly (L18M39/507).

These sentiments are consistent with proposition P12 in that unless ego is allowed to take the initiative concerning religious matters, the strongly held beliefs of alters will meet with vehement resistance. Those alters holding strong beliefs contrary to the beliefs of ego are therefore likely to be ejected from the network of ego unless such

---

[14] Procter (in Gilbert, 1993:117) has stated: "There is a long standing debate, sometimes called the 'attitude-behaviour' problem which refers to the common (indeed, almost universal) finding that there is no simple relationship between verbal and non-verbal indicators of an attitude".

beliefs are held in restraint by the alter. The main point concerning these 21 informants, however, is that dissimilar alters were never even given an opportunity *to enter* their networks, so the matter of ejection from a network never became an issue.

A further twelve informants, who said they would admit dissimilar alters into their network, did in fact already have such alters in their networks. Among these twelve informants, however, two informants, James Murdoch (LNCA) and Wendy Loveridge (HNCA), had excluded such alters from the central zones of their networks. In fact, all of their most frequent and most intimate alters were like-minded alters. A further five informants across all belief importance categories, from the twelve mentioned above, only interacted with dissimilar alters mostly located in Zone Two of their networks, with a few of these dissimilar alters located in Zone Three.[15] None of their dissimilar alters were located in Zone One. And of the remaining five informants, only one dissimilar alter per informant[16] was located in Zone One. Moreover, certain conditions applied to each of these alters in terms of their remaining within Zone One. For Graham Appleton, a CA, mutual respect constituted one of these conditions:

> They respect my stand, and I respect theirs ... That's part of friendship. Real friendship allows the other person to grow in the soil in which they're sown. I think that's a part of it. (C26L1/337)

Another condition which applied to three of the informants, in the MNCA and LNCA categories, was that religion was not discussed at all with the dissimilar alters in their networks. And Simon Lonsdale (an HNCA) expressed another commonly held view, among the above twelve informants, concerning his atheist friend: "He knows better than to try and persuade me" (H18L31/677). In other words, these relationships featured mutually recognised pre-established boundaries over which neither party crossed in order to avoid conflict and to maintain the relationship.

---

[15] See pages 191-193 for an explanation of the four zones.

[16] It is possible that, in the case of Graham Appleton, more than one dissimilar alter was located in Zone One. This cannot be verified due to *a lack of network information obtained from this informant only.*

Finally, Lindsay Kennedy (CA) was undecided whether to admit dissimilar alters into her network (which consisted of Christians or those who were very close to becoming Christians). The other two remaining informants, Mark Saunders (CA) and Ann Williams (LNCA), stated that they would *not* admit dissimilar alters into their close personal networks, but for different reasons. Mark Saunders' remark that: "I would not be in a hurry to bring someone into my close circle of friends on a regular basis who had another strong belief in another faith" (C35M22/528) may be, in part, a reflection of the restricted networks encouraged by his local church. It emphasizes Mark's point, cited previously,[17] that the Church tends to be too inward looking, although Mark was not making any efforts to extricate himself from the very situation he was criticizing. This lack of interaction with those outside of the Church would certainly inhibit the transmission of religious belief. On the other hand, Ann Williams was only willing to interact with those who shared her own agnosticism. Ann felt that alters with different beliefs would imply: "totally different people and not the sort of person that I [would] make friends with anyway. So I really don't think it would come about" (L26M33/527). In addition to the avoidance of conflict, the maintenance of cognitive consonance may be a factor which could help to explain the defensive strategy adopted by both of these informants, as well as by all of the informants who did not have any dissimilar alters in their networks.

In terms of the whole sample, no clear patterns emerged in relation to this issue with regard to age, gender or belief importance levels. It is clear that even though a total of 32 informants said they *would* admit dissimilar alters into their networks, 28 of these informants had not admitted a single dissimilar alter to Zone One of their current networks. There was therefore a consistent discrepancy between what these informants said they would do and what they had actually done in practice. One explanation is that it may have been perceived to be socially desirable to express an openness towards the idea of developing relationships with dissimilar alters but, in practice, the potential for conflict and for cognitive dissonance may have given rise to the reservations held by the informants about forming such relationships. These

---

[17] See page 178 for full quotation on this subject.

informants' reservations about, and conditions for, including dissimilar alters within their current networks would certainly inhibit belief transmission and adds further credence to proposition P14.

Attention will now be directed to the second proposition concerning mechanisms which inhibit belief transmission. Chapter four discussed the profound effects of primary socialization, the responses of ego to the exemplars of alters, and the subsequent difficulties of belief modification or change in later life (Berger and Luckmann, 1971). Beyond the formative years, the beliefs adopted by ego tend to remain ingrained, regardless of whether that belief is secular or religious. Despite this fact, Berger and Luckmann argue that *socialization is never complete*. Therefore, internalized beliefs face "continuing threats to their subjective reality" (ibid.:166). It has been further argued that the need to maintain cognitive consonance (Festinger, 1956, 1985) is closely associated with these threats to subjective reality. Chapter Five argued that one defensive strategy in this respect is the tendency of ego to select like-minded alters to ego's current network. But it will now be proposed that other strategies are also adopted which help to maintain and to defend ego's belief system. These strategies, however, have the effect of inhibiting belief transmission. Proposition P15 simply states the above argument in the form of a proposition:

P15   *To maintain the established response of ego to the former exemplars of alters and to retain cognitive consonance while, simultaneously, avoiding cognitive dissonance, ego will adopt various defensive strategies which will, in turn, inhibit any belief change or modification from taking place within ego.*

More specific testable propositions will now be formulated using this proposition as a basis.

The first defensive strategy is derived from the writings of Festinger (1985). Festinger suggests three ways in which ego may deal with unsolicited information from dissimilar alters when it conflicts with the belief system of ego: a) discredit the other as different, b) change one's beliefs, or c) change the beliefs of the other. As a further proposition one could add to this: d) find an alternative explanation of the

beliefs or experiences of the other which is consistent with one's own belief system. One could argue that formulating such alternative explanations would most likely reinforce the perspectives of both ego and alter and make a change of belief in either direction much more problematic. The following proposition P16 therefore develops P15 and is an extension of Festinger's argument:

P16   *Ego will tend to formulate an alternative interpretation, consistent with ego's own belief system, of the beliefs or experiences of any dissimilar alter, thus limiting the adoption of an alternative belief system.*

Thus, it is proposed that CAs and RNCAs will tend to resist non-religious views and will tend to interpret the non-religious views of others from a religious perspective. Conversely, NCAs with non-religious beliefs will tend to resist religious belief and will interpret the religious views of others from a non-religious, secular perspective.

During the Stage Two interviews, no direct questions were asked on this subject. Nevertheless, without any prompting, at some point during the interviews 27 of the informants gave an alternative interpretation of the beliefs or experiences of dissimilar alters. These informants were evenly distributed throughout the belief importance categories. The actual content of these alternative interpretations differed quite widely according to the circumstances, but the accounts can be divided into two broad categories based upon the above religious or secular perspectives held by the informants.

The religious perspective consisted of religious explanations to account for the non-religious views and behaviour of dissimilar alters. Among the CAs, Mark Saunders considered the beliefs of people who are not Christians to be a work of spiritual and intellectual deception initiated by the devil. Mark claimed to have access to the absolute truth concerning this view as well as with general reference to his belief system:

> It may come across arrogant, but I just know that Christianity is the truth. And whatever anybody would say, nothing would change my mind. I'm

very strong in my faith ... so nothing would change that. (C35M22/512)

Similarly, Lindsay Kennedy (CA) explained the, at times, difficult behaviour of her non-Christian husband (concerning Lindsay's churchgoing activities) as the work of the devil: "I think that Satan's winding him up here, which I know he [i.e. Satan] has done in the past" (C35M4/601). Lindsay was not a Christian, however, when she entered into marriage. Her husband may therefore have simply felt that he was losing his wife to the Church, but Lindsay chose a spiritual explanation to account for her husband's objections.

Other CAs produced alternative explanations whenever challenged by the views of alters in their networks. Nicola Sims, for example, said that, in her father's view, if God existed then the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War would not have taken place. Nicola's counter-argument was that: "essentially man does these things. I don't think God is so powerful that he can stop it really" (C26M35/592). Likewise, when Nicola's child died, dissimilar alters within her network said: "oh I suppose that means that you don't believe anything now because why would it happen?" (ibid:746). Again, Nicola had a counter-argument: "I thought to myself, well actually no, it really makes me think: what's going on? There must be a bigger plan here" (ibid:746). Thus, Nicola perceived meaning in perplexing events when dissimilar alters in her network could perceive no meaning at all.

Graham Appleton, another CA, explained the 'stalemate' situation which generally resulted from his encounters with ardent atheists:

> How an atheist who claims to have no spiritual experience can speak in a negative way about religious experiences or faith ... all this seems to be completely illogical to me. Because they've never had the experience, how can they claim it doesn't exist? So it usually ends up ... having the classic debate involved: you have your views, I have mine ... rather than the close relation. (C26L1/296)

The religious *and* secular belief systems of most, if not all, of the informants were so firmly established that the sentiments of Paul Tomlin (CA) would appear to apply

244

across the entire sample: "It would take a lot, it would need something very incredible to sway me" (C18M18/475).

A number of the religious HNCA and MNCA informants were less keen than the CAs to proselytize, but were characterized by a similar firmly established position regarding their belief system and had similar alternative interpretations of the beliefs and behaviour of dissimilar alters. Peter Gregson (HNCA), whilst holding traditional beliefs, found the beliefs and behaviour of 'born again' Christians to be 'excessive'. Peter explained the experiences of his 'born again' brother by employing a metaphor about the effects of a drug:

> Whether they become used to it and they don't get such a high out of it as they used to, their behaviour is [sometimes] tempered somewhat. I think I saw him once about a year or so later ... and I got the impression he was back to his old self again ... He went through that and if you like got it out of his system. (H35L2/144)

Peter later related that he was: "very interested in scientific matters, trying to marry up the two, between the scientific approach and the religious aspect" (ibid:213) which may account for this quasi-psychological interpretation of his brother's behaviour. Given his perspective it is highly unlikely that Peter would ever seek such an experience for himself.

The non-religious informants were equally entrenched in their predominantly secular interpretations of the views held by religious alters in their networks and thus constitute the second category holding a secular perspective. The comments of Emma Gordon (MNCA) and Ian Lewis (LNCA) typify the views held by the majority of the LNCAs on this issue. On the basis of her experiences associated with her occupation as an accountant, Emma was convinced that many people perceive religious belief to be a psychological weakness:

> I think a lot of people see religion or having a religious belief as being fulfilling a gap or fulfilling a deficiency in somebody's personality - they won't take responsibility for themselves. (M26M8/546)

Ian endorsed this line of thinking by stating that:

> I do believe there are large numbers of people fooling themselves - here's a controversial thought - fooling themselves with a faith, because they need so much to cling on in this world to something. (L35L7/154)

Thus, both secular and religious individuals equally believe that those holding dissimilar views are being deceived, but for different reasons. The firmly entrenched views held by these informants and the nature of the alternative interpretations outlined above leads to a typical intransigent situation between ego and dissimilar alter which inhibits belief transmission, thus supporting proposition P16. Moreover, this may constitute one reason why qualifications precede accounts of religious experience, as discussed in Chapter Five. For example, claims by an individual not to have been hallucinating during the religious experience may arise precisely because the person relating the experience knows there is a danger that others will interpret their experience in accordance with an alternative belief system and most likely from a psychological / scientific perspective.

The next two mechanisms which, it is proposed, inhibit belief transmission concern the very personal and 'taboo' nature of religious belief. An aversion to religious debate between individuals within the private sphere seems to be embedded in the British consciousness. In 1932, *The New Home Encyclopedia* gave the following advice on etiquette:

> Religion is a subject which should never be discussed in society. There is bound to be disagreement, and it is a matter on which some people find it extremely difficult to restrain their fervour when contrary opinions are expressed (Wheeler, 1932:860).

Over half a century later, as a consequence of her research on contemporary beliefs in Britain, Cottrell reported: "... there is such strong disapproval of political or religious proselytising outside narrowly defined (usually institutional) boundaries" (1985:329). It is difficult to ascertain whether this extends beyond British culture and applies to other countries since there do not appear to be any sociological studies on

246

this subject. Even Bellah (1985) and his associates do not discuss this phenomenon in their wide ranging study of individualism and commitment in contemporary American life. Given the higher levels of church attendance in America, it is possible, of course, that there may be a greater openness to the discussion of religious belief within the private sphere. But in Britain, at least, it would appear that religious debate still constitutes a sensitive topic. Thus, proposition P17 states:

P17   *The transmission of religious belief is inhibited by the sensitivity of religious belief as a topic of conversation.*

Chapter Five discussed a possible theoretical explanation of why a significant difference in the beliefs of ego and alters should cause psychological discomfort.[18] The same explanation may well account for the sensitivity of religious belief as a topic of conversation. Due to the social construction of reality (Berger, 1969; Berger and Luckmann, 1971), the discussion of religious belief may potentially reveal dissonant views between ego and alters (Festinger, 1985) and thereby uncover the social constructedness of the beliefs. As a result, the assumed 'giveness' of particular belief systems would be challenged; something which, arguably, few people would desire to contemplate. Clearly, a greater threat would result if religious belief were discussed between strangers, since the beliefs of the 'other' would be unknown, thereby increasing the risk of dissonance and the potential deconstruction of the world views held by the individuals involved. Martin's argument, cited previously, that: "In the absence of a shared environment individuals are forced to find common ground in order to maintain social interaction" (1967:111) adds further weight to this line of theoretical development. It is unlikely that religious belief would be anticipated by the majority of people in Britain to be an area of potential 'common ground', given the relatively low levels of church attendance. Moreover, the ever present threat of the withdrawal of social contacts to the realm of the stranger (Giddens, 1994a, 1994b) would arguably be greater when people meet for the first time, or when a relationship is in its infancy, giving a further incentive to avoid the topic of religion. Thus, proposition P18 - which is closely associated with proposition P17 due to the

---

[18] See pages 189-190.

sensitivity of religious discourse in Britain - could be described as the second of the defensive strategies:

P18   *There exists an unwritten social norm: 'never discuss religious belief with a stranger'.*[19]

These two propositions do not tend to apply as rigidly to the religious informants. Converts, together with other types of CAs and religious NCAs, whilst defensive about their own beliefs, tend to be more open towards discussing what they believe with others. On the other hand, those informants who responded to former alters by either accepting their secular beliefs or by rejecting their religious beliefs are the informants to whom propositions P17 and P18 most apply. Both of these propositions will be discussed together vis-à-vis the field notes made when collecting the initial questionnaires and with reference to the Stage Two interview data.

Due to the implications of these propositions (in particular: P18) great care was taken during Stage One of the current project to ensure that the 'letter of introduction'[20] assured the potential respondents that the study was in no way associated with any religious organisation whatsoever. The Mormon Church has made research in this area more problematic due to its use of questionnaires for the purposes of recruitment to their movement. In one sense, their use of such a method confirms the difficulties of approaching strangers about their religious beliefs. Thus, it was considered necessary to communicate clearly that this was an academic study and not an attempt to proselytize. This need to clarify the aims of the research was further informed by Cottrell's (1985:329) previously cited observation of the existence of strong disapproval of political or religious proselytising outside the confines of religious institutional structures.

These reservations, articulated in propositions P17 and P18, regarding possible misunderstandings about the purpose of the questionnaire together with a concern

---

[19] Again, this proposition is restricted to British culture.

[20] See Appendix I.

about the sensitivity of the subject matter were not without foundation given the reactions of some of the potential respondents. During the process of collecting the Stage One questionnaires, the potential threat of discussing religion with a stranger appeared to be perceived by at least 50 (10%) of the 500 respondents. The visible distress demonstrated by some of these respondents and the verbal replies of most in this group would suggest that they were not indifferent to religion, but rather, felt quite threatened by the subject and became very defensive. For example, one respondent said: "I don't like to discuss my religious views with other people" (Q.442) and looked visibly distressed. Others were more specific such as: "I started it, [the questionnaire] but then it got heavy and I didn't finish it" (Q.243). A few respondents became extremely angry with regard to the subject matter of the questionnaire, and totally refused to have anything to do with the survey. For example one very irate lady called her partner back into the house, shouting: "we're not getting involved in that!" (Q.16). Another was visibly seething with anger as she made the remark: "You have your beliefs; I have mine" (Q.33). Others responded in a much quieter way, but with equal distress. On one occasion a relative answered the door and spoke on behalf of the selected respondent: "He recently lost his father and therefore found some of the questions distressing to answer. He did try to complete it but had to leave it alone" (Q.265). Another lady had commenced filling in the form but appeared to be very upset when a visit was made to collect it. She said: "I feel really uncomfortable about filling in a religious form" (Q.228), hence the form was given back incomplete. As stated above, this type of scenario, characterized by irritation or deep distress was encountered with approximately 50 (10%) of the respondents. These respondents were not merely expressing a lack of interest or a lack of time to complete the questionnaire. These reasons accounted for a further 80 refusals (16%). The figure of 50 (10%) given for those who became very defensive may therefore be very conservative because a number of the others may well have used the reason given, of a lack of interest or time, as a form of defense mechanism to avoid any possible unsettlement of their world view.

There appear to be levels of toleration and limits beyond which no-one should venture when discussing religious beliefs within the private sphere. This chapter has already

249

referred to Festinger's (1956, 1985) argument about the psychological need to avoid situations or information which might increase cognitive dissonance. Religion seems to be perceived by the non-religious in particular to be a potential threat in this respect. From the interview data an example of this phenomenon among the LNCAs has already been cited in terms of Tim Knight's reaction to his neighbour[21] who introduced religion into the conversation just minutes after they had first met, with disastrous consequences in terms of any possible future friendship. Another LNCA, William Remmington, echoed Cottrell's argument above about the unacceptability of religious proselytizing outside of narrowly defined institutional boundaries. In the following interview extract, William refers to the mere *discussion* of the topic of religion:

> Religion is a personal thing, and they [friends] sort of say: what do you want to talk about religion for? So you might alienate them in a way if you're talking about it, unless it was in the environment of a church or you were there for the specific purpose to talk about religion. But just to say, 'oh, what do you think about religion Andy?': they'd look at you: 'what you on about?' - so you don't talk about it. It's not a taboo, well it is a taboo subject, I suppose it is ... I wouldn't bring it up because of how it might affect our relationship I suppose. You could sort of alienate. (L45D12/562)

Again, the personal aspect of religion, together with its potential to cause division among friends, are emphasized in this account as reasons for avoiding the subject. The consequences, of course, are that any type of belief transmission is inhibited.

It was mainly non-religious NCAs who wished to avoid discussion of religion. Nevertheless, views on this issue were expressed by a CA, Nicola Sims, although this concerned the non-religious members of her wider family:

> My father is a devout atheist to the extent that he's totally threatened by anything religious. He's almost to the point of fear about it. He's so, so anti. And my grandfather was the same but my grandmother was a Christian and my aunt, her daughter, was like me - confirmed as an adult. They both secretly, with much derision from the family, believed in it. It was like a

---

[21] See page 182.

secret club. The fish sign would be perfect for them because ... my
grandfather was very outspoken in his non-belief as well as my father.
(C26M35/253)

This need for the women in Nicola's family to keep their beliefs secret certainly inhibited any form of belief transmission between the men and the women in that situation. The familiar threat of religion - in this case, virtually a fear about the subject - is evident here and seems to be fairly common among the non-religious, creating difficulties for belief transmission. On the other hand, avoidance of religious discussion due to its sensitivity often functions to avoid conflict between different types of individuals within personal networks. This is particularly applicable when the alters involved are unselected within social networks (i.e. most dissimilar alters are unselected alters whereas most selected alters share similar belief systems).

None of the evidence from the interviews or the field notes appear to contradict or to place in question propositions P17 and P18. All of the relevant evidence supports these propositions.

The interface between CA and NCA and between religious and non-religious NCAs is clearly involved in this discussion of the dynamics of belief modification within current networks. This becomes particularly focussed when negative agency is given consideration. The definition of 'negative agent(s)' is given in the list of terms and abbreviations as: 'All individuals holding religious beliefs who, by their behaviour and/or by their understanding and interpretation of a belief system, discredit the belief system espoused by those same individuals'. On the basis of Festinger's (1985) theory of cognitive dissonance it could be argued that - just as ego seeks to maintain cognitive consonance and to avoid cognitive dissonance with regard to ego's own belief system - the plausibility of a belief system held by a religious agent is likely to be assessed by ego in the same terms. In other words, if ego perceives any dissonance *within* the belief system of the religious agent and/or in relation to the behaviour of the religious agent, the beliefs of the agent may well be dismissed as being unworthy of serious consideration. The belief system espoused by a negative agent may suffer further discreditation through ego's perception of dissonance *between* the belief

251

systems of agent and ego and by an absence of the network conditions outlined by propositions P10 to P12, thereby indirectly developing the previously cited principles derived from Berger (1969), Currie, *et al.* (1977), Heirich (1977), Gartrell and Shannon (1985), Potvin and Sloane (1985), Schluter and Lee (1993) and Giddens (1994a, 1994b).

Thus, proposition P19, again unprecedented in the literature, states that:

P19: *If a negative religious agent or agents are present in the network of ego, it is likely that ego will dismiss the beliefs of the religious agent(s). This has a tendency to lead to a negative view of religion on the part of ego.*

This, of course, may, in the long term, have the effect of inhibiting any further transmission of religious belief between religious agents and ego. It is rather ironic that the effective transmission[22] of religious belief is often inhibited by those who are the most eager to transmit their religious beliefs. Negative agents were mentioned at some point during the interviews by ten of the twelve LNCAs, compared with just three MNCAs, two HNCAs and two CAs. A further CA, David Hutchinson, referred to a negative agent but this was related to his wife's past experience which had considerably discouraged her from church attendance and had diminished the strength of her beliefs. The other two CAs mentioned above likewise referred to former network contacts rather than current alters. On the other hand, the remaining informants, noted above, referred to negative agents who were either current or more recent network alters.

The reason why negative agents were mentioned predominantly by LNCAs may be due, in part, to a need to maintain their established response to the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence, together with their need to maintain cognitive consonance. Negative agents within their networks would therefore serve as useful examples for them in support of their current arguments for maintaining non-religious beliefs. The hypocrisy of church attenders, for example, was quite a popular view

---

[22] Effective transmission in the sense of the occurrence of a change or modification in the belief system of ego.

252

held among the LNCAs. In fact, hypocrisy among church attenders was a topic raised by eight of the informants, five of whom were LNCAs and two were HNCAs. The remaining informant was Janet Wensley, an MNCA. Janet's experience was typical of all these informants:

> Some of the most religious people I know are the biggest hypocrites and bigots. Paul [my husband] is not practising but he's from a Catholic family and his mother is a staunch Catholic. She always goes to church every Sunday and that's it, that's the life. And she has crosses and things hanging around the room but she's racist, she's a bigot and I would say, I mean she's a nice enough woman, but in a lot of ways she's not the most generously minded person when it comes to social issues or whatever. Intolerance, she's not particularly tolerant I would say ... I suppose it confirmed, it further confirmed what I already believed [about organised religion]. (M26M36/338)

Similar to the other accounts of hypocrisy within the Church, Janet formulated her view of organised religion on the basis of known church attenders whose behaviour was not consistent with their religious beliefs. This behaviour had either discouraged all eight informants from becoming involved in church religion, or, at the very least, had been used by these informants as examples which reinforced their own stance of non-involvement with organised religion. Either way, these negative agents were not conducive to the effective transmission of orthodox Christianity. Thus, the data support proposition P19.

One LNCA, Neil Reid, was far from impressed with the Church when he attended a prayer group with his former Christian girlfriend. The religious beliefs held by this group were not effectively transmitted due to the fact that the group, along with his girlfriend, felt threatened by Neil's questions:

> I went to a prayer group where they were talking about conscience and there was a group of people sat in the room. And they said: 'what do you think conscience is?' So we launched into this discussion where they clearly hadn't grasped what the subject was about ... I think they felt a bit defensive about it ... the heathen had come into the room and was seriously questioning things. But I wasn't questioning their belief or questioning what was being said. I was just asking questions which put them on the spot slightly. And I don't think I made myself very popular. But I wasn't being antagonistic at all.

It's not in my nature ... It made me think that what they seemed to be doing was once they'd gone through the door they switched off. Well my attitude was well that's when you start thinking because the Bible ... it's a series of suggestions and analogies for you to draw your own conclusions. It was clear they kind of wanted all to go the same way and weren't thankful. Because what I was putting forward did actually stack up and I think they felt a bit uncomfortable with it ... It's just that I'd come from a background where it wasn't part of my upbringing. I just I came to it from a different angle. (L26L21/539)

It appears that no transmission of belief occurred between the group and Neil in either direction because both parties had formed their beliefs as a result of their previous upbringing and both parties wished to maintain those beliefs. The creation of cognitive dissonance may account for the discomfort felt by the group. Neil espoused liberal views whereas the group held a more literal interpretation of the Bible. This encounter merely reinforced both Neil's liberal beliefs and the group's literal stance. The negative agency in this example extends to Neil himself, because neither of the parties involved were able to transmit their beliefs effectively and both parties discredited their own belief systems in the estimation of the other. Neither of the parties were able to empathize with the background experience which each brought to the discussion. Both dismissed the religious beliefs of the other and both developed a negative view of the beliefs of the other, thus conforming to proposition P19.

In one sense, the above example reflects the challenge facing traditional evangelicals by post-evangelicals disaffected by their experience of evangelicalism (Tomlinson, 1997). Tomlinson argues that:

It seems to me that there is a basic separation from those who see the only solution to be that of returning (in some cases with a vengeance) to the older certainties; in effect these people are saying that the only response to a sea of uncertainty is to re-establish the presence of absolute certainty ... After all, it offers a sense of security and familiarity in the midst of a lot of confusion. But for lots of us, it just will not do. (ibid:140)

In the current cultural climate in which "people now reject truth claims which are expressed in the form of dogma or absolutes" (ibid:140) and in which "dignity is

granted to the emotions and to intuition" (ibid:140), traditional evangelicals are certainly faced with an immense challenge if they are effectively to transmit their beliefs to individuals such as Neil.

Proposition P12 stated the need for ego to be given the freedom to take the initiative when exploring religious belief. In complete contrast to this requirement, one of the key phrases used by five of the LNCA informants who discussed negative agents was that of having religion 'stuffed down the throat'. A further six of the informants in the other belief importance categories also used this phrase. In other words, one of the key characteristics of a negative agent was an overbearing, forceful approach to the communication of the agent's religious beliefs, as distinct from a convincing charismatic leader. Just two examples should suffice to illustrate the resentment felt by these informants, and the possible consequences, concerning these negative agents. Virginia Rothwell (an HNCA) referred to those who proselytize by knocking on people's doors:

> If they do it in a very pushy way, I react badly. For example, I do get annoyed when people come knocking on my door. Because I don't see that religion should be something that you sell door to door, knocking on doors. If I actually choose to go to a meeting or choose to go to somewhere where I know it's going to be discussed, then I will listen with an open mind. I might not agree with everything. But I don't like having it rammed down my throat. (H35W15/776)

Thus, even when an informant attributed a high level of importance to their religious beliefs, this method of communication was not appreciated at all.

Another HNCA, Justin Palmer, said that his beliefs partly resulted from an absence of force:

> But I think probably what has had an equally profound effect is the fact that it hasn't been forced down my throat. Because if it was forced down my throat I can guarantee you I would be a non-believer. (H26M38/469)

Religious belief may therefore be relegated to even lower levels of priority, or even

abandoned, if encounters with such negative agents take place.

According to Festinger (1985) the type of situation created by door to door evangelism, or the information on offer, will be avoided if it serves to increase cognitive dissonance within ego. Hence proposition P10's emphasis on a pre-established relationship between ego and agent if the efficiency of belief transmission is to be enhanced, thus avoiding the creation of immediate cognitive dissonance. Door to door evangelism also prevents the beliefs and the behaviour of the agent from being evaluated by ego over a period of time, thereby contravening the arguments of writers such as Currie, *et al.* (1977), Heirich (1977) and Gartrell and Shannon (1985).

On the other hand if, due to the above reasons, door to door evangelism is fairly ineffective, the Church in general is faced with an enormous challenge, since it would appear that the majority of the general population never come into contact with religious institutional structures. These structures are confined to the private sphere and are unlikely to be encountered unless network connections are established between NCAs and CAs. Chapter Five clearly demonstrated that there was minimal current network contact between NCAs and CAs[23]. Cottrell supports this view: "The majority of people live from day to day without ever encountering the teachings or perspective of church religion" (ibid:416). And by Mark Saunders' (CA) own admission, CAs have a tendency to be inward looking, thereby exacerbating the problem of belief transmission between the Church and NCAs.[24] The Church therefore has little choice other than to transmit its beliefs through friendship and kinship networks.[25]

The final proposition to be discussed in this chapter concerns the effects of social and geographical mobility on belief transmission and religious practice. In conclusion to their study of numerical data related to church life in Britain, Currie and his associates state that:

---

[23] See page 189.

[24] See page 184.

[25] The role of the media will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

As the special connection between migration and membership termination shows, individuals often leave churches at the same time as they leave their homes or the area in which they have long lived ... greater geographical and occupational mobility, as well as the spread of further education, must also be included among the influences making for the churches' increased losses: while these losses themselves, from whatever cause they may arise, produce further losses simply by depleting church-centred communities and increasing churchless communities (Currie, *et al.*, 1977:123).

This is echoed in the findings of Chambers' (1997) study of Welsh churchgoers. Chambers argues that after 1945 new opportunities in further education led to many young people moving permanently from small Welsh communities, thereby leading to a break-up of these communities. This had a detrimental effect on the Welsh churches, inhibiting the transmission of church religion. Likewise, Forster's fairly recent study of the Church and people living on a Hull council estate found that:

... a change of residence is a common reason for ceasing to attend church, and this finding is supported by the survey results (Forster, 1989:106).

The above findings are not universal, however, since Hornsby-Smith (1987), in his study of Roman Catholicism in England, observes that "the effects of social mobility on the religious practices and beliefs of English Catholics are variable and generally slight". Nevertheless, he states that social mobility appears to be "disruptive of orthodox beliefs". Drawing upon the findings of Sorokin (1959) concerning the favourable effects of mobility on, for example, innovation, cosmopolitanism and individualism, Hornsby-Smith argues that "we might therefore expect the privatisation of religious beliefs and behaviour among the upwardly mobile" (Hornsby-Smith, op.cit.:68); a term which has been used to describe those living at Grange Park. Hornsby-Smith then conducts a short review of previous, and somewhat conflicting, research findings on social and geographical mobility, which suggests that whilst some people may withdraw from community involvement, others may compensate for the marginality resulting from their mobility. But Hornsby-Smith concludes:

In general terms there are grounds for believing that the experiences of both social and geographical mobility can be seriously disruptive, leaving the

257

mobile individual marginal to both the community of origin and of destination (op.cit.:69).

As a natural conclusion to this discussion of the effects of social and geographical mobility, and bearing in mind Hornsby-Smith's reference to the upwardly mobile, proposition P20 states:

P20   *Social and geographical mobility has a tendency to inhibit the transmission of religious belief and adversely affect religious practice.*

With reference to the current data, section 7.2 identified that social change, particularly within Zone One of ego's network, was an a priori requirement for any belief change or belief modification to occur in ego. This not only applies in order to facilitate religious belief transmission - social change can also inhibit the transmission of religious belief, particularly in terms of the transmission of Church religion. This was particularly evident among those who moved away from a former network in which religious alters were present. In the absence of these religious alters, and with new social circumstances whereby ego was 'forced' into new networks in which religious beliefs were subjected to challenge, a change or modification took place in the religious practice, and to a lesser extent in the actual beliefs, of ego. This may have been due, in part, to the above observation by Martin, that: "increasing mobility may itself produce a need to play down differences between people" (ibid:111).

Five of the informants talked about modifications to their religious practice, due to changes in their networks as a result of housing moves. For three of these informants, the level of importance of their beliefs remained high, but their church attendance ceased. Virginia Rothwell's move, for example, was due to her pursuit of higher education:

> It [church attendance] was actually quite important in my life until I was eighteen and then I went off to university and I suppose my horizons broadened then and I started questioning stuff more and I'm afraid I didn't really go to church again. (H35W15/638)

Virginia continued to hold spiritual matters in high regard but had abandoned the dogmatism of formal church religion together with the practice of church attendance. In a sense she had assumed a liberal position rather akin to that of Neil Reid (discussed above). Her move resulted in the termination of any further transmission of Church religion.

Likewise, two of the MNCA informants who were former CAs moved to a university. The strength of their beliefs was already moderate, however, hence the move only affected their religious practice. At the time of the interview, one of these MCNA informants, Chris Hansford, was about to reverse the effects of his move to university by re-establishing his church attendance due to another change in his social network. Since leaving university he had met his current fiancée who was fairly religious. This led to a mutual agreement to attend church together on a weekly basis, partly because they felt it would be hypocritical to get married in church without subsequent regular attendance.

The intellectual challenges to the faith of these three informants who moved to university did not radically affect their fundamental beliefs, possibly due to the fact that they had reached a stage in their lives where they were engaged in maintaining their former established response to the exemplars of alters during their formative years, thus adding weight to the argument of earlier chapters. Even in the case of Virginia Rothwell, her adoption of a liberal position did not constitute a radical change from her earlier religious perspective because she commented that in many ways, at the time, she was simply going through the motions of religion without really knowing why she was doing so:

> I look back on it now and it seems weird that I actually did that. I went to these confirmation classes, I got myself confirmed, and then from about the age of fourteen to eighteen every Sunday I went down the road to the local church ... It just seems strange now that I did it. I did it almost without thinking. I suppose I went through all the ritual of all the things you're supposed to do ... in a sense I suppose a little bit hypocritical. I look on it now and I think that was really a bit of a cheek, that I was telling children basic Bible stories without really having thought it through myself and whether or not I believed in it. (H35W15/637)

The practice of church attendance by the other two MNCAs who moved to university may have placed too great an emphasis on the difference of these informants from the other students, hence its curtailment. The ease with which Chris Hansford had decided to recommence attending church since leaving university would suggest that his decision to curtail attending church was merely a pragmatic course of action at the time.

There were no examples from the data of a move to an attractive parish or church. The remaining two HNCAs who made a housing move simply found it difficult to relocate themselves in another church; hence they retained their beliefs but gave up church attendance. To some extent, this isolation from the Church inhibited any further influence which the Church might have on these informants. It is evident from each of these examples that the transmission of church religion can, to some extent, be inhibited by social and geographical mobility, thus giving credence to proposition P20 and reflecting the findings of the studies cited above.

7.4 CONCLUSION

From the previous chapters the evidence seems to suggest that ego becomes involved in a quest to maintain cognitive consonance, in terms of ego's personal belief system, from fairly early on in life and that early socialization plays a major role in the direction of this quest. Then, by adulthood, the mechanisms discussed in section 7.3 of the current chapter greatly inhibit any secondary religious socialization from taking place, which, according to Berger and Luckmann (1971:154) would have to be considerable in its effect to overcome the primary religious or secular socialization of ego. The mechanisms discussed in section 7.2 - which facilitate belief transmission within current networks - only applied to the conversionists in the sample due to the fact that most informants were engaged in maintaining their established response to the exemplars of former alters, hence no further belief changes or modifications generally took place. The transmission of religious belief therefore tends to be most effective during ego's formative years.

There was no evidence of the transmission of secular beliefs to former CAs who no longer attended church. The latter type of informants simply drifted away from the Church but continued to maintain the beliefs which resulted from their response to the exemplars of former alters.[26] It was additionally found that non-religious informants and/or non-religious alters tended not to make any effort to transmit their beliefs to others.

The current chapter has discussed evidence which tends to affirm propositions P10 to P20. A key element involved in either the facilitation or inhibition of the transmission of religious belief is that of human agency within social networks and the mechanisms through which human agents either penetrate, or are prevented from penetrating, the personal networks of others. Effective agents tend to be characterized by a high level of relational proximity to ego; a consistency of life-style and beliefs; an ability to establish trust and respect in relationships; and the willingness to allow ego to take the initiative in conversations about religious belief. Negative agents, on the other hand, tend sometimes inadvertently to reinforce the secular or alternative beliefs held by ego through hypocrisy, dogmatism and/or excessive force when communicating their beliefs.

The transmission of religious belief is further inhibited by a) a tendency of ego to prevent, or to place restrictions upon, access of dissimilar alters to ego's personal network, b) ego's alternative interpretations of the beliefs and experiences of dissimilar alters, c) the sensitivity of religion as a topic of conversation, and d) social and geographical mobility.

It is clear from the evidence cited in this chapter that belief change or modification is not just a cerebral event within ego. Social change is necessary if any belief change or modification is to occur within ego. This of course raises the question of whether the current beliefs of ego ever change *without* the entry of dissimilar alters into the central relational zone of ego's network. In other words, if there is no change to ego's

---

[26] In particular, see Chapter Five for the factors which explain the differences between CAs and RNCAs.

network and it remains static, is belief change still possible? Chapter Eight is devoted to discussing this possibility in terms of general life experiences plus the effects of the media on personal religious and secular beliefs.

CHAPTER EIGHT
BEYOND NETWORKS: OTHER FACTORS?

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter One drew attention to the argument of Wallis and Bruce (1982) against Snow *et al.* (1980) of an "undue emphasis on the role of social networks ... a mechanistic conception of the person and the means by which he is activated" and that "cognitive factors [were considered] trivial in comparison with the effects of personal networks" (Wallis and Bruce, 1982:112). As in the reply of Snow *et al.* (ibid.),[1] this thesis offers no apology for placing emphasis on the effects of social networks. On the basis of the empirical evidence collected for the current study it has already been argued that the response of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence was not predetermined and mechanistic but, rather, was the result of an emergent, dynamic interactional process. Ego accepted, questioned or rejected the beliefs of former alters and formulated religious or secular beliefs as an outcome of this interactive process. This generally formed a basis for the continued maintenance of these beliefs in later life and also formed one of the bases upon which current like-minded alters were selected. These factors were therefore very much network related but were also, arguably, simultaneously fused to a psychological need in ego for the reduction of cognitive dissonance and the maintenance of cognitive consonance (Festinger, 1956, 1985).

It is still necessary, however, to consider other factors which appear, on a surface level at least, to be independent of personal social networks and which may have contributed to the formulation or modification of the informants' religious or secular beliefs. There are two major factors which will be discussed in this chapter. The first concerns the general experience of informants related to contingent events. The second is that of the influence of the media on the religious or secular beliefs of the

---

[1] See pages 21-25 for a full account of the defense made by Snow *et al.*

informants.

8.2 GENERAL EXPERIENCE

8.2.1 Introduction

From a cursory review of the interview data it was clear that if anything might disprove the hypothesis that religious or secular personal belief systems are network dependent, it was that of the informants' responses to general experience in the world. It is arguable that certain contingent events in the world occur, in varying degrees, outside the direct control of human agency and outside of interaction within personal networks. Examples include threats to ontological security (Giddens, 1994a, 1994b) in the form of natural disasters, wars, accidents, unexpected illnesses and so on. Such contingent events could very easily evoke a religious or an anti-religious response.

Nevertheless, Chapter Four referred to Berger and Luckmann's (1971:154) argument that: "the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds internalized in secondary socializations" and that primary socialization has a tendency to persist. According to Berger and Luckmann, "severe biographical shocks" are required "to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood" (ibid.:162). On the basis of this argument - and in order to continue testing the network dependency hypothesis - it will therefore be proposed that interpretations of general experience are associated with the maintenance of ego's established response to the exemplars of former alters. Thus, proposition P21 states:

P21   *The established response of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood*
         and adolescence will generally provide the foundation upon which ego's
         interpretation of general experience is based.

This proposition implies that these general experiences rarely bring about a change in the belief system of ego. Indeed, it tests the severity of the 'biographical shocks'

264

required (in the form of general experience) in order to 'disintegrate' the established response of ego to former alters. Thus, it is proposed that ego's interpretation of general experience will be based upon a pre-established world view acquired through ego's former social networks. One would therefore expect to find in the data that those whose former established response to the exemplars of alters was an orientation in a religious direction would interpret general experience in religious terms. Conversely, those whose former established response was an orientation in a secular direction would interpret general experience in secular terms.

The responses of the informants to contingent events will now be addressed with further reference to the writings of Giddens (1994a) on this subject together with reference to the empirical data.

8.2.2 Responses to predominantly contingent events.

Giddens (1994a:125) has argued that the major risks facing the contemporary world are potential global events over which individuals have no control. He states:

> The possibility of nuclear war, ecological calamity, uncontainable population explosion, the collapse of global economic exchange, and other potential global catastrophes provide an unnerving horizon of dangers for everyone.

Giddens acknowledges, however, that: "The large majority of people do not spend much of their time, on a conscious level at least, worrying about nuclear war or about the other major hazards" (ibid.:132) and that a very common method of dealing with these 'low-probability high consequence' risks is to adopt a sense of fate, i.e. "a vague and generalised sense of trust in distant events over which one has no control relieves the individual of the burden of engagement with an existential situation which might otherwise be chronically disturbing" (ibid.). This sense of fate is often characterized by 'sustained optimism' which can be informed from either a secular or a religious perspective.

265

Giddens tends to emphasize secularized notions of fate at the expense of the religious and fails to cite the *type* of risks to which religious responses are most commonly evoked, that is, according to the evidence collected for this study and which is discussed below. But Giddens' focus on secular responses to *global types* of risk does reflect one aspect of the findings of the current study: namely that the informants made little or no mention of these global risks. Their own responses to these types of risks could well have been based upon the secular optimism suggested by Giddens, that: "unfettered rational thought and particularly science offers sources of long term security" (ibid.:136). This can only be assumed in the current study, however, since the informants rarely discussed any particular strategy for coping with global risks; they simply dismissed the issue, generally holding the view that such events were unlikely. Only one informant, Justin Palmer (an HNCA who was incidentally a scientist by profession), specifically mentioned global events in relation to a personal religious response:

> Particularly when you see strife in the world and you think I just wish that it could stop. That people would stop fighting and start talking. That sort of thing. [Prayer is] spurred on a lot of the time by events. Again, the same events make you think about things, then you think well, please God help these people to get over this, that sort of thing. (H26M38/347)

These adverse events very much determined the amount of time that Justin devoted to prayer.

But Giddens nevertheless gives the impression that religious belief plays very little part in individuals' attempts to deal with risks in the modern world:

> Risk and danger, as experienced in relation to ontological security, have become secularized along with most other aspects of social life. A world structured mainly by humanly created risks has little place for divine influences, or indeed for the magical propitiation of cosmic forces or spirits (ibid.:111).

Chapter One did point out, however, that Giddens does concede that religious notions

of fate still play *some* role in the contemporary world.[2] On the other hand, Giddens tends to marginalize religious responses to everyday types of risk and religious formulations of fate.

From the current data, it would appear that in everyday life, the informants perceived the greatest risks and the greatest areas of vulnerability to be in very personal and immediate situations and with issues other than those highlighted by Giddens. And it is with regard to these situations and issues from which religious responses were evoked and were most forthcoming. The types of experiences reported by the informants - all of which might be described as situations of vulnerability (potential or actual) - can be broadly classified into six categories: i) death, ii) depression and disillusionment with life, iii) illness, iv) childbirth and nurture of children, v) housing moves, and vi) other personal crises. These events and issues are almost entirely overlooked by Giddens, primarily through his concentration on the global aspects of the contemporary world. Yet it is quite clear that 69% of the Stage Two informants viewed the risks or issues, within one or more of these categories, in religious terms.

The pattern of religious responses to these situations, however, was not uniform across the sample. There was a distinct difference - based upon the established response of ego to the exemplars of former alters - concerning those informants who responded to these events and issues from a religious perspective and those who did not. Twenty-four Stage Two informants indicated on the initial questionnaire that they were brought up according to some form of belief or faith at home[3] and a further four Stage Two informants had religious alters in their former networks. At some point during the interviews, 27 of these 28 informants[4] reported that various contingent events had led them to formulate a religious interpretation of those events. This sub-group of 27 informants, which included the CA informants, will be analysed prior to the consideration of those who responded to general experience from a secular perspective.

---

[2] See pages 37-38.

[3] Another two informants indicated they were brought up according to some form of belief or faith at home but they did not have anything to report on this matter.

[4] The case which differed concerns Clive Willis and is discussed on pages 272-273.

The seven conversionists in the sample require separate discussion initially, due to their characteristic questioning of the exemplars of former alters. It will be recalled from Chapter Seven that the conversionists' beliefs were slightly modified or consolidated in later life. Nevertheless, due to their interaction with religious alters during their formative years, all of the conversionists became predisposed, to some degree, towards the adoption of religious belief in later life and therefore had *a tendency to search for evidence to confirm a religious world view prior to their conversion*. These informants therefore tended not to view contingent events from a secular perspective prior to their conversion, and by no means after they were converted. Lindsay Kennedy (one of these conversionists) commented: "I was a searcher for most of my life" (C35M4/373). Lindsay's search for a meaning to life was intensified in the face of death and depression:

> I was certainly thinking 'what on earth is life about?', and I was angry with 'somebody' [i.e. God] because my father had died and I was quite disillusioned with life - what's the purpose of life? (ibid.:371)

This outlook of Lindsay's is typical of the conversionists' responses to such events prior to their conversion. The accounts of the conversionists are therefore consistent with proposition P21.

Jennifer Reed, a CA who was not a conversionist - yet who was typical of most CAs - talked about her need of a belief in the afterlife due to her fear of death:

> I think death is a big part of it [i.e. thinking about religious belief and formulating a religious belief system]. It definitely was at my stage anyway ... I have to believe in something. I have to, definitely. It would be very black. That was a period which was very black when I used to think there was nothing. I used to actually try and think of nothing and it's very, very frightening - so if I had to face that, that would be awful. (C26M10/537)

The death of relatives also led to religious interpretations by those who were brought up religiously in the high and medium importance categories. Virginia Rothwell (HNCA), speaking about the tragic death of her husband at an early age, remarked:

A lot of people said to me 'oh well he died because his purpose on this earth was over and done with' - and I can't accept that because he had two children to bring up. And I just think well there must be something after that, otherwise why would that life just have been wiped out at that point if there wasn't something that was going to happen afterwards? I'm not sure what it is, but I do believe there is something. (H35W15/399)

Likewise, in the MNCA category, Sarah Rogers expressed a similar religious interpretation concerning the death of her grandmother:

My nan died three years ago, but her spirit lives on. That comforts me. And if, if somebody turned round and said categorically I can prove that there is no life after death, there is no spiritual anything, I would find that quite distressing, quite hard to deal with. (M26M3/188)

Other circumstances in the informants' lives, as listed in the six categories above, led to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability and were met with the same religious response by those who were oriented towards religious belief during their formative years. In order to illustrate the varying nature of these circumstances, including the ways in which some of the informants were motivated towards prayer in response to general experience, further examples will be given below.

A housing move can easily cause stress for a whole variety of reasons. When Simon Lonsdale (an HNCA) was contemplating a move from Plymouth to Southampton he perceived a possible threat to his relationship with his partner and therefore turned to God for guidance:

I mean each time I make a big decision, a life decision, I believe I'm getting some guidance from God. When we came to live here - we used to live in Plymouth - it was quite a big decision to uproot and come down here and the other half and I were just sort of fairly new together, so it was a big shift for her and it could have split us up. She might not have come. So I was in a bit of a dilemma. So I did pray and ask for some help, some guidance, and I think we made the right decision. (H18L31/252)

This recourse to prayer in response to unsettling or even potentially life-threatening situations extended to the process of childbirth and the nurture of children. Alison

Pemberton (HNCA) commented:

R.   Obviously you're responsible for someone who is completely helpless and
      very vulnerable. When I say a prayer at night I pray that he [the child] is
      always safe and healthy. It definitely makes you think more about things, life
      and things, yea.

I.   Do you think you would still say a prayer every night even if you didn't
      have children?

R.   No I don't think I would ... but I certainly would in times of difficulty.
      (H26M30/339)

Chapter Six referred to Davie's (1994:118-121) consideration of various reasons why
women are more inclined to be religious than men. Both Davie (ibid.) and Walter
(1990) argue that no one theory fully accounts for the phenomenon and that the
evidence is far from conclusive, although Davie does favour: "those explanations
which underline the proximity of women to birth and death" (ibid.:120). Some of the
women in the Grange Park sample, such as Janet Wensley, tended to echo Davie's
view about the process of child bearing:

        I think women are more in touch with emotional issues and I think there is
        more of a link with nature and that sort of thing. I think women tend to, I
        mean obviously we're talking generalizations here, but I think on the whole
        women do tend to listen to themselves and their minds and their bodies more
        and be more in touch with themselves emotionally. And more open to new
        experiences and change and I suppose the whole kind of child bearing thing
        makes you perhaps more spiritual in a way. (M26M36/217)

A woman's close proximity to birth and death is undoubtedly a strong influence
towards spirituality, but it is not an inevitable outcome. The evidence from the current
study indicates that if a woman's established response to former alters was not an
orientation in a religious direction, as in the cases of informants such as Caroline
Abrahams, Ann Williams and Melanie Salmon (all of whom were in the LNCA
category), then a religious response to birth and death was either absent or greatly

diminished, thus affirming proposition P21.[5]

Moreover, the birth of children did not merely remain an area of concern to women. Men also became conscious of the dangers of childbirth. For example, John Greaves (an MNCA who was brought up religiously) was motivated to pray to a far greater extent than he did normally, not just to God but to deceased relatives, for help and support during such an experience:

> ... I think the run up to the birth in so much as you read and hear about all the less well off handicaps and so on. I think sub-consciously you're sort of saying to yourself, praying for want of a better word, that everything's going to be OK and she's going to be alright. You see your partner in pain which is not something that we normally see or want to see. It's generally a crisis as opposed to pre-planned. When it finally comes and gets closer, that moment you draw on a few inner strengths and pray to a few people that you probably wouldn't normally pray to. (M35M29/97).

The response of these informants to illness was also articulated from a religious perspective. Michael Hayward perceived a religious meaning in the illnesses which he had suffered by identifying with the suffering of Christ:

> I've had quite a few illnesses in my life. And I've put my faith in God. And it gives me strength to know that if you believe he's with you at the time, that you'll pull through. I do sometimes think: 'why is it that he's making me suffer?' And then I think well perhaps it's because he suffered for us. That's the way I look at it. I say he suffered on the cross for us so perhaps ... we've got to suffer too. (H45M25/455)

Within this group of 27 informants who were oriented towards religious belief, none interpreted general experience in negative[6] terms. None of these informants thought that events in their lives were in any sense meaningless and none thought that contingent events placed in doubt the existence of God or the existence of a higher benevolent spiritual force. Graham Appleton (a CA) expressed a general view which

---

[5] The general experiences of informants oriented in a secular direction will be discussed in more detail following further analysis of the religiously oriented informants.

[6] Negative in the sense of deeming a religious interpretation to be irrelevant, unattractive or untenable.

typified this group:

> My experience in the world gives me a sense of hope that life isn't just brute
> fact. That I'm not here to live and then end my life. (C26L1/62)

Thus, in the CA and higher belief importance categories, such events generally caused
no particular theological difficulties for most of the informants. Their interpretations
of adverse circumstances were consistent with pre-established religious beliefs which
they sought to maintain. The pursuit of cognitive consonance therefore appears to be
involved even in their attempts to make sense out of difficult and distressing
situations. As in these examples of dealing with a variety of distressing circumstances,
a deeper spiritual meaning and purpose was perceived and/or a response was made
in the form of seeking help from God, from a higher spiritual power or from deceased
relatives. Crucially, however, these interpretations and responses were *only* made by
the 27 informants who were maintaining an established response to the exemplars of
former alters in the form of a religious orientation, giving further support to
proposition P21.

On the other hand, ten of the Stage Two informants formulated secular interpretations
of general experience, all of whom were, quite expectedly, in the lower belief
importance categories. Eight of them were agnostics or atheists (in fact, these eight
constituted all of the agnostics and atheists in the Stage Two sample). Moreover, nine
of these ten informants indicated on the Stage One questionnaire that they had not
been brought up according to some form of belief or faith at home. During Stage Two
of the research it was further discovered that these nine informants interacted only
with negative alters[7] in their former networks. Clive Willis (an MNCA) differed from
the others in that he was brought up in a religious home, but his response to that
upbringing was a rejection of the religious beliefs of his parents. When Clive was
asked during the interview if there had been anyone who had made him question
things at all, or if there had been anyone responsible for giving rise to doubts about

---

[7] Definition of *'negative alter'*: an alter who encouraged ego away from religious belief: making the adoption of religious belief appear
unattractive, irrelevant or untenable. See page 102.

religious matters, he replied:

> No. Events more than anything, give doubts. Things that have happened in this world definitely give you doubts. And I'm sure people within a religion can find a reason for it. But it gives doubts in my mind. (M26M16/592)

Clive felt resentful that during his childhood he had been forced to attend church every week by his parents. Consequently, the whole interview gave the impression that he was looking for various reasons to negate the religious perspective which his parents had insisted he adopt previously. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that contingent events led to doubt about religious matters, since he would have been unlikely to interpret such events in a favourable light from a religious perspective.[8]

The other eight agnostics and atheists, together with one gnosticist, also found that contingent events led them to conclude it was either very difficult to believe in a benevolent God, or in the case of just one informant, Nigel Grantham-Wright (LNCA), that there was definitely no God (although even Nigel admitted he had prayed when he was in a life-threatening situation in an aircraft). Nigel was a well-travelled diplomat who had seen so much suffering in the world from first hand experience that he had almost completely given up any belief in God (apart from his prayer in the aircraft). He stated: "Certainly the inequality in the world I cannot accept. For me, it's proof that there isn't a God - it really is" (L45M9/517).

Unlike the 27 informants who perceived meaning and purpose in the face of death, the response of the remaining agnostics to this subject was characterized by a total absence of meaning. The conclusion reached by Ian Lewis and his mother, as a result of discussions which they had during the time when she was dying, was typical of

---

[8] It is important to bear in mind that proposition P22 draws attention to the established *response* of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence as the foundation upon which ego's interpretation of general experience is based. As argued in the overall social network theory propounded in this thesis, there is no simplistic association between former religious background and religious beliefs in later life. It is the *response of ego* to ego's former social circumstances which is the crucial factor. Otherwise, this theory would indeed be mechanistic, as put forward in the argument of Wallis and Bruce (1982) against Snow *et al.* (1980). The response of ego to former alters is the result of an emergent, dynamic process of social interaction. This does not prevent prediction or falsifiability of the theory, however, since it is argued that the response of ego to former exemplars *continues to influence ego in later life*. See page 290 (Figure 9.1) and page 294 (Figure 9.2) which chart all of the potential belief outcomes of ego based on this theory.

these informants:

> And so I saw her day by day drifting away. And we had long
> conversations about what may or may not come next ... Basically we're in
> tune with what we both think and during our lengthily discussions (as
> lengthy as her health permitted) we didn't make any headway at all, and
> still ended up completely in the dark. (L35L7/149)

A similar absence of meaning and purpose was experienced whenever illness was mentioned, which again contrasts with the previous 27 informants. Ann Williams, for example, talked about the apparent senselessness of her son's severely disabled condition:

> Somebody's got to have some answers. If it was him up there, why? Why
> choose me? Because you get a lot of people saying 'oh well you're special
> because you're the chosen one'. And I mean, again, people who sort of
> say that to me end up, if I'm in a really bad mood, the sharp side of my
> tongue ... I think it's when things are getting tough and he's hard work
> and I'm thinking 'what's the point of this?' Especially - it sounds a bit
> ruthless really - but you know, thinking, he's got no understanding
> whatsoever of life, he's in his own little world and then you do probably
> think well what's the point? (L26M33/242)

Ann therefore rejected religious interpretations of the situation offered to her by dissimilar alters. And in contrast to the conversionists,[9] none of the latter ten informants were seeking evidence to confirm a religious world view. All of the above examples are therefore very consistent with proposition P21.

There was only one informant who did not fit neatly into the pattern outlined by proposition P21. It was argued that the proposition implies general experience rarely brings about a change in the belief system of ego. One of these rare exceptions concerns the report which Virginia Rothwell (an HNCA) gave of the impact of the death of her husband on her beliefs:

---

[9]   Some of the conversionists had reached a similar stage of questioning the meaning of their personal circumstances.

I.   I think you said that you believe in the after-life as well?

R.   Yes, I do, yes. And I suppose that's because of my spiritual experiences because I do believe I have had some messages somehow or other. And also, strange actually even talking about it, how many of my beliefs have developed because of the fact that my husband died. (H35W15/396)

Virginia was brought up religiously, however, and responded to the exemplars of her former alters by adopting religious beliefs. The death of her husband did not, therefore, bring about a change in orientation. Rather, her beliefs *developed further* as a result of her husband's death. She was therefore building upon a pre-established world view, which is not entirely at odds with proposition P21.

In terms of the concept of fate, the informants again exhibited a different emphasis to that of Giddens (1994a), i.e. Giddens argued that people would mainly appeal to fate when confronted by *global* risks, whereas the informants from the current study appealed to fate in a very general sense to explain a perceived order to events which had taken place in their lives, or as a concept suggesting the inevitability of a pre-ordained life course. *None* of the informants referred to fate in relation to global risks. Fate was not mentioned by the CAs for the obvious reason that most of them referred directly to the will of God, to God's guidance and direction and so on. For the other eighteen informants who were oriented in a religious direction, fate tended to be deemed as a concept synonymous with a spiritual force giving direction to life events, although some of these informants talked about a personal God, in terms of providence, rather than an impersonal life-force.

The following comments made by Alison Pemberton (an HNCA) concerning fate were typical of most who were oriented in a religious direction:

> I just think there is something there that controls your fate. I dunno, I can't explain it but I just feel grateful when things are going well and I want to talk to someone I suppose when things aren't so good. It's a bit difficult to explain really. I just feel that there's something there ... I just think that there's fate and there are things that control fate [such as a God]. I suppose it's looking for a rational explanation again, not a rational, but some sort of explanation as to why we are. (H26M30/450)

A completely different picture emerged with regard to those whose established response to former alters was a secular orientation. This is exemplified by the following extract from an interview with Ian Lewis:

> I have heated discussions with my cleaning lady who I love dearly and who is brilliant and I've got to know her very well over the years because as she mops and irons she says: 'oh it's all meant to be' and 'you didn't get that job and you were so down in the dumps when they didn't want you for that job, but look, now you've got this instead - you wouldn't have been able to do that if you hadn't done that, you see - it's all worked out for the best - it must have been fate'. This is just again, like having a religion or taking heroin. It's holding on to something which gets you through the appalling randomness and insecurity of life. And if I had got the first job I would have been perfectly happy in doing it and when the second one came along I would have had to have said sorry I'm too busy to be able to do it. But I still would have been alright. That's only the same - it just happened a different way. It's absolute nonsense. And I'm amazed how really intelligent people and people who in all other areas I respect greatly just won't let go of the lifebelt and won't float in the sea, when they must know it's nonsense ... So it's nonsense. Fate is a comfort to a fool. (L35L7/256)

These interpretations of general experience therefore had a tendency to reinforce the informants' respective world views. They were seen as confirmation that their views were correct. They also sought to maintain cognitive consonance in their interpretations of general experience in the light of their established responses to former alters, thereby confirming proposition P21.

8.3 THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

It is possible that the media may have some influence on the religious or secular personal belief systems of individuals throughout the course of their lives, although it is highly problematic to determine the exact extent of such influence. Notwithstanding this caveat, William Martin, in his foreword to Hoover's (1988) treatise on the 'electronic Church'[10] in America, observes that, as a result of the

---

[10] This term refers to radio, television and other forms of modern communication.

276

accumulation of evidence from many careful studies: "we now have a reasonably balanced and informed view on most of the major questions" (ibid.:10) concerning religion and the electronic media. Most pertinently, he comments: "We know that most viewers [of religious television programmes] are church members and that religious broadcasts constitute an addition to their participation in local congregations rather than a substitute for it" (ibid.:10). Hoover himself concludes that:

> In spite of its pretension, the electronic church may well be severely limited in its power to transcend preexisting class boundaries, social structures and cultural symbols ... That it fails to reach many aside from those who already are adherents suggests that its cultural appeal is very limited, indeed. (ibid.:243-245).

Bruce (1990) reaches the same conclusion with regard to the limited effectiveness of American televangelists, again arguing that most viewers in America tend to be church attenders.

Is it possible that a similar scenario may exist in Britain? It is arguable that the relatively new Christian satellite channel: *Christian Channel Europe* may be limited in its appeal to non-church attenders in Britain since, on the whole, the programmes are charismatic and fundamentalist in content. Davie (ibid.:113) points out that: "there may well be limits to what a British audience will tolerate". On the other hand, terrestrial television programmes aimed at the mass-market, such as *Songs of Praise*, still attract audience figures which exceed *Match of the Day* (ibid.:112) and there is plenty of evidence which confirms the relative popularity of religious broadcasting in contemporary Britain (Davie, 1994; Svennevig, *et al*, 1988). Davie (ibid.:113) concludes that: "There can be little doubt that the religious broadcasters bolster the values in society on which both they and the churches depend for their survival". Bruce (1995) is keen to point out, however, that religious television programme audiences, whilst large, have been in steady decline since the 1970s. Moreover, Bruce argues that even though audience ratings are high: "audience size and share is in the first place a function, not of demand but of supply" (ibid.:56). He then refers to a quotation by Gunter and Vinney (1994:53) about surveys which have attempted to

gauge demand for religious programmes: "By 1987 ... only seven per cent of people [said] they deliberately turned on [to watch a religious programme] when a religious programme was being shown". The significance of religious broadcasting in contemporary Britain is therefore debateable.

But are these religious programmes viewed by individuals independently of any social network influence? The important questions, in terms of the current study, are a) whether religious broadcasting, or religious media in general, play any significant role in reported religious conversions, and b) whether religious media have any appeal beyond those whose established response to the exemplars of former alters was that of an orientation in a religious direction. The final proposition therefore relates, in part, to these questions. It also relates to the previous argument about the strongly internalized world created by primary socialization (Berger and Luckmann, 1971) and continues the testing of the network dependency hypothesis:

P22   *The established response of ego to the exemplars of alters during childhood and adolescence will determine the extent to which ego will make use of religious media.*

In other words, one would expect to find in the current empirical data an association between the informants' responses to socialization within former social networks and their current use of religious media.

The conversionists again require separate discussion due to their questioning of the beliefs of former alters and due to a need to address the question of whether the media played any part in their conversions. Section 8.2 pointed out that the questioning of former alters beliefs, which characterized the conversionists in the sample, included a tendency to search for evidence to confirm a religious world view prior to conversion. None of the conversionists made any reference to religious media, however, with regard to any of the circumstances which led to their conversions. The only informant who did make reference to the influence of religious media prior to her conversion was Lindsay Kennedy, but this was in terms of a previously *negative* image of the Church:

278

> I was amazed because I'd been led by the media to believe that people didn't go to church any more and there was a packed congregation - you couldn't get another person in the door. That was a Sunday evening service. They used to have them monthly at this church. So that was a shock at first.
> (C35M4/112)

The current study therefore contains no evidence to support the view that the media played any role in the conversion process of these informants other than in negative terms.

In contrast, following her conversion, Lindsay made extensive use of Christian media to complement her church activities. Her search for evidence to confirm a religious world view was subsequently channelled into an avid thirst for more knowledge of the faith she had embraced, which supports proposition P22:

> I like to read things that help me to evangelize and help me to have answers for people. Subjects such as suffering, sexuality and AIDS, that sort of thing. All sorts of things that are relevant issues. I listen to a lot of Christian music and teaching tapes while I'm cooking, ironing and doing other things.
> (ibid.:575)

Lindsay was one of the most prolific consumers of Christian media in the sample. Her level of devotion and enthusiasm appeared to be related, in a reflexive sense, to the amount of time she gave to internalize Christian ideology.[11] Her beliefs were therefore not just a product of her personal network relationships but were supplemented and strengthened by her use of Christian media. In fact, six of the nine CAs, all of whom were either brought up religiously or had religious alters in their former networks, reported *current* use of religious media. This consisted of various 'sacred scriptures', i.e. the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon, as well as Christian books, tapes and videos. With all of these CAs, the use of religious media tended to reinforce their beliefs and its use was sometimes encouraged by alters in their networks through recommendation of suitable material. This could even be regarded as one type of

---

[11] This statement is unashamedly tautological: the more time Lindsay spent internalizing Christian ideology through the media, the more enthusiastic and devoted she became, which in turn fuelled her desire for gaining further knowledge in this manner.

modern plausibility structure,[12] particularly when extensive use was made of the media, such as in the example given of Lindsay Kennedy.

Such a plausibility structure did *appear* to function independently of current social networks among some of the NCA informants in the sense that various religious media were used without the obvious encouragement of alters within their current networks. The data are still consistent with proposition P22, however, in that a religious orientation of ego formed in response to interaction with former alters was certainly associated with the amount of time and attention given to *personal* religious media.[13] Eleven of the twenty NCA informants whose established response to former alters was a religious orientation made use of personal religious media, with a further five of these informants making use of academic religious media. On the other hand, seven of the ten informants whose response to former alters was a secular orientation only made use of academic religious media, while the remaining three informants in this category made no use of religious media at all.

For example, Michael Hayward (an HNCA) was brought up in a religious children's home, but his former guardians, whilst being strong committed believers in Christ, did not regard church attendance as essential to the Christian faith. Michael subsequently adopted these beliefs for himself. Michael was quite a socially isolated individual. He lived with his wife, had little contact with work colleagues and only met with one friend once a fortnight. His wife was religious but not quite to the same extent as Michael. In this case, the media not only provided him with a plausibility structure but appeared to function as an alternative to church attendance. Unable to find a suitable church since moving to Grange Park, Michael seemed to have given

---

[12] Chapter One employed Berger's (1969) definition of a *plausibility structure* as a 'social base' through which a particular social construction of reality, i.e. a world view, is maintained, whether that world view be religious or otherwise. These religious media are social in the sense that all types of media are socially constructed and distributed. The only differences to the previously cited network factors involved in the formulation and maintenance of ego's belief system are a) there is an absence of reciprocal interaction in terms of communication between ego and the media, and b) the media are easily discarded if deemed by ego to be cognitively dissonant with the belief system of ego.

[13] In this respect, Bruce (ibid.:57) has made a distinction between personal religious television programmes such as *Songs of Praise* (which include acts of worship for example) and programmes which are *about* religion and are therefore academic in their approach to religion, such as *Everyman* and *Heart of the Matter*. The term: 'personal religious media' therefore refers to any type of media which are of personal religious interest or devotion as opposed to a more detached academic interest.

up on the practice of church attendance. Yet he made even more prolific use of religious media than Lindsay Kennedy. He talked about his daily use of books on the Holy Land, of the Bible, of Christian music and of various tapes, including the entire New Testament on tape. He also listened to practically *every* religious broadcast available on television or radio, and he described the various religious items distributed around his home thus:

> There's a statue of Moses over there and underneath I've got a piece of rock I brought back from Mount Sinai, so I put that there you see, and when I look at that rock it tells me that I must adhere to ... the ten commandments, so every day I see these things around me and this is why I've got my faith ... I go out of the door and there's a plaque above the door of the way of the cross. And when I go out I think that Jesus carried the cross for me ... these two vases here, they came from Hebron, where they were blowing glass in the time of Christ, in the same place. (H45M25/212)

Indeed, his home resembled a shrine and included a stained glass window and a flower arrangement in the hall: a space which he used as his private chapel. Michael Hayward could be described as an example of 'believing without belonging' *par excellence*[14], although he had gained his enthusiasm for religion during his early upbringing; hence these data are consistent with proposition P22.

Sylvia Clifton, another HNCA who was a retired widow and who was, again, socially isolated, made similar use of religious media, in this instance mainly in the form of religious television broadcasting, whenever she decided not to attend church (which was most of the time):

> Every Sunday. I always have. Yea, if I don't go down there [to the church] I will have my service on, in fact I will have more than one on and I will light a candle. I light the candle for my husband. I don't miss a service. (H45W26/787)

Sylvia's enthusiasm was similarly gained through her religious upbringing, mainly through the influence of her mother, together with Sunday School and church.

---

[14] A phrase echoed in Davie (ibid.:112).

In parenthesis, Davie (ibid.:112) has described religious television broadcasting *per se*, to use the same phrase again, as: "believing without belonging *par excellence*" and as: "the church of the air". Nevertheless, in this study only three religiously oriented informants (including Michael and Sylvia) made *extensive* use of the television and radio, apparently as a substitute for church religion. Eight other informants demonstrated a lesser interest in such programmes, but were already oriented in a religious direction as a result of interaction with religious alters within their former networks. Hence, the 'church of the air' in contemporary Britain may well be patronized exclusively by those who have received some sort of Christian upbringing but who, in the majority of cases, have only a passing interest in these 'personal' religious programmes. Most of the informants in this religiously oriented category mainly talked about their reading of religious or spiritual books, but in contrast to the CAs most of these informants read books about the supernatural or about reincarnation, with books about reincarnation constituting the main source of such beliefs.

The ten informants whose established response to former alters was a secular orientation only watched academic religious television programmes if indeed they watched religious programmes at all. These included religious history, programmes about the 'spiritual' and the 'supernatural', and programmes based upon ethical and moral debate. The religious literature read by these informants was also pursued only out of academic interest. James Murdoch's experience was typical of these informants:

> I will latch onto things that explore religion, not religious programmes if you see what I mean. So things like on Sunday night there's *Everyman* and sometimes there's an interesting topic on there, and things like that ... I occasionally latch onto some of the newer contentious theories about Christianity, which is just for interest ... When the Jehovah's Witnesses came the other day I actually read the stuff they left behind, just to get to try and understand what it's about ... I wouldn't like to enter into it because it would be intellectually fun for me but I think it wouldn't be particularly pleasant for them, and I wouldn't want to waste their time. (L35M34/644)

Thus, James emphasized the intellectual challenge of such media. This contrasting evidence reported by the two types of informant (i.e. religious and secular oriented)

clearly gives credence to proposition P22 and is further illustrated by the chart on page 295 (Figure 9.3) which shows predicted pathways for the use of personal and academic religious media.

8.4 THE INFLUENCE OF GENERAL EXPERIENCE AND THE MEDIA DURING EGO'S FORMATIVE YEARS

Propositions P21 and P22 admittedly do not focus on possible influences of general experience and the media upon ego during ego's childhood and adolescence, for two reasons. First, by the time ego reaches a stage where ego has the capacity to evaluate general experience and the media, the process of primary socialization is already well in progress. And second, the informants rarely spoke about their views of general experience earlier in life. Few of the informants said the early formation of their beliefs involved the evaluation of general experience or the media during their earlier years. Most of the informants were merely evaluating their former alters' beliefs and behaviour. But just because it was not mentioned does not mean that general experience and the media were not involved at all in the formation of the informants' religious or secular beliefs. Constant television viewing, the use of computer games and so on, as Davie (ibid.:113) has argued, must have some effect on the value systems developed by those who partake in these activities. Measuring those effects is where the difficulty lies.

There were two informants, for example, whose general experience or attention to the media did contribute to some extent towards their later beliefs. In terms of general experience, William Remmington was rather devastated by the divorce of his parents when he was only twelve years old, despite the fact that he had prayed that they would remain together. This experience subsequently affected his level of faith in the efficacy of prayer and was one of the factors which led to his agnosticism. In terms of the effects of the media, James Murdoch mentioned that he had read an article in the *Eagle* magazine which partially contributed towards the early formation of his atheist beliefs:

283

> I remember reading a letter from somewhere, in something like *Eagle*, which
> is going back some years, in which they put forward that God was just man's
> easy way of explaining the unexplainable. It was certainly primary school age.
> I thought phew, that sounds reasonable and I suppose I explored that. But to
> be honest it wasn't a big thing - it wasn't a revelation. I just never really,
> from that point, found anything to convince me otherwise. (L35M34/205)

These two examples from the data occurred within the context of networks which did
not contain religious alters. There were therefore no religious alters who might
otherwise have challenged the ideas of these informants or who might have guided
them in a different direction. As James commented, the article in the *Eagle* magazine
was not exactly a 'revelation' but no alters had since convinced him otherwise. These
incidents do have to be understood in the context of the networks in which they
occurred due to the strength of the contribution of network alters in the process of
primary socialization, as argued in Chapter Four. Nevertheless, the possibility of these
incidents having some form of influence on early belief formation does have to be
acknowledged.

8.5 CONCLUSION

The empirical evidence collected for Stage Two of the current study shows that none
of the 'biographical shocks' to which Berger and Luckmann (ibid.:162) refer (and
which the informants reported in terms of their general experiences) were enough to
'disintegrate' the pre-established religious or secular orientation of the informants
resulting from their responses to primary socialization. In contrast to the global
concerns emphasized by Giddens (1994a), the very personal and immediate situations
of risk and vulnerability reported and emphasized by the informants were interpreted
according to the informants' pre-established beliefs which they sought to maintain.
Their personal quest for cognitive consonance was arguably part of this process. The
clear association between the informants' established response to the exemplars of
former alters and their current interpretation of adverse circumstances gives credence
to proposition P21.

Likewise, it has been shown that *personal* religious media only tended to be used by those who already had a religious orientation acquired through former social networks. Those whose orientation was secular were only interested in religious media from an academic perspective. Finally, in terms of its use in evangelism, Bruce (1990) has argued that the influence of the media tends to be overrated. The current study supports that view in that the media were not featured in the conversion process of the conversionist informants. These particular informants, however, tended to use personal religious media to support and strengthen their beliefs subsequent to their conversions. Overall the empirical data supports proposition P22, although the possibility of the media in particular having some effect (even if minimal) on the beliefs of the informants, independently of social networks, has to be acknowledged.

The strength of all the propositions related to the network dependency hypothesis will now be evaluated and the implications of the social network theory of religion, developed in Chapter One, will be explored in conclusion of the current thesis.

CHAPTER NINE

THE THEORY OF NETWORK DEPENDENCY: IMPLICATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

It would now be pertinent to return to the social network theory which informed the formulation of the network dependency hypothesis outlined in Chapter One. The empirical findings of the current study can then be summarized to assess the level of support for this social network theory. Other incidental research questions raised in Chapter One will also be addressed. It will then be necessary to consider the implications of the current study vis-à-vis secularization theory, religious organisations and educationalists. Finally, suggestions will be made for further research.

The main objectives of the current thesis were to develop and test a social network theory which might explain the phenomena of religious and secular beliefs in the general population. In Britain, the contemporary disparity between the high percentage of the population claiming to be Christian and the relatively low percentage of church attenders gave rise to the theory that any religious beliefs held by NCAs are likely to be dependent upon the influences of people within their social networks rather than upon religious organisations. The literature on network analysis and the sociology of kinship and friendship was therefore consulted in an attempt to answer the question posed by Stark and Bainbridge (1980:1389), viz.: "Is all religion sustained by social networks?". However, despite an emphasis on the importance of social networks as a fundamental starting point for the analysis of social life by writers such as Fischer (1982), Law (1992) and Allan (1985, 1996), it was found that there was an absolute minimal application of network analysis to the study of personal religious beliefs. Apart from a few studies on localism, urbanism and religious conversion - from which general network principles were derived and applied to the current study - the wider application of network analysis to the study of religious, and indeed secular, beliefs within the sociology of religion was conspicuous by its absence.

Drawing upon the work of several historians such as: Thomas (1971), Thompson (1986), Speck (1988) and Myers (1988) and upon the work of Giddens (1994a, 1994b), the current study was subsequently placed in the theoretical context of the debate about the nature of modernity. It was proposed that, on the whole, personal network links between CAs and NCAs have been gradually severed since pre-modern times and churches are no longer fully integrated with the surrounding population. The immediate implications of this proposition are twofold. First, the transmission of religious beliefs by religious institutions may be greatly restricted by this development. Second, over-arching religious (or indeed secular) world views are now likely to be held and maintained by individuals within discrete networks which need not be local. Social network links between individuals may therefore play a crucial and indispensable role in the transmission and maintenance of any type of religious belief or non-belief. If this network theory is correct it has further implications for the development of secularization theory as well as for the strategies adopted by religious organisations and educationalists. These implications will be discussed following a résumé of the findings of the current study.

9.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the current study are summarized below in relation to the five areas of empirical enquiry outlined in Chapter One.[1]

i) The effects of early socialization.

The process of primary socialization had a profound effect on the initial belief formation of ego and on future belief outcomes by providing a foundation for religious or secular belief. The *response of ego to the exemplars of former alters* was the crucial factor, however, in predicting the future belief outcome of ego, thus emphasizing the emergent, dynamic aspects of ego's interaction with former alters.

---

[1] See page 59.

The majority of informants whose primary socialization was religious generally responded to the exemplars of religious alters by accepting the alters' religious belief systems. The interaction of the conversionists in the sample with former alters was somewhat ambiguous, but appeared to be characterized by a questioning of the exemplars of former alters which was resolved at the time of their conversions through contact with other religious alters in their *current* networks.

Differences between the CAs and HNCAs - most of whom, in both categories, were brought up religiously, confronted by positive[2] exemplars, and characterized by an almost total absence of negative exemplars - can be explained by the following network factors. With regard to the CA informants: a) their parents generally considered church attendance to be essential, b) these informants were immersed in the life of the church at an early age, c) they attended church on a voluntary basis, and d) they had positive CA role models who espoused traditional religious beliefs requiring commitment to the Church. None of these factors tended to characterize the HNCAs. Most of the HNCAs' role models emphasized the importance of *a Christian way of life* in preference to church attendance, and these role models often drew attention to the hypocritical lifestyles of CAs.

In the lower belief importance categories, ten informants were characterized by a religious socialization process and ten by a secular socialization process. But as the belief importance category became lower, an increasing number of negative exemplars entered the equation, resulting in a tendency of ego either to reject former alters' religious belief systems or to accept their secular belief systems. In fact, negative exemplars virtually dominated the former experiences of most LNCAs. Moreover, the secular socialization process which characterized most of the LNCAs, and one of the MNCAs, was *invariably met with a response of acceptance* by ego.

It was also found that the response of ego to the exemplars of former alters - in the form of acceptance, questioning or rejection of the beliefs held by those alters - was

---

[2] The terms positive, neutral and negative are used in this chapter as defined in Chapter Two (page 102). This is not a value judgement.

simultaneously fused to a psychological need in ego for the reduction of cognitive dissonance. Figure 9.1, on the following page, graphically illustrates the above findings.

ii) The effects of current networks.

The established response of ego to former alters continued to be maintained within the current networks of the informants, in part, through ego's choice of like-minded HRP alters. This involved the avoidance of cognitive dissonance and therefore the avoidance of alters who might have created that dissonance. Thus, the CA informants' current networks contained a high percentage of CA alters, whereas the NCA informants' current networks contained a very low percentage of CA alters, if at all. And if the latter informants *did* have CA alters in their networks, these alters tended to be kept at a social distance, remaining outside of Zone One of ego's network. On the basis of this evidence it would be reasonable to conclude that a relational gulf exists between CAs and NCAs.

The maintenance of secular world views in the form of agnosticism or atheism can be explained in part by the predominance of like-minded HRP alters and a lack of religious HRP alters in the current networks of those who held a secular world view. Across all of the belief importance categories, dissimilar alters were generally kept at a social distance and tended not to be found in Zone One of ego's network. Indeed, some of these dissimilar alters were relegated to Zone Four, particularly if the relationships began to cause an increase in cognitive dissonance. These latter principles, concerning dissimilar alters, demonstrate a fusion between the psychological and sociological factors involved.

iii) Personal networks as plausibility structures.

The maintenance of belief plausibility, including the plausibility of religious ...

FIGURE 9.1   PATHWAYS TO CURRENT RELIGIOUS OR SECULAR BELIEFS

Parent Type	Type of Socialization	Ego response to exemplars	Current belief status
CA PARENTS	RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION	ACCEPTANCE OR QUESTIONING	**CURRENT CA**
			CURRENT RELIGIOUS NCA
			CURRENT SECULAR NCA
		REJECTION	CURRENT CA
			CURRENT RELIGIOUS NCA
			CURRENT SECULAR NCA
NCA PARENTS	RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION	ACCEPTANCE	CURRENT CA
			CURRENT RELIGIOUS NCA
			CURRENT SECULAR NCA
		REJECTION	CURRENT CA
			CURRENT RELIGIOUS NCA
			CURRENT SECULAR NCA
NCA PARENTS	SECULAR SOCIALIZATION	ACCEPTANCE	CURRENT CA
			CURRENT RELIGIOUS NCA
			CURRENT SECULAR NCA
		REJECTION	CURRENT CA
			CURRENT RELIGIOUS NCA
			CURRENT SECULAR NCA

(Predicted pathways shown in bold / double lines)   290

... experience, occurred between ego and like-minded alters within *discrete dispersed networks* located in the private sphere. The local community did not constitute a plausibility structure and even the local church did not perform this function with regard to the informants who were involved in their local church. Their relationships with other CAs and religious alters *outside* of the local church had a greater bearing on maintaining the belief plausibility of these informants. The plausibility of all types of belief and unbelief tended to be maintained predominantly within Zone One of ego's network, with little extension beyond this.

iv) Belief change or modification, and mechanisms which facilitate or inhibit religious belief transmission.

Most of the informants were engaged in maintaining their established response to former alters, hence, no further belief changes or modifications generally took place. However, within the paradigm of ego's established response followed by maintenance of that response, there was room for a maturing process to take place. Peck (1990) has argued that religious individuals go through various stages of spiritual growth and that these individuals often move on to explore their beliefs from a position of scepticism, doubt and questioning, only to rediscover their former faith at a later stage without their original naivety. The evidence from the current study suggests that this level of questioning *only occurred with the conversionists and one 'liberal' CA*. The beliefs of the other religious CAs and NCAs did not appear to have been pursued with the same level of intellectual scrutiny. Nevertheless, in all cases, the overall *orientation* of ego, following ego's response to the exemplars of former alters, was either in a permanently religious or a permanently secular direction. It was this orientation which was maintained. Mechanisms were identified which facilitated belief transmission within current networks but these, again, *only applied to the conversionists* in the sample. The penetration of Zone One of ego's network by effective human agents was required for any significant belief change or modification to occur in ego. Effective agents were characterized by a high level of relational proximity to ego; a consistency of life-style and beliefs; an ability to establish trust and respect in relationships; and the willingness to allow ego to take the initiative in

conversations about religious belief.

For the majority of informants, however, the following mechanisms greatly inhibited any secondary religious socialization from taking place:

a) Negative agents often inadvertently reinforced the secular or alternative beliefs held by ego, through hypocrisy, dogmatism and/or excessive force when communicating their beliefs.

b) Ego had a tendency to prevent, or to place restrictions upon, access of dissimilar alters to ego's personal network.

c) Ego tended to formulate alternative interpretations of the beliefs and experiences of dissimilar alters according to ego's own belief system.

d) Discussion of religion tended to be avoided, particularly by NCAs, due to its sensitivity as a topic of conversation in contemporary Britain. This avoidance of religious discussion often functioned as a means of avoiding conflict between dissimilar alters within personal networks.

e) The social and geographical mobility of some of the informants had a detrimental effect on their religious practice, with housing moves resulting in the termination of church attendance and thereby the termination of any further transmission of church religion.

v) **Factors outside of social networks.**

Contingent and adverse events tended to be interpreted by the informants according to the established response of ego to the exemplars of former alters, thereby continuing the quest for cognitive consonance. The conversionists in the sample continued this quest in the sense that their questioning of former exemplars was characterized by a tendency to search for evidence to confirm a religious world view prior to their conversions. Hence, they tended to view contingent events from a religious perspective both prior and subsequent to conversion. General experience was invariably interpreted from a secular perspective by those informants whose primary

socialization was secular. These findings are graphically represented in Figure 9.2.[3]

Religious media did not feature in the conversion process of the conversionist informants, but were used subsequent to conversion to support and strengthen their beliefs. Personal[4] religious media were used *exclusively* by those who were religiously oriented through religious socialization. However, some religiously oriented informants only made use of academic religious media. Any knowledge gained by this researcher of the acceptance or questioning of the exemplars of religious alters by ego was therefore not sufficient to predict the outcome of the media type used by the informants in this religiously oriented category. On the other hand, those informants whose orientation was secular were clearly only interested in religious media from an academic perspective or were not interested in religious media at all. These findings are represented in Figure 9.3.[5] It has to be acknowledged, however, that the media *may* have had some effect (even if minimal) on the beliefs of all the informants, independently of social networks, although this is extremely difficult to measure or to verify.

On the whole, the above findings constitute overwhelming support for the propositions formulated in the current study and hence support the network dependency hypothesis. Thus, on the basis of the findings and in answer to the question posed by Stark and Bainbridge (ibid.), it would appear that all types of religious, or indeed secular, beliefs are sustained by social networks.

In addition, it is now possible to answer the incidental questions raised by Chapter One. It is evident that many NCAs in the Grange Park sample did hold religious beliefs beyond a mere nominal assent to Christian belief, particularly given that ...

---

[3] See page 294.

[4] Personal and general religious media are defined in Chapter Eight, page 280.

[5] See page 295.

FIGURE 9.2   PATHWAYS TO INTERPRETATIONS OF GENERAL EXPERIENCE

| Type of Socialization | Ego response to exemplars | Current interpretation of general experience |

(Predicted pathways shown in bold / double lines)

294
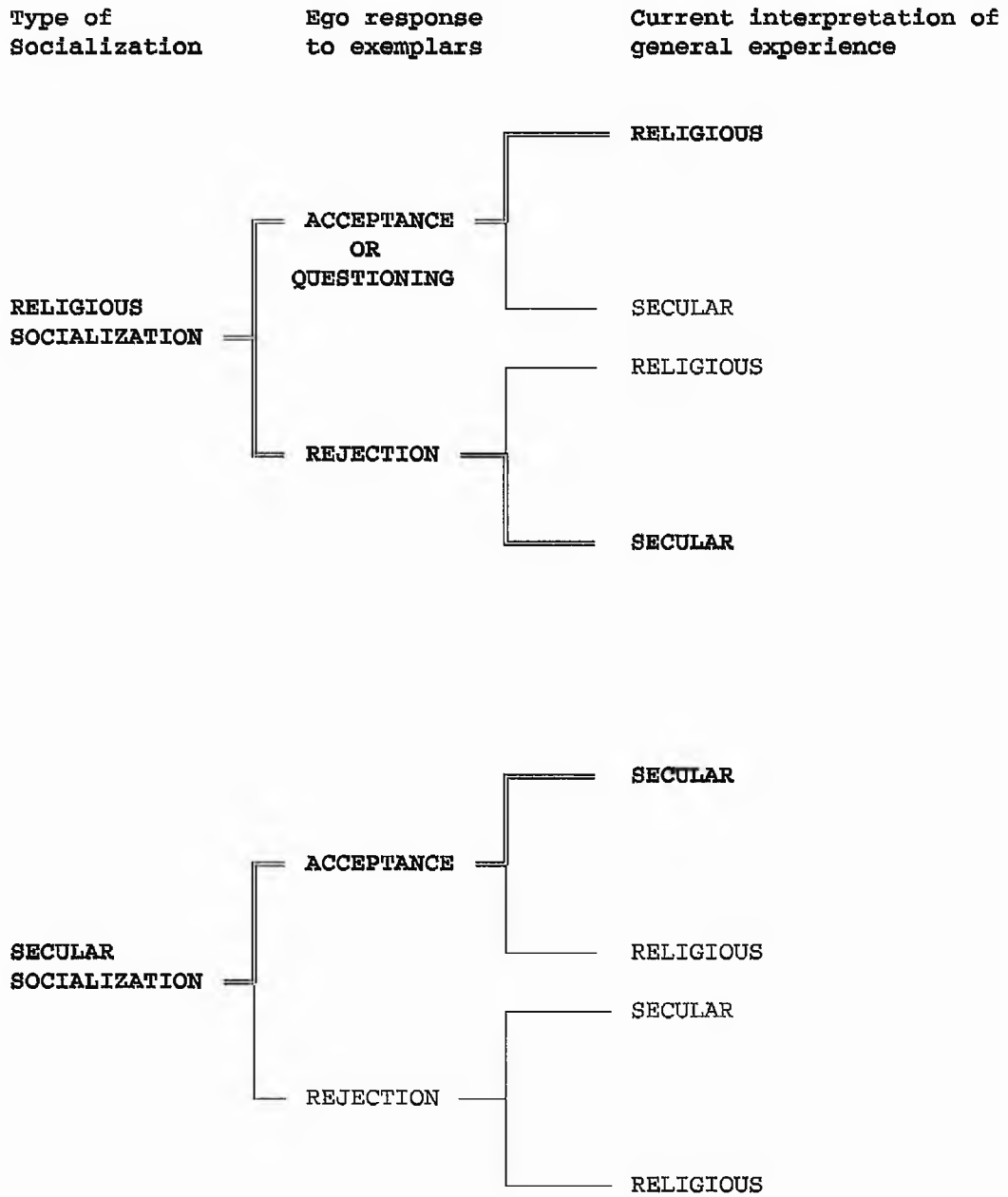
FIGURE 9.3 PATHWAYS TO USE OF PERSONAL / ACADEMIC RELIGIOUS MEDIA

Type of Socialization	Ego response to exemplars	Religious media type in current use

PERSONAL

**ACCEPTANCE
OR
QUESTIONING**

**RELIGIOUS
SOCIALIZATION**

ACADEMIC

PERSONAL

REJECTION

ACADEMIC OR NONE AT ALL

PERSONAL

ACCEPTANCE

**SECULAR
SOCIALIZATION**

ACADEMIC OR NONE AT ALL

PERSONAL

REJECTION

ACADEMIC OR NONE AT ALL
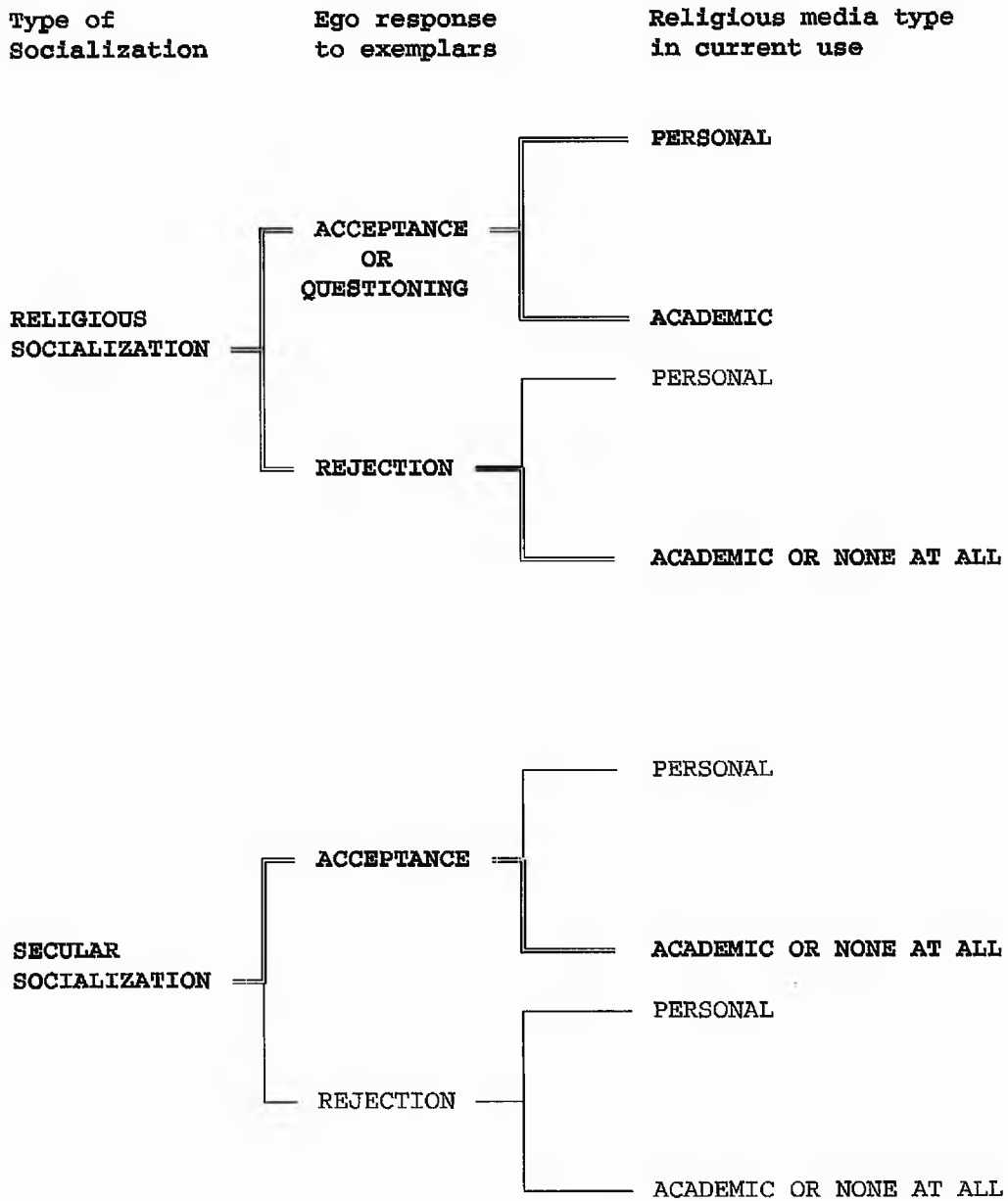
(Selected/predicted pathways shown in bold / double lines)

N.B. It is not possible to predict the outcome if religious socialization was accepted or questioned, as some of these informants used personal religious media whereas others used academic religious media. There was no difference between those informants who accepted and those who questioned the exemplars of former alters in terms of predicting the outcome.

... six of the Stage Two NCA informants could best be described as 'active customary',[6] together with four informants who were traditionalists, five who were gnosticists and two who were theists.[7] All of the beliefs held by these informants, both the strength and the type of belief, were very closely associated with the response of ego to the exemplars of former alters and with like-minded HRP alters in the informants' current networks, thus explaining the origin of these beliefs and their continued maintenance outside of traditional religious structures. The argument that NCA beliefs amounted to more than mere nominalism is strengthened when one considers the evidence reported in Chapter Eight, namely, that 69% of the Stage Two informants (49% of whom were NCAs) responded to everyday types of risk by formulating religious interpretations of contingent events.[8] Moreover, in terms of the Stage One survey, the less traditional survey questions - such as those about the meaning and purpose of life, prayer and meditation, and whether the respondents derived comfort and strength from their beliefs - produced percentage figures which were fairly high, and close to other major surveys about religious belief in Britain.[9] Chapter Three did point out, however, that *traditional* religion in Grange Park did appear to be less popular than in the country as a whole, with the Grange Park survey scoring systematically lower than the EVS 1981 and 1990 surveys for Great Britain on questions related to traditional doctrinal orthodoxy. In addition, only 13% of the total sample claimed to attend church at least once a month[10] and residents of Grange Park appeared to have a much less favourable view of the Church than indicated by people in the country generally.

The findings from Stage Two possibly help to account for these results from the Stage One survey. First, Chapter Three reported that Grange Park was a relatively new

---

[6] See Appendix IX for the definitions of these belief types.

[7] There were, of course, thirteen remaining NCA informants who were not actively engaged with religious belief (i.e. five customarys, six agnostics and two atheists). Nevertheless, just over half of the NCA informants' beliefs extended beyond a nominal assent to Christian belief.

[8] This refers to 49% of 69%, i.e. 34% overall. These included an equal distribution of male and female informants.

[9] See Appendix XI for these questions and percentage figures.

[10] Compared with the 1990 EVS percentage for G.B. of 25% (Ester *et al.*, 1993).

housing development which had attracted people from all over the country and where housing moves were a frequent occurrence. Chapter Seven listed social and geographical mobility as one of the mechanisms which inhibit the transmission of church religion. This indeed had affected some of the informants.[11] Second, a relational gulf was identified between CAs and NCAs together with a lack of CA involvement in the primary socialization of the informants. In fact, if religious alters were involved in the primary socialization of the NCA informants they tended to be RNCAs. These RNCA alters encouraged the NCA informants towards religious belief but simultaneously discouraged them from church attendance. Third, the strongly held beliefs of the gnosticists and theists in the sample were supported by like-minded alters in their current networks. Fourth, the informants were predominantly either in managerial or professional occupations and were generally ambitious, individualistic, self-reliant and well educated. In this respect, both Wuthnow (1985:189) and Davie (1994) have observed that: "increased educational levels (normally associated with higher social class) have a negative effect on religious belief" (ibid.:107). This may in itself be network related in the sense that middle class values, such as higher educational attainment, may be generally transmitted through middle class networks. These factors at least help towards explaining why the Grange Park sample were less *traditionally* religious, in terms of traditional *practice* and attitudes towards the Church, than indicated by people in the country as a whole.

But the current study reveals little evidence that traditional religion is being replaced by New Age beliefs[12] in Grange Park - such as 'est' and other 'self religions' (Heelas, 1991, 1996; Abercrombie and Warde, 1992) - apart from rather vague notions of spirituality and yogic beliefs held among certain of the gnosticists and theists in the

---

[11] See summary on page 292.

[12] The 'New Age' is difficult to define, but Heelas argues that there are certain underlying assumptions which distinguish New Age beliefs:

> New Agers make the monistic assumption that the Self itself is sacred ... True, many New Agers also emphasize the spirituality of the natural order as a whole. But the fact remains that they would also agree that the initial task is to make contact with the spirituality which lies within the person. There is thus general agreement that it is essential to shift from our contaminated mode of being - what we are by virtue of socialization - to that realm which constitutes our authentic nature. And these assumptions of Self-spirituality ensure that the New Age Movement is far from being a mish-mash, significantly eclectic, or fundamentally incoherent (1996:2).

sample. Most of the beliefs of the NCAs were active customary, customary or traditionalist. A final point is that Grange Park would appear to be typical of the type of housing development which tends to attract an aspiring, upwardly mobile, *nouveau riche* population as distinct from a traditional stable middle class population. This educated, career-oriented population appears to be growing. More places are now available at universities. More young people are pursuing careers and moving around the country. Grange Park may therefore be a microcosm of a burgeoning population.

Having said all of this, is it possible to answer the question raised in Chapter One: can the use of Davie's phrase: 'believing without belonging' be justified? Hornsby-Smith concludes that it does not apply to Catholics due to:

> ... considerable variability of both belief and practice or belonging, and of customary forms of religion reflecting the breakdown of processes of religious socialization (1992:133-134).

Certainly the Grange Park study shows less evidence of belonging when compared to the EVS data, but there is some strong evidence of believing without belonging, particularly when one considers the 69% of informants, mentioned above, who formulated religious interpretations of contingent events, 49% of whom were NCAs. One does have to bear in mind, however, the customary or traditionalist nature of religious belief outside of traditional religious structures. When viewed in this light, believing without belonging begins to appear somewhat precarious, hanging on a fine thread of former religious socialization.

9.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR SECULARIZATION THEORY

Chapter One referred to Wilson's (1966:14) definition of secularization as the "process by which religious institutions, actions and consciousness lose their social significance" and to Dobbelaere's (1981) three principle levels of secularization, namely, the wider society, religious organisational structures and the individual. Clearly it is not possible for the current thesis to comment on the process of decline

at any of these levels. That would have required a longitudinal study with its concomitant demand on more time and resources than were available. The current study can, however, offer some insight into the debate about secularization by discussing the implications of the above findings, particularly with regard to the assertion, on the basis of the evidence, that all forms of belief and non-belief are network dependent.

Roof (1978:32) has argued that secularization can be described as:

> a process in which the plausibility structure for religion *diminishes in scope - from society as a whole to smaller, more fragmented social spheres.* Envisioned in this way secularization does not eliminate religion from the modern scene but rather implies that its plausibility is increasingly restricted to the traditionally oriented sectors of the society. To assert this is not to dismiss churches as unimportant to the believers or even to suggest they are socially insignificant. A religious world view may not prevail in society generally but still inspire commitment among members from within certain social strata and sectors.

This view is consistent, to some extent, with the social network theory propounded by the current thesis. The social network theory diverges from the Roof thesis, however, in that Roof argues these 'smaller, more fragmented social spheres' are fundamentally smaller communities whereas the network theory posits that these spheres are essentially personal social networks which need not be local and which need not necessarily be centred on traditional churches or on church religion.

Furthermore, as stated above, the findings of the current study support the postulate that a gulf does now indeed exist between the networks of CAs and NCAs. The processes of industrialization and urbanisation have certainly contributed to the severance of these networks. However, the current thesis has attempted to move away from the Wilsonian emphasis upon the breakdown of communities. The focus has, rather, been upon the damage and disruption caused to network links between CAs and NCAs which has been a major factor in the undermining of traditional religious beliefs in Britain. As Beckford (1989:110) has rightfully observed, there is "no *necessary* connection between religion and local community". The main implication

299

of this argument is that, in the modern setting, whilst local communities may be virtually impossible to re-create due to the increased mobility of the population, dispersed personal relationships and less stable kinship relationships, the transmission of religious belief through personal social networks need not inevitably be subject to continuous decline. If, for example, the churches had been able to maintain network links with the general population, the decline of traditional religion may not have been as rapid. As pointed out in Chapter One, there is still a need to bear in mind the influence of other factors such as greater religious choice, competing leisure interests and epistemological challenges to religious belief. But whilst these factors may have made decline more likely, they have not made decline inevitable.

The above argument does not necessarily challenge the recent evidence presented by Bruce (1996) concerning religious decline on a number of different indices of religious belief and behaviour, but it does challenge the implied inevitability (ibid.:273) of the process. Having said this, some of the findings of the current study would suggest caution should be exercised in terms of any optimism about the future of religion in Britain. It is true that many of the Grange Park informants held beliefs beyond a mere nominal assent to Christian belief, but the response of ego to religious socialization was found to be a crucial factor in producing this outcome. None of the informants became either CAs or religious NCAs unless their primary socialization included religious alters. Even the reported adult conversions tended to consist of those who were already predisposed to religion through former contact with religious alters. If religious alters were absent and primary socialization was secular the informants invariably accepted the secular beliefs of alters within their former networks. Collins (1997:257) study on young people's beliefs in contemporary Britain revealed a similar relationship between the religious networks and the religious beliefs of her informants:

> The minority of young people who did adopt transcendent faith had a strong social network of family and/or friends contributing to the plausibility of Christian referents.

The current study has further indicated that even the viewing of devotional types of

300

religious television programme is dependent upon ego's acceptance (or in the case of conversionists, the questioning) of a former *religious socialization*. The optimism inherent in Davie's (ibid.112) description of religious television viewing as: "believing without belonging *par excellence*" is questionable when one considers the issue of whether a religious socialization process will continue from one generation to the next without the involvement of these individuals in religious organisations.

This, of course, relates to Hervieu-Léger's (1994)[13] writings about the chain of believers required to perpetuate religious memory and her emphasis on the essential place which regular church attendance has in this process; a lack of which encourages the secularization process. But if the involvement of individuals in religious organisations is an essential prerequisite for the perpetuation of religious socialization, Hervieu-Léger's analysis of the contemporary Church gives some cause for concern. Hervieu-Léger (1993, 1994) points to the failure of modern society to maintain this chain of memory (together with the decline of social events which promote collective memory) but also to the apparent contradictory effects which modernity continues to have on the Church. Focusing on the involvement of individuals in 'emotional communities',[14] Hervieu-Léger on one hand highlights the apparent desecularization effect of religious emotionalism in terms of its 'protest' against the cold, dogmatic, ritualistic and arid authorized forms of expression of religious institutions (1993:139). This development, she argues, may in fact lead to an "emotional conclusion to the process of secularization" (ibid.:141) in the sense of a return to immediate contact with the supernatural which is more in accord with contemporary cultural values of self-fulfilment. The difficulties presented by a traditional religious language at variance with a world in which "coherence can no longer be presented as the result of once-and-for-all revelation" (ibid.:142) can thereby be overcome. Davie (1996:105) seems to regard this development in a positive light. On the other hand, Hervieu-Léger points out the possible implications this might have in the long term. She asserts that an emotional religion "freed from the constraints of language" may lead

---

[13] Also discussed by Davie, 1996.

[14] Hervieu-Léger defines 'emotional communities' as: "the pattern of community emotionalism which is very widespread, not only in the new religious movements, but also within the various churches and faiths" (1993:131).

301

to an "irreversible decline of a religious language capable of being understood socially" and thus to an "emotional consummation of secularization" (ibid.:145). Fulton (1996:3) comments that a precise answer appears to be elusive to Hervieu-Léger, "probably because any attempt to do so would be premature".

By way of contrast, Chapter One[15] argued that Hervieu-Léger's thesis is valid up to a point but does not extend to all forms of contemporary traditional religion, some of which are experiencing growth. Kelly (1972), for example, has outlined reasons for the growth of *conservative* churches. He argues that churches related to the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and so on, are intolerant of the developments of modernity, yet they continue to grow.[16] Kelly further observes that:

> the quality that enables religious meanings to take hold is not their rationality, their logic, their surface credibility, but rather the *demand* they make upon their adherents and the degree to which that demand is met by *commitment* (ibid.:53).

Davie (1996) likewise recognises the flourishing of churches which refuse to compromise with contemporary culture. It could also be argued that many of the *charismatic* communities in Britain underpin their emotional expression with a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and thus retain a purchase on the traditional chain of memory.

The difficulties of traditional religious language at variance with contemporary culture are addressed by Richter (1996) in his argument that evangelicals themselves, as well as individuals outside of the Church:

---

[15] See page 43.

[16] Iain MacRobert similarly discusses the "dramatic growth of new black-led Pentecostal Churches in Britain" (1989:x.). All of these churches are, however, *minority* churches. Whether their growth will persist into the second generation remains to be seen.

may be finding traditional religious language implausible when they themselves are 'full participants in cultural modernity' - because, for instance, of their everyday work milieux (ibid.:22).

Many evangelicals therefore "embrace the non-verbal Toronto Blessing" which avoids "head-on engagement with the language of modernity" (ibid.). However, it can be argued that not all evangelicals find the gospel implausible when confronted with the difficulties of fundamentalist Christian belief in the face of technical rationality (as emphasized by Hervieu-Léger). Intellectual arguments in defence of orthodox Christianity are, according to Ward, in a favourable position:

> The stronger conclusion is that the progress of knowledge in the sciences, in philosophy and in theology itself has actually made Christian belief seem much more acceptable now than it might have seemed forty or fifty years ago ... Christian belief is actually in quite a strong position as far as the intellectual arguments go (Ward, 1986:8).

Ward then proceeds to give accounts of intellectual reasons for Christian faith from experts in various fields of science. He comments that this new 'reinvigorated form of faith' is: "strong enough to challenge the presuppositions of anyone who looks carefully at it" (ibid.:11). And Wuthnow adds further credence to this argument by stating that few surveys and polls "have actually proven that exposure to science is the reason why the better educated turn out to have lower levels of religious commitment" (1985:189). Wuthnow concludes:

> Rather than religion being constantly on the run, so to speak, in the face of ever advancing scientific knowledge, scientists have had to carve out a space in which to work by dissociating themselves from the claims which religion has had traditionally, and which it still appears to command over the everyday life of contemporary society (ibid.:199).

Moreover, some fundamentalist religious organisations are flourishing as a result of their tendency to adapt to modernity by addressing *personal needs* rather than appealing to emotion. For example, the American ministries directed by Kenneth and

Gloria Copeland, Jerry Savelle and Kenneth Hagin[17] (to which a significant number[18] of British charismatic Christians subscribe) place emphasis on the utilitarian value of religion in terms of its capacity to meet the 'this worldly needs' of individuals for physical and mental health, financial prosperity and personal success and fulfilment.[19] The chain of traditional religious memory is therefore not completely overwhelmed by the technical and scientific rationality of contemporary culture.

The key point at this juncture, however, is that - just as no firm conclusions can be drawn about the future prospects of Church religion in Britain - the future perpetuation of NCA religious beliefs likewise remains uncertain. In terms of the current data, if the religious beliefs of the NCA informants are to be passed on to the next generation, an equal religious socialization of their offspring would appear to be a *sine qua non*. But this situation appears to be somewhat precarious. Unless CAs find more effective ways of integrating with NCAs, the future of NCA religious beliefs seems bleak. One has to bear in mind that many of the NCAs beliefs were active customary or traditionalist in content and were likely, therefore, to have been influenced by former alters who themselves had some form of network link to the traditional Church in the past.[20] This echoes the empirical work of Hay and Morisy (1978) in terms of their finding a connection between religious experience and conventional religiosity. Likewise, Bibby's (1983) analysis of Canadian survey data has identified a link between traditional religious commitment and individuals claiming to have answers to 'ultimate' questions. It would thus be reasonable to suggest that the onus for the future of religious belief in Britain, and the perpetuation of religious memory, has to fall upon religious organisations and upon educationalists, both of whom are faced with an enormous challenge.

---

[17] Cited in Hollinger (1991).

[18] Kenneth Copeland Ministries were not willing to give the number of people on their mailing list when this researcher contacted their office in Bath, but from a discussion with one of their former 'video ministers' it would appear the number is well over 10,000 in England alone.

[19] This moves towards the 'practical religion' outlined by Schneider (1970).

[20] It is possible that network links between the Church and the informants' former alters extend further back than just one generation. Due to the finite limits of the current study, few data were collected on this issue.

9.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

The current study has presented evidence of a relational gulf between CAs and NCAs, yet it would seem that this gulf needs to be bridged if religious belief outside of organised religious structures is to continue for generations to come. Bellah and his associates reach a similar conclusion in their study of individualism and commitment in American life:

> It would seem that a vital and enduring religious individualism can only survive in a renewed relationship with established religious bodies (Bellah, *et al.*, 1985:247-248).

The current data have already shown that a secular socialization process leads almost invariably to a secular world view among NCAs. In the absence of any further contact between NCAs and church religion, the chain of religious memory within discrete NCA networks is likely to weaken and eventually, in future generations, to break completely. Bridging the relational gulf to reinstate that memory therefore depends, in part, upon the ability of religious organisations to forge network links with NCAs.

One of the major problems in this respect concerning the main Christian denominations in Britain is the tendency of churches to be inward-looking - a fault of the Church readily admitted by Mark Saunders, one of the CA informants.[21] There are few attempts on the part of leaders of religious organisations to encourage the development of relationships between church members and those outside of the church. In fact Bruce (1995:21) argues that:

> The tolerance of the denomination removes most reasons for trying to recruit new members by conversion. Indeed, many Christians no longer accept the validity of conversion; in 1994 George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, withdrew his patronage from an organisation dedicated to converting Jews to Christianity. And apart from a sentimental desire to see one's children follow in one's footsteps, there is no powerful reason to work hard to socialize one's children into the doctrines of one's denomination.

---

[21] See page 178.

The sectarian end of the religious continuum reduces the incentive to forge links with NCAs for other reasons:

> ... with their [i.e. the sectarians] insistence that they and they alone possess the saving truth, they encourage their adherents to work hard at maintaining their faith and transmitting it to the children. *They will organise their social world so as to reduce contact with unbelievers* and strengthen the social bonds that maintain the community of the Godly [my italics] (ibid.:69).

As an exception, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons *do* organise their social world to contact unbelievers through door-to-door evangelism, but this hardly constitutes an attempt to build network relationships with NCAs. The findings of the current study argue against door-to-door evangelism as a suitable method for bridging the gap between CAs and NCAs. This method breaks the necessary conditions identified in the current study for effective belief transmission between the religious agent and the NCA, namely, a high level of relational proximity (Schluter and Lee, 1993), the gradual establishment of trust and respect between ego and agent (Giddens, 1994a, 1994b), the need for ego to take the initiative (Potvin and Sloane, 1985), and the requirement of a pre-existing or emergent network tie between ego and agent (Snow *et al*, 1980, 1983). The likelihood of an unsolicited visit by a complete stranger resulting in an individual changing their entire world view on the basis of a short conversation on the doorstep is remote in the light of the findings of the current study. It is not surprising that the informants generally held a low opinion of these religious organisations.

The current position of the Roman Catholic Church in England clearly indicates a crisis of recruitment. Hornsby-Smith (1996:1) cites the following quotation by Bishop Crispian Hollis:

> One of the major pastoral problems that we face is, quite simply, our erosion as a Mass-going community . . . If our decline continues at current rates, we will scarcely have a Church at all in thirty years' time.

Hornsby-Smith then suggests possible reasons for this crisis:

Also of importance is the unthinking reliance on the recruitment of the children of existing members and the almost total neglect of any strategy of evangelization. (ibid.:2)

Currie and his associates take up this point by arguing that:

... [if a church] is to grow at all, it must, given wastage, be able to recruit persons other than its own members' children ... recruitment - from within 'church' families, so to speak - must decline, unless those families are increasing very much faster than the total population, simply because no church can expect to recruit *all* its members' children (Currie, *et al.*, 1977:119).

There is no doubt that the fastest growing religious organisations throughout the world *do* have a strategy for evangelism and are oriented towards recruitment *outside* church families, but the most effective of these organisations *do not* employ door to door evangelism in their strategies. In many developed countries where extensive urbanisation has taken place, other religious organisations have experienced phenomenal growth due to their adoption of a social network strategy to evangelism. For example, by adopting relational marketing strategies,[22] the Soka Gakkai religion in Japan is now an organisation which has grown, since 1945, to a current membership of 10 million (Neighbour, 1990:27). Even in Britain, the Soka Gakkai has grown from two members in 1960 to over 4,000 members by 1988 (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994:13). Ninety-four per cent of these members "met the movement through social interaction" with friends representing "the largest category of people who introduced members" (ibid.:50). The Rissho Koseikai religion (a Japanese Buddhist sect) applies similar principles and is rapidly expanding as a result (Neighbour, op.cit.:26). Likewise, the 'cell group movement',[23] located in various parts of the world (which is based on a fundamentalist form of Christianity), has given a great deal of attention to relational marketing techniques within the private sphere and has subsequently produced churches which far exceed the numerical growth of

---

[22] See Appendix XII for an explanation of relational marketing strategies / techniques used by commercial as well as religious organisations.

[23] The 'cell group' movement should not be confused with the 'house church' movement. This distinction is clarified in Appendix XII.

other traditional Christian church structures situated in the same urban locations. For example, *one single cell group church with one minister*, located in Seoul in South Korea, consists of almost one million members divided throughout the city into individual cell groups, who then meet together collectively (ibid.:24).[24]

The immediate question this raises is whether such a cell group strategy can be effective in Britain. Several problematic factors are involved in this question. First, Martin's (1978) thesis, cited in Chapter One, argues that within different cultural contexts, broad tendencies towards secularization may take place:

> not ... that they *must happen*, but in the sense they tend to occur other things being equal. But things are not equal - ever ... they are most conspicuously not equal with respect to the particular cultural (and generally linguistic) complex within which they operate (ibid.:3).

The transmission of Christian religious belief in Britain therefore presents a different set of cultural problems which need to be surmounted.[25]

Second, and closely related to the latter point, the current study has identified a number of mechanisms which inhibit the transmission of religious belief in Britain; mechanisms which would need to be overcome by any religious organisation seeking to recruit new members beyond its own members' children.[26] In particular, the tendency of ego to prevent, or to place restrictions upon, access of dissimilar alters to ego's personal network may present a considerable obstacle. Likewise, Chapter Seven reported that there is an aversion to religious debate between individuals within the private sphere which seems to be embedded in the British consciousness.

---

[24] Other examples are given in Appendix XII.

[25] Without being diverted into a prolonged discussion of other cultures, it is difficult, even on a surface level, to compare, for example, Britain with South Korea. In South Korea, the religious history of the country has traditionally been Buddhist and Confucian. Conversions from Buddhism to Christianity are rather different than conversions from either 'customary Christian' or secular backgrounds to active participation in the Christian Church. As a generalization, the latter seems to typify the contemporary situation which confronts religious organisations in Britain.

[26] See summary on pages 291-292.

Third, one has to take into account Thompson's (1991) argument about the reluctance of religious bodies within Europe to become involved with 'secular' organisational techniques in their attempt to preserve 'the integrity of the sacred' (ibid.:10). America is therefore cited by Thompson as being one of the few countries where this occurs to any great extent due to the cultural acceptability of utilitarian discourses and rationalities.

Having highlighted the above difficulties, there are indications that some British churches and religious organisations are beginning to address some of these problems by focussing on the importance of network relationships in their strategies for evangelism and by abandoning the 'come to us' mentality which has tended to characterize church religion. A recent issue of *Quadrant*, for example, featured an article about RUN (Reaching the Unchurched Network) - a cross-denominational network of churches: "captivated by the vision to turn church outward to the lost"[27] - which has been operational for the past seven years. The relational mission of the organisation is based upon a philosophy which "rests upon forming long term friendships with unchurched people" (ibid.). Altrincham Baptist Church, one of the churches involved in this network of churches, claims to have increased its percentage of converts from 'unchurched backgrounds' from 18% in 1994 to 60% in 1999 and claims that during 1998, 60 people from unchurched backgrounds either 'came to faith' or became fully committed to their faith as a result of the network strategy (ibid.). The 'ICHTHUS' fellowship in London is one further example of a church which has attempted to employ a network approach to evangelism and has experienced considerable growth as a consequence (Neighbour, op.cit.:32-33). How successful these efforts will be in the long term remains to be seen. Further research would be useful to find out if these 'unchurched' converts had any religious CA alters in their former networks. It would be surprising indeed if these recent unchurched recruits were from secular backgrounds since the current research has shown that those who received a secular primary socialization were the most resistant to any form of religious secondary socialization. Moreover, the informants who were current CAs

---

[27] *Quadrant*, July 1999, published by Christian Research, page 6.

were generally those whose parents were CAs during the informant's childhood.

Finally, given the findings of the current study, it is precisely due to the importance of early socialization that the responsibility of educationalists needs to be stressed.

9.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONALISTS

It was mentioned in Chapter One that Hervieu-Léger has drawn attention to the failure of French schools to transmit Christian knowledge. It is certainly possible that the traditional chain of religious memory may be under considerable threat in Britain as well as in France. Davie (1996:9) comments that:

> The place of religion in schools - both in France and elsewhere - becomes in fact a crucial area of investigation in terms of religious memory. It remains a sharply contested area in many European societies.

Unless religion is given priority in the school curriculum, the gulf between NCAs and Church religion is likely to become even wider in the future, given the lack of contact between NCAs and CAs. This was a view shared by Adrian Dempster in the HNCA category (discussed in Chapter Five).[28] To reiterate just part of that quotation, Adrian commented:

> Everyone used to hate it [religious education] when I was at school but at the end of the day it was the only chance I ever had in my life to pick up that culture. And if it's no longer taught, when do those people pick up that culture? (H45M28/863)

Certainly, one of the main sources of primary religious socialization for many of the NCA informants was that of school, with boarding school playing a major role in that socialization process for at least three of the informants. One caveat, however, is that deliberate policies in Britain to educate children in religion are just as liable to create

---

[28] See page 179.

negative attitudes towards personal religious belief as they are to promote positive attitudes. Equally, a religious upbringing at home, if not conducted sensitively, can sometimes produce a reaction against the adoption of religious belief, as in the case of Clive Willis.[29] What is clear, however, is that an *absence* of a primary religious socialization invariably[30] produced a lack of religious belief in ego in later life, together with ego's selection of current alters who tended to reinforce the secular beliefs of ego, thereby enabling ego to maintain cognitive consonance.

Davie's (1994:135) conclusion on the subject of religious education is more than adequate here:

> It is hardly likely that religious education, however well it is taught, is going to turn us back into a nation of churchgoers (always assuming that that is what we are after) ... But religious education is, surely, more than this, for it remains, above all, a carrier of tradition ... at the very least, religious education and collective worship have helped to keep in place some sort of religious culture, however tenuous this may be. That in itself is a valuable undertaking.

9.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The current thesis has taken the sociology of religion in a less familiar direction through its integration with the sociology of kinship and friendship and its employment of ego-centred network analysis. Allan (1989:3) points out that the study of friendship, for example, "... is usually not integrated into an analysis with any wider empirical or theoretical significance". Hopefully the current study has helped to redress the balance and responded to the concerns of Beckford (1989) about the isolation of the study of religion from other social phenomena. However, there are several weaknesses to the current study which require acknowledgement and further research.

---

[29] See pages 272-273.

[30] The data in the current study showed no variation at all in this matter.

First, the methodology of the study inevitably suffers from the inherent problems associated with network analysis, mainly in terms of the arbitrary selection of which alters to include and exclude from the social networks and with regard to measurements of social ties within these networks. In terms of ego-centred network analysis and network indicators in general, there is a need to standardize methods and measurements. There is, as yet, little consensus among sociologists as to how social networks should be researched, measured and evaluated (Mitchell, 1969:11; Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988:38-39).[31]

Second, the social network theory propounded by the current thesis requires further testing. This theory has been explored, in the main, using qualitative data which has necessarily been limited in terms of its size and scope. However, Granovetter (1973:1361) highlights the potential of qualitative network studies (which might be recognized by a mathematically inclined reader) for further development by more technical and complex mathematical models. It would also be useful to construct a questionnaire based on some of the network principles identified herein and to conduct a much larger quantitative study to facilitate research of a more representative population sample. Having said this, the difficulties of obtaining the detailed information required about the network of each respondent will always present a considerable problem in terms of the design and implementation of a large survey.

As a result of the lack of application of network analysis to personal religious and secular belief systems, the current study has, necessarily, been exploratory. This was certainly the case when decisions were made about which questions to ask, not only about ego's beliefs but also about the alters' beliefs within ego's network. The interview questions were only directed towards ego; ideally it would have been desirable to have interviewed each alter within each network about their beliefs and their relationships with one another as well as with ego. But, clearly, this would have become extremely complex, expensive, time consuming and impractical (Allan, 1996:118-119).

---

[31] See page 96 of the current study.

312

Third, the sociology of religion has tended to discuss key variables which affect personal religiosity, such as class, education, age and gender, in isolation - and in terms of the epistemological ramifications associated with each variable - rather than analyse the effects of these variables from a network perspective. Each variable presents different types of network opportunity. Attention to the networks associated with these variables should therefore pay dividends in terms of achieving a richer understanding of the dynamics of social interaction associated with these network opportunities. For example, why is it that women are so consistently more religious than men? (Davie, 1994:117). Could it be associated with unique network opportunities which are available to women but are not open to men? And why should older people have always been more religious than the young? (ibid.:121) or why is there an inverse relation between exposure to higher education and adherence to core religious tenets? (Wuthnow, 1985:189). Again, do personal relational networks play a significant role in producing these phenomena?

Finally, from the above discussion there is clearly a need to find out if churches and other religious organisations are merely recruiting those who have received a former religious socialization through CA parents. If this is so, the perpetuation of traditional religious memory among future generations of NCAs may be seriously under threat for the reasons given above.

9.7 EPILOGUE

In conclusion, the modern setting of Grange Park in central southern England may provide a material security for its residents, but it has not extinguished the 'divine flame' which continues to be transmitted and maintained within discrete dispersed personal networks.[32] Religion may sometimes be articulated by a more contemporary language;[33] the Christian religious landscape may be colourful and multifarious with

---

[32] *The Divine Flame* is the title of a book by Hardy, 1966.

[33] For example, one informant, Neil Reid, described God as being: "Like a giant great kind of file server in the sky that if you want you can have your own line in" (L26L21/190).

313

a plethora of interpretations of Christian belief;[34] religious beliefs in general may be less relationally integrated with the Church than they were in the past; but, for many individuals, religion in some form nevertheless continues to occupy a metaphysical space in this modern environment. The key question is for how long? The answer to that question appears to be elusive. Undoubtedly, given the lack of involvement of the Grange Park residents in organised religion, unless religious organisations and educationalists can bridge the gulf which has been created between NCAs and church religion or other forms of organised religion, the divine flame may eventually be deprived of the necessary 'relational ether' required to keep it burning in the hearts and minds of those who remain outside of religious institutional structures.

---

[34] This situation is apparent even among contemporary Christian leaders in Britain, as exemplified in Moss (1986).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1 METHODOLOGY

Arber, Sara, (1993) 'Designing Samples' in N. Gilbert, *Researching Social Life*. Sage. Chapter 5.

Belsey, Catherine, (1980) *Critical Practice*. London and New York: Methuen.

Bucher, R., Fritz, C.E., and Quarantelli, E.L., (1956) 'Tape Recorded Interviews in Social Research', *American Sociological Review*, 21, pp. 359-364.

Derrida, J., (1978) *Writing and Difference*. trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

de Vaus, D.A., (1991) *Surveys in Social Research, Third Edition*. Allen & Unwin.

Dixon, Beverly R., Bouma, Gary D., Atkinson, G. B. J., (1992) *A Handbook of Social Science Research*. Oxford.

Elster, Jon, (1990) *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge.

Fielding, N. and Fielding, J., (1986) *Linking Data*. Sage.

Fielding, N, (1993) 'Qualitative Interviewing' in Gilbert, N, (1993) *Researching Social Life*. Sage. Chapter 8.

Gilbert, Nigel, (ed.), (1993) *Researching Social Life*. Sage.

Heberlein, T.A. and Baumgartner, R., (1978) 'Factors affecting response rates to mailed questionnaires: a quantitative analysis of the published literature'. *American Sociological Review*. 43, 447-62.

Hughes, J.A., (1978) *Sociological Analysis: Methods of Discovery*. Nelson.

Lynn, P. and Lievesley, D., (1991) *Drawing General Population Samples in Great Britain*. London: SCPR.

McCracken, Grant David, (1988) *The Long Interview*. Qualitative Research Methods Vol.13. Sage.

Moser, C.A., and Kalton, G., (1972) *Survey Methods in Social Investigation*. New York: Basic Books Inc.

Norusis, Marija J., (1991) *The SPSS Guide to Data Analysis, 2nd Edition*. SPSS Inc.

Popper, Karl R., (1959) *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Hutchinson.

Saussure, Ferdinand de, (1959) *Course in General Linguistics*. eds., Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, Albert Reidlinger, trans. Wade Baskin. New York: The Philosophical Library.

Steiner, George, (1989) *Real Presences*. Faber and Faber.

Sudman, S. and Bradburn, N.M., (1974) *Response Effects in Surveys*. Chicago: Aldine.

Thompson, Sonia, (1996) *Social Research Update 14: Paying Respondents and Informants*. University of Surrey.

Wynne-Davies, Marion, (ed.), (1989) *Bloomsbury Guide to English Literature*. London: Bloomsbury.

2 SOCIOLOGY / SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION / SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Abercrombie, N. and Warde, A., (1992) *Social Change in Contemporary Britain*. Polity Press.

Ahern, G. and Davie, G., (1987) *Inner City God: The Nature of Belief in the Inner City*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Allan, Graham, (1989) *Friendship: Developing a Sociological Perspective*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Allan, Graham, (1996) *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain*. Oxford.

Argyle, Michael, (1958) *Religious Behaviour*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Badham, Paul, (1989) *Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain*. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Bailey, Edward, (1986) *A Workbook in Popular Religion*. Partners Publications.

Bailey, Edward, (1990a) *Why Implicit Religion?* Network for the Study of Implicit Religion.

Bailey, Edward, (1990b) *Common Religion and Believing Without Belonging: The Suburban Context*. NSIR.

Barker, D., Halman, L. and Vloet, A., (1992) *The European Values Study, 1981 - 1990, Summary Report*. European Values Group.

Beckford, James A., (1989) *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society*. Unwin Hyman.

Bellah, Robert N., (1971) 'Between religion and social science', R. Caporale and A. Grumelli, (eds.), *The Culture of Unbelief*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bellah, Robert N., Madsen, Richard, Sullivan, William M., Swidler, Ann, and Tipton, Steven M., (1985) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. New York: Harper & Row.

Berger, Peter, (1963) *Invitation to Sociology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Berger, Peter, (1969) *The Social Reality of Religion*. Faber & Faber. (Formerly published under the title of: *The Sacred Canopy)*.

Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T., (1971) *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin.

Bibby, Reginald, (1983) 'Searching for invisible thread: Meaning systems in contemporary Canada', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 22, 117.

Boissevain, Jeremy, (1974) *Friends of Friends*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Bott, Elizabeth, (1971) *Family and Social Network*. 2nd Edition. Tavistock.

Bottomore, T. and Nisbet, R., (eds.), (1979) *A History of Sociological Analysis*. London.

Bradley, (1995) 'Religious Involvement and Social Resources: Evidence from the Data Set "Americans Changing Lives"', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 34, 2, June, 259-267.

Brierley, P., (1991) *Christian England*. Marc Europe.

Brierley, P., (1995) *Finding Faith in 1994*. Christian Research.

Bruce, Steve, (1990) *Pray TV: Televangelism in America* London: Routledge.

Bruce, Steve, (1992) *Religion and Modernisation*. Clarendon Press.

Bruce, Steve, (1995a) *Religion in Modern Britain*. Oxford.

Bruce, Steve, (1995b) *From Cathedrals to Cults: Religion in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bruce, Steve, (1996) 'Religion in Britain at the close of the 20th century: A challenge to the silver lining perspective', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* Vol 11, No.3, pp. 261-275.

Bruce, Steve, (1997) 'The pervasive world-view: religion in pre-modern Britain', in *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol.48, No.4, pp. 667-80.

Campbell, Colin, (1971) *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion.* MacMillan.

Cavanaugh, J.J., (1939) 'Survey of fifteen surveys' Bull. University of Notre Dame. 34, 1-128.

Cavendish, James C., Welch, Michael R. and Leege, David C., (1998) 'Social Network Theory and Predictors of Religiosity for Black and White Catholics: Evidence of a 'Black Sacred Cosmos'?' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37, 3, 397-410

Chambers, Paul, (1997) *Why do more women go to Church?* Unpublished paper, presented to NSIR.

Collins, Sylvia, Eyre, Anne and Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1996) *Young People's Beliefs: Public and Private Dimensions of the Sacred.* University of Surrey.

Collins, Sylvia, (1997) *Young People's Faith in Late Modernity.* University of Surrey. (Unpublished Ph.D thesis).

Cottrell, Melanie, (1985) *Secular Beliefs in Contemporary Society* (Unpublished D.Phil thesis, Oxford.

Crow, G. and Allan, G., (1994) *Community Life: An Introduction to Local Social Relationships.* Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Davie, G., (1990a) 'Believing without belonging: Is this the future of religion in Britain?' *Social Compass.* 37(4), pp. 455-469.

Davie, G., (1990b) ''An ordinary God': The paradox of religion in contemporary Britain', *British Journal of Sociology.* Vol 41, pp. 395-421.

Davie, G., (1994) *Religion in Britain Since 1945.* Blackwell.

Davie, G., (1996) 'Religion and modernity: The work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger' in Flanagan, K. and Jupp, P. (eds.), *Postmodernity, Religion and Sociology.* Macmillan.

Davie, G., (1997a) 'Belief in modern Britain: the tradition becomes vicarious', in Platten, S., Chandler, A. and James, G., (eds.), *New Soundings: Essays on Tradition and Change.* London: Darton, Longman and Todd, pp. 92-117.

Davie, G., (1997b) 'Believing without belonging: a framework for religious transmission'. *Recherches Sociologiques* 3, pp. 17-37.

Dobbelaere, K., (1981) 'Secularization: A Multi-Dimensional Concept', *Current Sociology*, Vol 29, (2). London Sage Publications.

Dobbelaere, K., (1984) 'Secularization theories and sociological paradigms: Convergences and divergences', *Social Compass* Vol XXXI/2-3, pp. 199-219.

Dobbelaere, K., (1985) 'Secularization theories and sociological paradigms: a reformation of the private-public dichotomy and the problem of societal integration', *Sociological Analysis*. 46, 4, 377-387.

Dobbelaere, K., (1987) 'Some trends in European sociology of religion: the secularization debate', *Sociological Analysis*. 48, 2, 107-137.

Durkheim, Emile, (1961) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York.

Durkheim, Emile, (1975) in: Pickering, W.S.F., ed., *Durkheim on Religion*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Eason, Cassandra, (1993) *Families are Forever*. Harper Collins.

Edrington, R., (1987) *Everyday Men*. Lang.

Eisinga, Rob, Lammers, Jan, and Peters, Jan, (1990) 'Localism and Religiosity in the Netherlands', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 29, 4, December, 496-504.

Eisinga, Rob, Lammers, Jan, and Peters, Jan, (1991) 'Community, Commitment and Conservatism', *European Sociological Review*, 7, 2, September, 123 -134.

Ellison, Christopher G., and George, Linda K., (1994) 'Religious Involvement, Social Ties, and Social Support in a Southeastern Community', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 33, 1, March, 46-61.

Erickson, Bonnie H., (1982) 'Networks, ideologies and belief systems', in Marsden, P. & Lin, N., (eds.), *Social Structure and Network Analysis*. Sage.

Ester, Peter, Halman, Loek and de Moor, Ruud, (1993) *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America*. Tilburg University Press.

European Values Surveys (Great Britain, 1981, 1990) in Ester, Peter, *et al*, ibid.

Eyre, A., (1996) 'Football and religion: sociological reflections', Unpublished paper presented at the Surrey Religious Research Group Seminar, University of Surrey, 24 May.

Festinger, Leon, (1985) *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. California: Stanford University Press.

Festinger, Leon, Riecken, Henry W. and Schachter, Stanley, (1956) *When Prophecy Fails*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fischer, Claude, (1982) *To Dwell Among Friends*. Chicago, University Press.

Flanagan, K. and Jupp, P. (eds.), (1996) *Postmodernity, Religion and Sociology* Macmillan.

Forster, P., (1989) *Church and People on Longhill Estate*. University of Hull.

Fulton, John, (1996) *Theory of Modernity and Religious Change: Two Opposing Paradigms to Test*. Unpublished paper, but has since been substantially published as:

Fulton, John, (1997) 'Modernity and Religious Change in Western Roman Catholicism: Two Contrasting Paradigms', *Social Compass*, 44, 1, 115-129.

Fulton, J. and Gee, P., (eds.), (1994) *Religion in Contemporary Europe*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen.

Gartrell, C. David and Shannon, Zane K., (1985) 'Contacts, Cognitions, and Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach', *Review of Religious Research*, 27, 1, September, 32-48.

Gee, P. and Fulton, J., (eds.), (1991) *Religion and Power, Decline and Growth* B.S.A. Sociology of Religion Study Group.

Gibbs, Eddie, (1993) *Winning Them Back*. Monarch.

Giddens, Anthony, (1994a) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press.

Giddens, Anthony, (1994b) *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Polity Press.

Glasner, Peter E., (1977) *The Sociology of Secularization*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Glock, Charles Y. and Stark, Rodney, (1965) *Religion and Society in Tension*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Granovetter, Mark, (1973) 'The strength of weak ties', *American Journal of Sociology* 78, pp. 1360-80.

Greeley, Andrew M., (1973) *The Persistence of Religion*. SCM.

Gunter, Barrie and Vinney, Rachel, (1994) *Seeing is Believing: Religion and Television in the 1990s*. London: John Libby / Independent Television Commission, 32.

Halsey, A.H., (1974) 'Government against poverty in school and community', in D.Wedderburn (ed.), *Poverty, Inequality and Class Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 123-140.

Hamilton, Malcolm, (1995) *The Sociology of Religion*. Routledge.

Hammond, P., (ed.), (1985) *The Sacred in a Secular Age*. London: University of California Press.

Harding, Stephen and Phillips, David, (1986) *Contrasting Values in Western Europe*. MacMillan.

Hardy, Alister, (1978) *The Divine Flame*. The Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, Oxford.

Hardy, Alister C, (1979) *The Spiritual Nature of Man* Clarendon Press.

Hay, David, (1987) *Exploring Inner Space*. Mowbray.

Hay, D. and Morisy, A., (1978) 'Reports of ecstatic, paranormal, or religious experience in Great Britain and the United States: A comparison of trends', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17 (3), pp. 255-268.

Heelas, Paul, (1991) 'Cults for Capitalism - Self Religions, Magic and the Empowerment of Business' in: Gee, Peter and Fulton, John, (eds.), *Religion and Power, Decline and Growth: Sociological Analyses of Religion in Britain, Poland and the Americas*. B.S.A. Sociology of Religion Study Group.

Heelas, Paul, (1996) *The New Age Movement*. Blackwell.

Heirich, Max, (1977) 'Change of heart: A test of some widely held theories about religious conversion', *American Journal of Sociology* Vol 83, No.3, pp. 653-680.

Herman, Nancy J., (1984) 'Conflict in the Church: A Social Network Analysis of an Anglican Congregation', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* 23, 1, March, 60-74.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, (1993) 'Present day emotional renewals: the end of secularisation or the end of Religion?', pp. 129-48, in Swatos Jr, William H., (ed.), *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis.* London: Sage.

Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, (1994) 'Religion, memory and Catholic identity: Young people in France and the 'New evangelisation of Europe', in Fulton, J. and Gee, P., (eds.), *Religion in Contemporary Europe.* Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, pp. 125-138.

Hirst, R., Allan, G. and Watson L., (1995) *Now or Never: Older People's Decisions About Housing.* University of Southampton.

Hollinger, Dennis, (1991) 'Enjoying God forever: An historical/sociological profile of the health and wealth gospel in the U.S.A.', in: Gee P. and Fulton, J., (eds.), *Religion and Power, Decline and Growth: Sociological Analyses of Religion in Britain, Poland and the Americas.* B.S.A. Sociology of Religion Study Group.

Homan, Roger, (1996) *The Liminality of the Implicit.* NSIR.

Hoover, Stewart M., (1988) *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church.* Sage.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1987) *Roman Catholics in England: Studies in Social Structure Since the Second World War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1989) *The Changing Parish.* Routledge.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1991) *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England: Customary Catholicism and Transformations of Religious Authority.* Cambridge University Press.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1992) 'Believing without belonging? The case of Roman Catholics in England', in Wilson, B., (ed.), *Religion: Contemporary Issues.* London: Bellew Publishing. pp. 125-34.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1996) *Failed Socialisation or Religious Transformation? English Catholics and Historical Contingencies*. Unpublished paper. A French translation has since been published:

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1997) 'Échec de l'imprégnation religieuse ou transformation du religieux? Catholiques anglais et circonstances historiques', *Recherches Sociologiques*, 3, 51-64.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P. and Lee, Raymond M., (1979) *Roman Catholic Opinion*. University of Surrey.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., Lee, Raymond M. and Reilly, Peter, (1985) 'Common Religion and Customary Religion: A Critique and a Proposal', *Review of Religious Research*. Vol 26, No.3, 244-252.

Kapferer, B., (1969) 'Norms and the manipulation of relationships in a work context', in: J.C. Mitchell, (ed.), *Social Networks in Urban Situations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Kelley, Dean M., (1972) *Why are Conservative Churches Growing?* Harper & Row.

Kirkpatrick and Shaver, (1990) 'Attachment Theory and Religion: Childhood Attachments, Religious Beliefs and Conversion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol.29, No.3, 315-334.

Kox, Willem, Meeus, Wim and Hart, Harm, (1991) 'Religious conversion of adolescents', *Sociological Analysis*. 52, 3, Fall, 227-240.

Law, John, (ed.), (1991) *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*. Routledge.

Law, John, (1992) *Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity*. Plenum Publishing.

Lehman Jr, Edward C., (1986) 'The local/cosmopolitan dichotomy and acceptance of women clergy: A replication and extension of Roof', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 25, (4), pp. 461-482.

Lehman Jr, Edward C., (1990) 'Localism and Sexism: A Replication and Extension', *Social Science Quarterly*. 71, 1, March, 184-195.

Lofland, John and Stark, Rodney, (1965) 'Becoming a world saver: A theory of conversion to a deviant perspective' *American Sociological Review*. 30, pp. 862 - 875.

Luckmann, T., (1967) *The Invisible Religion*. New York: MacMillan.

Luckmann, T., (1983) *Life World and Social Realities*. Heinemann.

MacRobert, Iain, (1989), in: Badham, Paul, *Religion, State and Society in Modern Britain*. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Malinowski, Bronislaw, (1925) *Science, Religion and Reality*. London: Souvenir Press.

Marsden, P. and Lin, N., (eds.), (1982) *Social Structure and Network Analysis*. Sage.

Martin, David, (1965) 'Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularization' in Gould, J., (ed.), *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, pp. 169-182.

Martin, David, (1967) *A Sociology of English Religion*. Heinemann Education Books Ltd.

Martin, David, (1978) *A General Theory of Secularisation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Martin, David, (1991) 'The secularisation issue: prospect and retrospect', *British Journal of Sociology*. 42, pp. 465-74.

Marx, K, and Engels, F, (1957) *On Religion*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Miller, Alan S., (1995) 'A Rational Choice Model of Religious Behaviour in Japan', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 34, 2, June, 234-244.

Mitchell, J. Clyde, (1969) *Social Networks in Urban Situations*. Manchester University Press.

Moss, Tony, (ed.), (1986) *In Search of Christianity*. Firethorn Press.

Neighbour, Ralph W., (1990) *Where Do We Go From Here?* Touch Publications.

Olson, Daniel V.A., (1989) 'Church friendships: Boon or barrier to church growth?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28, 4, December, 432-447.

Otto, Rudolph, (1950) *The Idea of the Holy (2nd Edition)*. Oxford.

Peck, M. Scott, (1990) *The Different Drum*. London: Arrow Books.

Pool, I. and Kochen, M., (1978) 'Contacts and Influence', *Social Networks*. 1, 5-51.

Potvin, Raymond H. and Sloane, Douglas M., (1985) 'Parental control, age and religious practice', *Review of Religious Research*. 27, 1, 12.

Procter, Michael, (1993) 'Analysing other researchers' data', in N.Gilbert, (ed.), *Researching Social Life*. Sage.

Richter, P., (1996) 'Charismatic mysticism: A sociological analysis of the 'Toronto Blessing' ', in Porter, S.E., (ed.), *The Nature of Religious Language*. Sheffield Academic Press.

Robinson, John A. T., (1963) *Honest to God and the Debate*. S.C.M.

Robinson, M., (1992) *A World Apart*. Monarch.

Robinson, Martin, (1994) *The Faith of the Unbeliever*. Monarch.

Roof, W.C., (1978) *Community and Commitment*. New York: Elsevier.

Scheepers, Peer and van der Slik, Fran, (1998) 'Religion and attitudes on moral issues: Effects of individual, spouse and parental characteristics', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 37, 4, 678-691.

Schluter, Michael, and Lee, David, (1993) *The 'R' Factor*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Schneider, Louis, (1970) *Sociological Approach to Religion*. John Wiley & Sons.

Short, C., and Winter, M., (1993) 'Believing and belonging: religion in rural England', *British Journal of Sociology* 44, pp. 635-51.

Smart, Ninian, (1971) *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. Fontana.

Smart, Ninian, (1973) *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge* Princeton University Press.

Snow, David A., Zurcher Jr, Louis and Ekland-Olson, Sheldon, (1980) 'Social networks and social movements: a microstructural approach to differential recruitment', *American Sociological Review* 45, pp. 787-801.

Snow, David A., Zurcher Jr, Louis and Ekland-Olson, Sheldon, (1983) 'Further thoughts on social networks and movement recruitment', *Sociology* 17, (1), pp. 112-120.

Stark, Rodney, (1965) 'Social contexts and religious experience', *Review of Religious Research* Vol 7, pp. 17-28.

Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W., (1980a) 'Secularisation, revival and cult formation', *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion* 4, pp. 85-119.

Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W., (1980b) 'Networks of faith: Interpersonal bonds and recruitment to cults and sects', *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 85, No.6, pp. 1376-1395.

Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W., (1985) *The Future of Religion*. University of California Press.

Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W., (1987) *A Theory of Religion*. New York: Lang.

Stark, Rodney and Glock, Charles Y., (1968) *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment*. London: University of California Press.

Svennevig, M., Haldane, I., Spiers, S. and Gunter, B., (1988) *Godwatching: Viewers, Religion and Television*. London: John Libbey/IBA.

Swatos, William, (1981) 'Beyond denominationalism?: Community and culture in American religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 20, 3, 217-227.

Swatos, William, (1993) *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis*. Sage.

Tomlinson, Dave, (1997) *The Post Evangelical*. Triangle.

Thompson, Kenneth, (1988) 'How religious are the British?', in Terence Thomas, (ed.), *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, 1800-1986*. Routledge.

Thompson, Kenneth, (1991) 'The Secularization Debate', in *Religion and Power, Decline and Growth: Sociological Analyses of Religion in Britain, Poland and the Americas*. B.S.A. Sociology of Religion Study Group, pp.7-14.

Tonnies, Ferdinand, (1979) in: Freund, J., 'German Sociology in the time of Max Weber' in: Bottomore, T. and Nisbet, R., (eds.), *A History of Sociological Analysis*. London.

Towler, Robert, (1974) *Homo Religiosus*. Constable.

Towler, Robert, (1984) *The Need for Certainty: A Sociological Study of Conventional Religion*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Turner, B.S., (1991) *Religion and Social Theory*. 2nd Edition. Sage.

Wallis, R., and Bruce, S., (1982) 'Network and clockwork. A critique of Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson', *Sociology* 16, (1), pp. 102-7.

Wallis, R., and Bruce, S., (1984) 'The Stark-Bainbridge theory of religion: a critique and counter proposal', *Sociological Analysis* 45, (1), pp. 11-28.

Wallis, R., and Bruce, S., (1992) 'Secularization: the orthodox model' in Bruce, S., (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and historians debate the secularisation thesis*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 8-30.

Wallman, S., (1984) *Eight London Households*. Tavistock.

Walter, T., (1990) 'Why are most churchgoers women?', *Vox Evangelica* 20, pp. 73-90.

Ward, Keith, (1986) *The Turn of the Tide*. BBC Publications.

Wasserman, S. and Faust, K., (1994) *Social Network Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Weber, Max, (1949) *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: Free Press.

Weber, Max, (1965) *The Sociology of Religion*. Translated by Ephraim Fischoff. London: Methuen.

Welch, Kevin W., (1981) 'An interpersonal influence model of traditional religious commitment', *Sociological Quarterly* 22, pp. 81-92.

Wellman, B., (1979) 'The community question: The intimate networks of East Yorkers'. *American Journal of Sociology* 84, pp. 1201-1231.

Wellman, B., (1982) 'Studying Personal Communities' in Marsden, P. & Lin, N., (eds.), *Social Structure and Network Analysis*. Sage.

Wellman, B. and Berkowitz, S.D., (eds.), (1988) *Social Structures: A Network Approach*. Cambridge University Press.

G C Wenger, (1989) 'Support Networks in Old Age - Constructing a Typology', in M. Jefferys (ed.), *Growing Old in the Twentieth Century*. Routledge, and in: 'A Comparison of Urban with Rural Support Networks: Liverpool and North Wales', *Ageing and Society* (15) pp. 59 - 81.

White, R., (1968) 'Toward a Theory of Religious Influence', *Pacific Sociological Review*. 11, 23-28.

Wilson, B.R., (1966) *Religion in Secular Society*. London: Watts.

Wilson, B.R., (1976) *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*. Oxford University Press.

Wilson, B.R., (1982) *Religion in Sociological Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Wilson, B.R., (1985) 'Secularization: The inherited model' in: Hammond, P., *The Sacred in a Secular Age*. University of California.

Wilson, B.R. and Dobbelaere, K., (1994) *A Time to Chant: The Soka Gakkai: Buddhists in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Winter, M.M., (1973) *Mission or Maintenance: A Study in New Pastoral Structures*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Winter, M.M., (1985) *What Ever Happened to Vatican II?* London: Sheed and Ward.

Wirth, L., (1938) 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', *American Journal of Sociology* 44, pp. 1-24

Wirth, L., (1969) 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', in: *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, (ed.), R.Sennet, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Wooffitt, Robin, (1992) *Telling Tales of the Unexpected*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wuthnow, Robert, (1985) 'Science and the sacred', in: Phillip E. Hammond, (ed.), *The Sacred in a Secular Age*. London: University of California Press.

Yinger, J.M., (1970) *The Scientific Study of Religion*. New York: MacMillan.

Yinger, J.M., (1977) 'A comparative study of the substructures of religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.*

3   HISTORICAL REFERENCES

Beck, G.A., (ed.), (1950) *The English Catholics: 1850 - 1950*. Burns Oats.

Currie, Robert, Gilbert, Alan and Horsley, Lee, (1977) *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Falkus, Malcolm and Gillingham, John, (eds.), (1987) *Historical Atlas of Britain* Kingfisher.

Houghton, S. M., (1980) *Sketches From Church History*. Banner of Truth Trust.

Lees, L.H., (1979) *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lowe, Norman, (1986) *Mastering Modern British History*. MacMillan.

McLeod, H., (1974) *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*. Croom Helm.

Morgan, Kenneth O., (1988) *The Oxford Mini History of Britain, Volume IV*. Oxford.

Myers, A.R., (1988) *England in the Late Middle Ages*. Penguin.

Speck, W.A., (1988) *Stability and Strife: England 1714-1760*. Edward Arnold.

Thomas, Keith, (1971) *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Penguin.

Thomas, Terence, (ed.), (1988) *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, 1800 - 1986*. Routledge.

Thompson, John A.F., (1986) *The Transformation of Medieval England*. Longman.

Wheeler, Joan, (ed.), (1932) *The New Home Encyclopedia*. London: Odhams Press Ltd.

4   OTHER REFERENCES CONSULTED

Abrams, M., Gerard, D., and Timms, N., (eds.), (1985) *Values and Social Change in Britain*. MacMillan.

Ashford, S. and Timms, N., (1992) *What Europe Thinks: A Study of Western European Values*. Dartmouth.

Castells, Manuel, (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Fichter, J.H., (1954) *Social Relations in the Urban Parish*. University of Chicago Press.

Hanson, Sharon, (1997) 'The secularisation thesis: Talking at cross purposes', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* Vol 12, No.2, pp. 159-179.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1996b) *Religious Experience: A Sociological Perspective*. Unpublished paper, but subsequently published in:

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P., (1998) 'Religious Experience: A Sociological Perspective', *The Heythrop Journal*, 39, 4, 413-433.

Martin, David, (1969) *The Religious and the Secular*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Reizetti, Claire and Lee, Raymond, (eds.), (1993) *Researching Sensitive Topics*. Sage.

Richardson, J. T. and Stewart, M., (1977) 'Conversion process models and the Jesus Movement', *American Behavioural Scientist* 20, pp. 819-838.

Stahl, William A., (1996) *Excerpts from: God and the Chip: Religion and Technology in an Information Age*. University of Regina.

Wuthnow, R., (ed.), (1979) *The Religious Dimension*. New York: Academic Press.

Young, M.D. and Willmott, P., (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London*. London: Routledge.

APPENDICES

CONTENTS

APPENDIX I. LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

To:

Date:

Dear

University
of Surrey

I am currently conducting postgraduate research for a Ph.D at the University of Surrey on the subject of people's beliefs, values and attitudes. Surprisingly, very little is known about the beliefs currently held by people in the general population in Britain. I would therefore greatly appreciate your help and co-operation if you could fill-in the brief questionnaire attached to this letter. It should only take about 5 minutes to complete. If this survey is to be truly representative of the area, it is important that each questionnaire is collected, so if you are able to complete it I would indeed be most grateful to you.

The questionnaire is part of a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It is not associated with, nor representative of, any religious organisation whatsoever. The aim of the questionnaire is simply to find out about the beliefs and values held by people living at Grange Park. I am equally interested to know how many people in the area have no religious beliefs at all.

If you agree to help with my research, I would be pleased to offer you, in return, at least a 1 in 500 chance of winning £50.00 in a free prize draw. This questionnaire is only being posted to 500 homes. Therefore, all who complete and return the questionnaire will be entered in a draw for the £50.00 prize. Could I ask you to spare a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and retain it somewhere safe for collection? I will call on you personally to collect it within the next four to five days. In your own interests of security I will be carrying a letter of identification. If you have any questions concerning this study, please do not hesitate to telephone the University of Surrey on the number below and ask for either Dr Mike Hornsby-Smith or Mrs Agnes McGill in the Department of Sociology.

Finally, if you would be willing to take part in a more in-depth interview about your beliefs, values and attitudes, your name would be included, after the interview, in a second free draw for the prize of an Hitachi 14" portable colour television or the direction of an equivalent sum of money to a registered charity of your choice. A maximum of 60 people will be required for these interviews, although fewer than this may participate. The first people selected for interview will be entered for the final prize draw. Therefore your chance of winning will be at least 1 in 60. With the opportunity of being entered for TWO prize draws - your chances of winning are very high indeed!

Thank you very much for your attention.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hirst (Postgraduate Researcher)

Department of Sociology
University of Surrey
Guildford
Surrey GU2 5XH
England

Telephone: (01483) 300800
Fax: (01483) 306290

1. Have you ever had an experience which you might call 'spiritual' or 'religious'?

Yes	51 (18)
No	206 (74)
Don't know	23 (8)

         9 missing cases

2. With regard to your beliefs, how would you describe yourself? (Tick as many descriptions as you would apply to yourself - for example, if you would describe yourself using descriptions a), b) and d), tick all three, and so on)

a) a believer in the supernatural   83 (29) Yes, 206 (71) No
b) a believer in God   142 (49) Yes, 147 (51) No
c) a religious person   21 (7) Yes, 268 (93) No
d) a Christian   114 (39) Yes, 175 (61) No
e) I'm unsure what I believe   81 (28) Yes, 208 (72) No
f) I'm a convinced atheist   26 (9) Yes, 263 (91) No

g) Other (please state) _   9 (3) Yes, 280 (97) No

3. Are you an active attender of a religious denomination or other religious group?

Yes ☐ If Yes, GO TO QUESTION 4   34 (12) Yes

No ☐ If No, GO TO QUESTION 5   253 (88) No

4. At which denomination or religious group are you an attender? (Please tick box, then GO TO QUESTION 6)

Roman Catholic	5 (2)
Church of England (Protestant)	18 (6)
Free Church / Non-Conformist/ Evangelical	9 (3)
Jew	0
Muslim	0
Hindu	1 (0.5)
Buddhist	0
Other (please state) _	1 (0.5)
	254 (88) N/A

5. Have you ever been an active attender of a religious denomination or a religious group?

Yes ☐ If Yes, GO TO QUESTION 5b   96 (33) Yes

No ☐ If No, GO TO QUESTION 6   158 (55) No

                 33 (12) N/A

5b. Tick which one - then GO TO 5c

Roman Catholic	14 (5)
Church of England (Protestant)	69 (24)
Free Church / Non-Conformist/ Evangelical	8 (3)
Jew	0
Muslim	0
Hindu	0
Buddhist	0
Other (please state) _	5 (2)
	191 (66)

5c. How long ago did you attend this denomination / religious group?

Within the past year	7 (2)
Within the past 5 years	7 (2)
Over 5 years ago	82 (29)
N/A	191 (67)

         2 missing cases

6. Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?

a) More than once a week	4 (1)
b) Once a week	17 (6)
c) Once a month	15 (5)
d) Christmas / Easter day	34 (12)
e) Other specific holy days	13 (5)
f) Once a year	21 (7)
g) Less often	18 (6)
h) Never, practically never	166 (58)

         1 missing case

7. Were you brought up with some form of belief / faith at home?

Yes	180 (63)
No	93 (32)
Don't know	14 (5)

         2 missing cases

8. How often, if at all, do you think about the meaning and purpose of life?

Often	66 (23)
Sometimes	131 (45)
Rarely	58 (20)
Never	25 (9)
Don't know	8 (3)

         1 missing case

9. Which, if any, of the following do you believe in?

a) God   157 (55) Yes, 131 (45) No, 1 missing
b) Life after death   129 (45) Yes, 159 (55) No, 1 missing
c) A soul   127 (44) Yes, 161 (56) No, 1 missing
d) The Devil   40 (14) Yes, 248 (86) No, 1 missing
e) Hell   43 (15) Yes, 245 (85) No, 1 missing
f) Heaven   106 (37) Yes, 182 (63) No, 1 missing
g) Sin   66 (23) Yes, 222 (77) No, 1 missing

h) Resurrection from
the dead   42 (15) Yes, 246 (85) No, 1 missing

i) Re-incarnation   57 (20) Yes, 231 (80) No, 1 missing

10. Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?

a) There is a personal God   80 (28)

b) There is some sort of spirit or
life force   109 (38)
c) I don't really know what to think   66 (23)
d) I don't really think there is any
sort of spirit, God or life force   32 (11)
                                  2 missing cases

11. If your answer to the last question was a), please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about a personal God . . .
Percentages omitted for these questions (not enough space)

	Agree	Disagree	Neither	Don't know
a) Usually I feel that God is very near to me	33	13	20	14
b) I know that God is always near to me, but sometimes I don't feel that he is near	46	12	8	11
c) God is far off	7	49	14	8
d) God is awesome	22	27	16	10
e) God is very severe, judgemental and difficult to please	2	58	8	9
f) Whilst God judges all sin, he is also very willing to forgive sins	64	6	4	6
g) God is all-loving and always forgives sins without making any conditions	30	22	12	13
h) God is all-loving but only forgives those who turn away from their wrong-doing	31	22	9	18

12. Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation, contemplation or something like that, outside organised religious services or meetings?

Yes   137 (48)
No   143 (50)
Don't know   7 (2)
                2 missing cases

13. How often do you take some moments of prayer, meditation, contemplation or something like that, outside organised religious services or meetings?

Often   39 (14)
Sometimes   78 (28)
Hardly ever   23 (8)
Only in times of
crisis   38 (13)
Never   100 (35)
Don't know   6 (2)
                5 missing cases

14. Do you find you get comfort and strength from your beliefs or not?

Yes   111 (39)
No   88 (31)
Don't know   84 (30)
                2 N/A, 4 missing cases

15. How important are spiritual matters in your life? (Please circle the appropriate number. 10 means very important and 1 means not at all important)
Percentages omitted for next 5 questions (no space)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
83	33	45	27	28	18	20	19	4	11

Not at all   Very
               1 missing case

16. How important is God in your life? (Please circle)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
89	36	32	25	36	6	23	21	3	16

Not at all   Very
               2 missing cases

17. Generally speaking, do you think the church is giving this country adequate answers to . . .

	Yes	No	Don't know
a) The moral problems and needs of the individual	22	161	104
b) The problems of family life	22	163	100
c) People's spiritual needs	71	85	129
d) The social problems facing our country today	13	168	106

18. Please indicate whether you think the following statements are true or false . . .

	True	False	No Opinion	Don't know
a) Jesus Christ was / is uniquely significant to humanity	149	27	62	43
b) Jesus Christ was, and is, God	71	90	59	65
c) God is three persons in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit	100	47	73	65
d) It is possible to communicate with the dead	75	74	34	102
e) It is desireable to communicate with the dead	34	99	84	67
f) Human nature is fundamentally good	156	59	27	42
g) Church traditions should remain unaltered	58	112	73	43

19. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements . . .

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
a) The number one priority for churches or religious groups should be the encouraging of people towards self-fulfilment	131	48	105
b) Personal spiritual experience is more important than personal knowledge about God or about spiritual matters	108	50	127
c) People would be happier if they were to submit to the guiding authority of a church or other religious group	22	187	75
d) The marriage service should replace the words: 'till death do us part' with: 'as long as our love shall last'	105	144	35
e) It should be made extremely difficult for a married couple to obtain a divorce	50	197	33
f) Generally speaking, watching TV during the evening is preferable to going out for the evening	43	205	37

Finally, please answer the following questions about yourself (all answers will be treated in the strictest confidence)

20. Male 140   Female 149

22. In what age band are you?

18 - 25 42 26 - 34 120 35 - 44 66 45 - 64 53 65+ 6
(2 missing cases)

23. Are you currently . . .

Married 198 Living as married 44 Divorced 10 Separated 3
Widowed 7 Single 26   1 missing case

24. Tenure type Owner/Occupier 265 Rented 15, 9 missing

25. At what age did you (or will you) complete your full-time education, either at school, or at an institution of higher education? (Please exclude any apprenticeships)

14 - 16 40%, 17 9%, 18 17%, 19 - 21 20%, 22+ 14%

26. What is your present / last full-time occupation?

Please specify   *No figures applicable here.*

27. Are you . . . ? (please tick appropriate box)

49 An employer/manager in an establishment with 10 or more employees
15 An employer/manager in an establishment with less than 10 employees
72 Professional worker (lawyer, accountant, teacher, etc)
15 Self-employed with no employees
1 Farmer: employer, manager on own account
61 Middle level non-manual office worker
13 Junior level non-manual office worker
10 Foreman and supervisor   11 Skilled manual worker
0 Agricultural worker   5 Semi-skilled manual worker
0 Member of armed forces   2 Unskilled manual worker
3 Unemployed   8 Student
            23 Other   Please specify _

28. Are you the chief wage earner? *No figures applicable here.*

29. Is the chief wage earner employed now or not?

Yes 257 No 17   15 missing cases

30. If the chief wage earner is not yourself, what is/was his/her job?

(please specify) *No figures applicable here.*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. I will personally call within the next four to five days to collect it.
Could I interview you further about your religious beliefs, attitudes and values? The interview would take approximately 45 - 60 minutes, after which your name would be entered for the final prize draw.

YES 76
NO 213   If NO, I would still be very grateful if you could fill in this questionnaire and retain it until I collect it. Your name will still be entered for the initial prize draw.
                    Thank you for your help.

APPENDIX III   INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide which follows appears to be complex and gives the impression that more time would be needed to complete the interviews. However, there were a number of filter questions and, more importantly, the network tables were for the benefit of the researcher. Some of the lists of questions relate directly to the tables.

Collecting network information:

An average total of 25 minutes was allowed for all the network questions. Each network table took approximately two minutes to complete. Most of the questions which applied to each alter in the informant's network required only 'single word' answers and each informant was instructed to keep the answers brief regarding this information. So, for example, for each relationship, single word answers were required for: occupation of alter, length of time relationship established, frequency of meeting, whether meetings were face to face, by telephone, by letter, and so on. Moreover, most alters in each informant's network did not know one another, hence the tables on pages 5, 9 and 11 of the interview guide did not need to be used.

APPENDIX III.   INTERVIEW GUIDE

60 minute interview - no longer than 90 minutes.

First, ask if there is a definite need to keep strictly to 60 minutes.

----

1. LEVEL AND TYPE OF BELIEF (25 mins)

TO ALL:

Which beliefs are held by the respondent?

Discuss and clarify relevant responses to the initial questionnaire.

Include any accounts of religious or spiritual experience.

TO CONVERTS ONLY:

What led to your conversion?   Further prompts . . .

Were you asking questions about the meaning and purpose of life, or about spiritual matters, PRIOR to your conversion?

Did you discuss these matters with others holding religious beliefs, PRIOR to your conversion?

Did you read any literature, listen to any TV programmes, radio programmes, videos or tapes about religious matters PRIOR to your conversion?

TO THOSE INDICATING A BELIEF IN GOD OR IN A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION:

How do you think you would feel if you suddenly discovered there was no God?

Could you live quite happily without such belief?

Do you feel you have a NEED to believe in something, such as God or the spiritual?

What do you think is the purpose of life?

TO THOSE INDICATING VERY LOW / NO BELIEF IN GOD:

Looking back over past years, do you see anything other than pure chance in operation through the various events of your life?

1

Do you think there is any purpose to life? If so, what do you think it is?

Is everything ultimately meaningless?

Do you think anything exists beyond the material world?

What do you think about luck, or good and bad fortune?

How about fate? Does human life have a pre-planned destiny?

Have you ever been through any experience which has led to strong thoughts or feelings about that experience, for example, the birth of a child, or a bereavement or a personal crisis?

You've indicated on the questionnaire you think that human nature is fundamentally _   . Could you tell me any more about that? (Q.18)

What sort of thoughts go through your mind when you hear of news such as the Dunblane massacre or the West family murders? What does it tell you about the human condition?

How do you view disasters such as the TWA jet explosion during the '96 Olympic Games?

How do you deal with life's uncertainties?

For example, how do you deal with your own mortality?

Do you ever think about the risk of nuclear war?

You've indicated you get/don't get comfort and strength from your beliefs. How did you interpret that question? (Q.14)

How do you think you would feel if you discovered that God definitely exists?

Or that a spiritual dimension definitely exists?

Would it make any difference to your life?

Do you feel you have a NEED to dismiss the possibility of a God or the possibility of a spiritual dimension to life?

TO ALL:

Does your belief/lack of belief in an after-life make any difference to you in terms of the moral choices you may have to make in this life?

OPENNESS OF INFORMANT TO POTENTIAL CHANGE OF BELIEF.

How firmly embedded would you say your current beliefs are? Do you think you'll ever be likely to change from what you believe at present?

Do you ever consider other world views or other beliefs?

Do you think anything may cause you to reconsider what you currently believe?

How important is it to you to establish trust in a person before taking any notice of what they say about religious matters?

If someone tried to share with you different beliefs to those held by yourself, would the personal example set by that person make any difference to you in terms of whether you were prepared to listen to them or not or would you be more interested in the knowledge they were seeking to impart to you?

Have you ever encountered anyone holding strong religious beliefs contrary to your own beliefs? Has anyone ever tried to convert you to a different world view? What would your reaction be if anyone tried to do that?

Would you ever admit into your circle of close friends a person holding completely different beliefs to your own?

Does religious belief ever come up as a topic of conversation with your colleagues at work? What usually happens if it does?

----

2. SOURCES OF BELIEF: NETWORK QUESTIONS (25 mins)

What kind of beliefs did your parents have when you were a child? (Refer to question 7 on Q1). Did that influence you in any way? Do they believe the same things now?

3

I don't wish to know about anyone by name, but I am interested in knowing about the relationship networks people have and how that relates to people's religious beliefs.

Can you think of anyone in the past who has significantly influenced your beliefs, either within or outside your family? Could you tell me about that?

List them all first, by relationship. If family, state immediate or extended.

If friend, state neighbour, work, other.

	Relationship to respondent	Type of belief	Main benefits of relationship	Distance loc. from respond.
Person A				
Person B				
Person C				
Person D				

	Continuity	Parity	Directness	Commonality	Multiplexity
A					
B					
C					
D					

Nature of relationship(s) = kin, b/g friend, friend, neighbour, colleague, etc.

Continuity: **how long relationship established, frequency of meeting.**
Parity: **occupation of other.**
Directness: **L etter, I nternet, T elephone, F ace-to-face.**
Commonality: **things in common with other.**
Multiplexity: **contexts in which known.**

Did any of these people know one another?

	Who knew who?	Relationship to one another	Distance located from one another	Cont	Par	Dr	Comn	Mult
A		ATB ATC ATD	AFB AFC AFD					
B		BTC BTD	BFC BFD					
C		CTD	CFD					

Nature of relationship(s) = kin, b/g friend, friend, neighbour, colleague, etc.

Continuity: **how long relationship established, frequency of meeting.**
Parity: **occupation of other.**
Directness: **L etter, I nternet, T elephone, F ace-to-face.**
Commonality: **things in common with other.**
Multiplexity: **contexts in which known.**

Note: For all questions concerning:

Main benefits of relationship

ask: What is it they like about that person?

What drew them together?

How many times have you moved within the past 10 years?

How long have you lived at this address?

Do you think you will be likely to move within the next 5 - 10 years?

Use this table with reference to the questions on the next page:

Number of kin in frequent contact			
Immediate:	Children:	Ages:	Extended:
Number of kin to confide in the most			
Immediate:	Extended:		
Number of kin overlap			
Immediate:	Extended:		
Number of friends in frequent contact			
Neighbours:	Work colleagues:	Other:	
Number of friends to confide in the most:			
Neighbours:	Work colleagues:	Other:	
Number of friends overlap:			
Neighbours:	Work colleagues:	Other:	

Note: If living with partner - count as immediate family. If b/g friend, outside home, count as friend.

1.1 How many are there in your immediate family, i.e. living at this address?
Do you see these members of your family every day?

1.2 Are any of these children? Ages of children?

1.3 How many of the rest of your wider family keep in frequent contact with you?

1.4 How many of your family would you say you can confide in the most, both from within and outside your immediate family? Are they immediate or extended family?

1.5 How many of these overlap? In other words have you mentioned anyone who you see frequently AND you feel you can confide in them the most?
Are they immediate or extended family?

2.1 How many of your friends keep in frequent contact with you?
Distinguish between neighbours, work colleagues and others.

2.2 How many friends do you have who you feel you can confide in the most?
Distinguish between neighbours, work colleagues and others.

2.3 How many of these overlap? In other words have you mentioned friends who you see frequently AND feel you can confide in them the most?
Distinguish between neighbours, work colleagues and others.

3.1 Do any of these individuals you've mentioned, both friends and family, hold any religious beliefs?

Note where these people are located within the network.

Could we just talk very briefly about the 3 or 4 people you see most frequently and then the 3 or 4 people you feel you can confide in the most. These may be either friends or family. First of all, do any of these people overlap (frequent/confide)? How many are we talking about, i.e. _ most frequent, _ confide in most, _ frequent + confide? First, the 3 or 4 you see most frequently.

List them all first, by relationship. If family, state immediate or extended.

If friend, state neighbour, work, other.

	Relationship to respondent	Type of belief	Main benefits of relationship	Distance loc. from respond.
Person A				
Person B				
Person C				
Person D				

	Continuity	Parity	Directness	Commonality	Multiplexity
A					
B					
C					
D					

Nature of relationship(s) = kin, b/g friend, friend, neighbour, colleague, etc.

Continuity: how long relationship established, frequency of meeting.
Parity: occupation of other.
Directness: L etter, I nternet, T elephone, F ace-to-face.
Commonality: things in common with other.
Multiplexity: contexts in which known.

Do any of these people know one another?

	Who knows who?	Relationship to one another	Distance located from one another	Cont	Par	Dr	Comn	Mult
A		ATB ATC ATD	AFB AFC AFD					
B		BTC BTD	BFC BFD					
C		CTD	CFD					

Nature of relationship(s) = kin, b/g friend, friend, neighbour, colleague, etc.

Continuity: how long relationship established, frequency of meeting.
Parity: occupation of other.
Directness: L etter, I nternet, T elephone, F ace-to-face.
Commonality: things in common with other.
Multiplexity: contexts in which known.

Now the 3 or 4 you feel you can confide in the most. Are any of these the same people you've already mentioned, whom you see most frequently? (Mark with asterisk to avoid duplication)

List them all first, by relationship. If family, state immediate or extended.

If friend, state neighbour, work, other.

	Relationship to respondent	Type of belief	Main benefits of relationship	Distance loc. from respond.
Person A				
Person B				
Person C				
Person D				

	Continuity	Parity	Directness	Commonality	Multiplexity
A					
B					
C					
D					

Nature of relationship(s) = kin, b/g friend, friend, neighbour, colleague, etc.

Continuity: **how long relationship established, frequency of meeting.**
Parity: **occupation of other.**
Directness: **L etter, I nternet, T elephone, F ace-to-face.**
Commonality: **things in common with other.**
Multiplexity: **contexts in which known.**

Do any of these people know one another or know those most frequent?

	Who knows who?	Relationship to one another	Distance located from one another	Cont	Par	Dr	Comn	Mult
A		ATB ATC ATD	AFB AFC AFD					
B		BTC BTD	BFC BFD					
C		CTD	CFD					

Nature of relationship(s) = kin, b/g friend, friend, neighbour, colleague, etc.

Continuity: how long relationship established, frequency of meeting.
Parity: occupation of other.
Directness: **L** etter, **I** nternet, **T** elephone, **F** ace-to-face.
Commonality: things in common with other.
Multiplexity: contexts in which known.

Do any of the people we've just spoken about meet together without you being present?

Have any of these people we've spoken about influenced your beliefs in any way?

Are there any other people more recently who have influenced your beliefs in any way (even people with whom you may no longer be in contact)?

How much time would you say you have to devote to friendships each week?

Are you seeking to build new friendships or are you content with your present circle of friends?

If you did form new close friendships, would it mean you would have to drop any current close friends in order to create time to spend with the new friends? Would this be desirable?

Are you involved in any local voluntary organisations, clubs, societies or other such groups?

What are these?

How often do you attend?

Number of friends at these groups?

Have any of these friends influenced your beliefs in any way?

Have you ever read any literature on spiritual or religious matters, or on humanist or atheistic issues?

Do you ever watch any TV programmes on religious or spiritual matters or listen to similar radio broadcasts?

----

3. INVOLVEMENT OR NON-INVOLVEMENT IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES. (10 mins)

What does the informant think of religious institutions/organisations?

For CA's:

Refer first to answers to question 17.

What attracts you to be an attender? Why are you involved?

Did you independently seek out a church or religious organisation which taught what you already believed or did you start attending through the encouragement and influence of others?

Have you ever experienced any pressure from other people to hold you back from attending? Have you ever felt pressurized into attending in any way at all?

Do you think there is any conflict between the emotional and the intellectual aspects of religious belief? How important is individualism to you? Do these views conflict with your involvement?

Is there anything about the church or religious organisations which you find off-putting to you personally?

How important is it to you to pass on your beliefs to others?

What sort of beliefs do you think should be taught in schools?

END OF INTERVIEW FOR CA's

For NCA's:

Why do you avoid religious institutions?

Is there anything about the church or about religious organisations which you find off-putting to you personally?

Have you ever experienced any pressure from other people not to become involved in religious organisations?

How important is individualism to you?

Do religious organisations conflict with your views in this respect?

Would you ever participate in *any* type of organisation during your own leisure time?

How important is it to you to pass on what you believe to others?

What sort of beliefs do you think should be taught in schools?

END OF INTERVIEW FOR NCA's

APPENDIX IV

Deconstruction theory: language and the data

The principal epistemological challenge to the social sciences arises through the textuality of social life. Hughes (1978) has pointed out that language is a major element in the formation of social thought and that perceptions of reality are created through linguistic systems. In fact, without language social thought would not be possible at all. Without words and without constructed meanings nothing would be left of social experience other than passive silence. The interview process itself produces texts, the analysis and writing-up of which produces yet further texts.

In order to understand developments in literary theory prior to post-structuralist literary criticism one has to refer back to Aristotle's concept of art as 'mimesis': the imitation of reality. Textual criticism used to be dominated by Aristotelian mimesis, i.e. it was assumed that the text was a *reflection* of reality and that reality could be imitated by means of words (Belsey, 1980). This philosophy of the text began to be questioned in the light of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*.[1] In this work, Saussure (1959) drew attention to the ideological construction of all texts. In Saussure's terminology, language is a system of differences without positive terms. Words are thus an arbitrary construction by consensus and have no direct link with an essential reality outside of language itself. Saussure thereby undermined the assumed referential element of language. Saussure was still located within a logocentric (word centred) philosophy of language, however, in that whenever there was a dispute about the meaning of a signifier (the word) he appealed to the signified (the concept relating to the word) rather than to the referent, i.e. the thing in the world to which the sign (made up of the signifier and the signified) referred.

The expressive realist approach to texts was rejected by structuralists in the light of

---

[1] Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913) was a Swiss linguist. His *Course in General Linguistics* was published in 1915 and was based upon a series of lectures which he had given at the University of Geneva.

post-Saussurean linguistics. Structuralists did not, however, look further into the nature of language to question its stability. Structuralists assumed a stability to language in order to formulate various theories about the structures involved in culture, language, the narrative and so on.

Derrida's (1978) post-structuralist formulation of the concept of 'différance' theoretically undermined this assumed stability of language and simultaneously undermined the logocentric basis of Western philosophy. Différance has been defined by Wynne-Davies (1989:461) as: "the deferral of meaning whereby no sign can ever be brought into direct alignment with the object that it purports to recall. This means that meaning is always *deferred*, and can never be final". In other words, signifiers only mean what they mean due to their difference from one another and this meaning is further deferred from one signifier to the next. Within linguistic systems there is therefore no stable point of departure or reference. All meaning is in a state of flux. Whilst Saussure separated the sign from the referent, Derrida thus separated the signifier from the signified. Derrida's formulation ultimately undermines any signifier which refers to the transcendent. No transcendental signifier can arrest this fluidity of meaning. At the basis of this argument there is no room for the existence of any stable, essential meaning either within or outside of linguistic systems.

Nevertheless, at the very least we still inhabit a constructed reality which is determined by consensus. If a centre of meaning *is* illusory, it is arguably a necessary illusion in order for anything in the world to be accomplished at all. Berger (1969:4) focuses attention on this social construction of reality in that: "Unlike the other higher mammals, who are born with an essentially completed organism, man is curiously 'unfinished' at birth". Due to man's lack of specialized instinctual drives, a world must be fashioned and created by man himself, i.e. culture - which "attains the character of objective reality" even though it is humanly produced (ibid.:9). The linguistic aspect of this construction arises in Berger's statement that "the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation" (ibid.:17). Conversation thus maintains the subjective reality of the world. Nevertheless, it is Berger's assumption of the capacity of language to produce and impose order upon experience (ibid.:20) which is undermined by post-structuralist deconstruction theory.

The argument outlined above has implications for the current study. For if Derrida is correct, that all meaning is in a state of flux without any stable point of departure or reference, then it is not possible to form conclusions about anything which was stated by the informants or indeed by this researcher. For example, we take for granted the notion of selfhood. The informants, we would assume, are individual 'selves'. Yet, if the self consists merely of a constructed narrative formulated over a period of time, unless that narrative has a stable point of reference, a coherent selfhood is impossible, since, if language is in a state of constant deferral and flux, then the self is equally subject to that tyranny of language. Likewise, it is taken for granted that the words of this text are stable and meaningful. Yet, if Derrida's theory is correct, then this text is ultimately meaningless since it is not possible to penetrate to any essential meaning unless language can somehow be anchored to a stability outside of itself.

A brief argument will now be offered to defend the current thesis from the philosophical challenge of Derridean deconstruction theory. First, Derrida may be correct in his assumption that there is no centre to meaning. One cannot prove conclusively, however, whether an essence does or does not exist outside of language. Ultimately, and rather ironically, given the subject matter of the current study, *this is a religious matter*. It is a matter of faith. The existence or non-existence of a transcendental point of reference is where all arguments end. If there is only difference and deferral of meaning, even this statement is meaningless. To counter this position, Steiner (1989:4) has argued that "a wager on the meaning of meaning ... is a wager on transcendence ... grammar lives and generates worlds because there is the wager on God". If the transcendental signifier has a reality in itself then the flux of meaning is interrupted. It becomes a stable point of reference and language is reinstated with a centre.

Second, even if a defence which appeals to faith is abandoned, one could still argue that approximate (rather than absolute) meanings are achieved by consensus through the social construction of meaning. Moreover, the context in which social interaction occurs or in which particular statements are made teases out this approximation of meaning. This has implications for the analysis of the interview data. When analysing

interview data it is important not to take sentences completely out of context on their own, but to widen the context. It is also important to refer back to the original tape recordings to clarify not just *what* was said but *how* it was said. How a statement was made arguably enhances the meaning and contributes towards the context of a statement.

The NUD.IST computer software program was used to analyse the data for the current study. 'Version 4' of the program was highly useful for preserving the context of statements when text searches were made, for example, on a particular theme. When a 'text unit' (in the current study - a sentence) was displayed when viewing text from a text search, various options were available for referring back to the original interview transcription to clarify the wider context of which the particular text unit was a part.

Finally, it has not been possible to do justice to the complex area of deconstruction theory herein, but the brief argument above does draw attention to the ideological basis of the Derridean theory of language. Texts remain open to sociological analysis, but to regard such texts as inherently stable clearly rests upon a 'belief' about the nature of language. This has to be acknowledged.

APPENDIX V

CONSTRUCTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

This section needs to be read alongside the final version of the questionnaire, given in Appendix II. Details of the reasoning involved in the construction of various questions now follows:

Question 1

Have you ever had an experience which you might call 'spiritual' or 'religious'?

This question was used to avoid asking anything too complicated initially and hopefully generated some interest. Only a 'Yes' or 'No' answer was required to this question as it was intended to obtain further details from the respondents selected for further interview.

Question 2

In terms of self-description, EVS question 340 is not particularly helpful and in fact would not have yielded the required information. EVS No. 340 states:

Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are

1 A religious person
2 Not a religious person
3 A convinced atheist
9 Don't know

Most evangelical or charismatic Christians known to this researcher (at least one hundred) are absolutely loathe to describe themselves as religious. They tend to equate religion with man's efforts to reach God. They therefore tend consciously to replace the word 'religion' with the word 'reality' and use this word to express their

understanding of that which God has done to reach man through Jesus Christ. Thus, to avoid excluding a whole number of 'religious' people (who would not have considered themselves to be 'religious') the modified form of Question 2 used on the survey questionnaire was deemed much more suitable. Such Christians as those described above would most likely have answered Question 2 by ticking boxes a), b) and d), i.e. they would have most likely described themselves as a 'believer in the supernatural' a 'believer in God' and as a 'Christian'.

Questions 3, 4, and 5

EVS questions 332a and 334c were avoided. Question 332a uses the word 'belong'. The respondent may well have interpreted the word 'belong' to mean being a 'member' of a religious organisation. In fact, 'belonging' may mean quite different things to different people. To add to the confusion, the EVS question changes in 334c when it refers to 'membership'. Thus, 332a could easily be misinterpreted by both the respondent and by the researcher who finally analyses the results. To overcome these problems the phrase 'active attender' was used in the current survey. Of course, changing the wording of questions meant that direct comparisons with these specific EVS questions were not possible.

Question 6

This is worded exactly as it appears in the EVS survey, to use as a comparison with other data.

Question 7

The phrase 'belief/faith' was selected for this question rather than the word 'religious', for the reasons given previously for avoiding the words 'religion' or 'religious'.

Question 8

As a result of discussing this question with many committed Christians, one could argue that sociologists may be completely mislead by this EVS question. It would appear that some committed Christians have already worked though this fundamental question about the meaning and purpose of life and no longer need to ponder on such issues. Their response would therefore most likely be 'rarely' or 'never'. Whilst they may be categorised as 'highly religious' on the one hand, they would nevertheless be regarded not to have a religious disposition according to the suggested likely reply to this question. On the other hand, it may well be a useful indicator of a religious disposition with some NCAs. The effectiveness of this question was therefore tested during stage two of the research. Question 8 appears exactly as in the EVS survey, as does question 9.

Question 9

This EVS question, which appears to be constructed to elicit extremely conventional religious views, was used to serve as a source of comparison with other data at a later stage of analysis. Nevertheless, all of the terms are problematic, since they refer to concepts which are not easy to restrict to clear definitions. To give just one example, if a belief in 'sin' was indicated, the respondent may have adopted one of a range of potential meanings:

i) Did the respondent mean 'sin' in the biblical sense of the term, i.e. as in the doctrine of 'original sin' brought about through the 'fall' of mankind? If this *was* their meaning it may be possible to identify it by question '18 f' which asked whether or not they considered 'human nature' to be fundamentally good, although even this question does not allow a firm conclusion to be made about the respondent's understanding of that which constitutes 'sin'. Neither could it inform us if their understanding were biblically based. And even if a person did have a biblical understanding of the term, such understanding may have varied greatly from one respondent to the next. Furthermore, 'human nature' is itself a concept which is a

construct of language, open to a variety of interpretations and there are some academics who deny the very existence of anything consistent to all human beings which can be termed 'human nature'. One then inevitably enters into the debate of whether human behaviour is learned or innate.

ii) 'Sin' may have been understood to mean falling short of moral absolutes. If so, from where did the respondents derive such moral absolutes? Were these absolutes formulated on the basis of a religious belief system, a secular philosophy or a personally formulated philosophy?

iii) Was 'sin' understood by the respondent in relative terms, as in the situational ethics argued by Robinson (1963) in the 'Honest to God' debate of the 60s?

iv) Was 'sin' another term used by the respondent to describe 'wrongdoing', and if so, 'wrongdoing' according to whom? Wrongdoing according to the law? 'Wrongdoing' according to the 'Church' or other religious organisation? If so, which Church, which denomination, which religious organisation, and which interpretation of which scripture, if any at all? Or could it have been 'wrongdoing' as defined by the respondent him or herself?

Clearly, all of these questions *could* be asked, but obviously it would result in the construction of a questionnaire of inordinate length and complexity. Such questions demonstrate the problematic nature of questionnaires and highlight the potential manipulation of respondents through the categorisation of replies which can subsequently be analysed with relative ease by the researcher. This discussion also demonstrates the need to follow-up questionnaires with focused interviews, not only to question the respondents further but to clarify that which was meant by their responses on the questionnaire. This procedure was adopted during stage two of the research.

Question 10.

This EVS question is extremely problematic because it excludes any type of belief which does not include reference to God as personal, a spirit or a life force. What if the person believed in many Gods? Or if they believed that God is within?

Question 11.

This was formulated to obtain a clearer picture of the type of personal God respondents believed in if they selected the appropriate filter option in question 10.

Questions 12, 13 and 14.

These were all taken from the EVS survey, although each of the questions were modified slightly, hence they are not directly comparable with the findings of the EVS survey. Question 12 (368 in the EVS questionnaire) does not appear to distinguish if these 'moments' were taken in private or in church settings. It was desirable to know, from both questions 12 and 13, whether or not this was a private affair, hence the additional words: "outside of organised religious services or meetings".

Question 14 modifies EVS question 367 by avoiding the use of the word 'religion'.

Questions 15 and 16.

Question 15 was added so as not to exclude those who held non-conventional religious views. Question 16, which has been constructed exactly as it appears in the EVS survey, may not have made any sense to such respondents, yet they may still have been very religious. Unless these two questions were discussed further in the stage two interviews, it was impossible to know exactly how the respondents interpreted the questions. In fact, this does seem to apply to most of the questions.

Question 17.

This is worded as it appears in the EVS survey, apart from the phrase 'your Church' which has been changed to 'the Church'. The reason why EVS question 341 - 344 uses the phrase 'your Church' is quite incomprehensible since it restricts the question to CAs only.

Question 18.

Towler's (1984) ideal types were used to construct this question and to distinguish between the various types of conventional belief without necessarily excluding valid information about these beliefs. For example, exemplarists would find questions about God: "profoundly irrelevant to their way of being religious" (1984:95) yet if "people who think of themselves as 'religious' or as 'Christians' hold these views [i.e. exemplarists], it is for sociologists to ensure that they do not measure religiousness in such a way as to exclude these people" (1984:37). Whilst this question operationalises Towler's five types, it only indicated approximately whether respondents held conventional beliefs according to Towler's five types or whether the respondents beliefs differed radically from these types. The only way of discovering these or other types of belief (in detail) in the population - for example, the various beliefs associated with Neo-Paganism, which Robinson (1994) argues is now the major contender with Christianity - would appear to be through the use of in-depth focussed interviews. The second stage of interviews was highly useful in this respect. The EVS survey certainly *does not* allow for a wide range of conventional and unconventional beliefs.

Question 19.

This is the final question to be discussed here. It was constructed to identify possible contemporary cultural influences upon beliefs, attitudes and values. These are as follows:

Question 19

Parts a) and b):   The contemporary shift towards individual religious experience and towards personal fulfilment.

Part c):   Contemporary suspicions of constraints on personal freedom.

Parts d) and e):   Choice more important than obligation and commitment.

Part f):   Television viewing placing limits on frequency of encounter relationships.

CONSTRUCTING AND APPLYING A CONVENTIONAL SCALE OF RELIGIOSITY

To construct a conventional scale, church attendance was omitted since the CAs had already been identified. The point of the scale was to identify conventional *beliefs* rather than traditional practice. The criteria and the questions used to construct the scale were therefore:

Score one point for each, if the boxes on the initial questionnaire were ticked for:

Question numbers 2b, 2d, 9 a - h, 10a, and 18a 'true', 18b 'true' and 18c 'true'.

The selected informants for Stage Two of the research, i.e. 10 CAs[2] and 30 NCAs, each scored the following points using this scale (with a maximum of 14) to measure conventional religious belief:

---

[2] The chart was compiled prior to one CA withdrawing from Stage Two of the study.

Table A1: Conventional religiosity scores for the stage two informants.

CA Q.No.	Conv Score	Q.No.	Conv Score	Q.No.	Conv Score	Q.No.	Conv Score
86CA	10	27H	13	368M	4	489L	1
152CA	7	436H	6	278M	4	202L	4
172CA	8	96H	7	34M	6	12L	5
186CA	14	418H	9	122M	5	263L	4
223CA	14	264H	10	279M	1	193L	1
315CA	14	333H	5	52M	10	232L	1
336CA	12	451H	8	329M	10	137L	1
348CA	5	47H	9	312M	11	149L	2
370CA	12	158H	12			164L	3
428CA	13	206H	11			49L	1
						499L	1
						37L	1
Mean:	10.9		9.0		6.4		2.1

The first column shows the original selection of CAs. The other three columns show the original selection of 30 NCAs each identified by respondent number followed by a letter indicating high (7-10), medium (4-6) or low (1-3) belief importance scores. Their individual scores then follow using the aforementioned scale to measure conventional religious beliefs (with a maximum conventional belief score of 14).

APPENDIX VII TABLE OF FORMER EXEMPLAR TYPES

Source of influence	NATURE OF FORMER EXEMPLAR				
	+	+/-	Neutral	-	Total
CA	(N = 9)				
Parental	5	2	2	0	9
Rel/Ed	8	0	0	1	9
Family	3	1	2	0	6
Friends	3	1	0	0	4
All	19	4	4	1	28
HIGH	(N = 10)				
Parental	8	0	2	0	10
Rel/Ed	8	2	0	0	10
Family	6	0	0	0	6
Friends	4	0	0	0	4
All	26	2	2	0	30
MEDIUM	(N = 8)				
Parental	4	0	2	2	8
Rel/Ed	3	1	3	1	8
Family	2	0	0	2	4
Friends	1	1	1	2	5
All	10	2	6	7	25
LOW	(N = 12)				
Parental	0	1	2	9	12
Rel/Ed	0	0	2	7	9
Family	1	0	0	6	7
Friends	0	0	2	8	10
All	1	1	6	30	38

Rel/Ed: Religious Contact / Education

APPENDIX VIII   TABLES OF CURRENT NETWORK DATA

Church Attenders   (N = 8)

Int No.	No. of Religious/ No. in Network		Relational Proximity of Religious Cases	Religious Alters: Strength of Beliefs
10	5/5	100	5H	4S, 1W
35	3/4	75	1H, 2M (1S)	2S, 1W
4	3/7	43	2H, 1L (2S)	3S, 2W
11	5/7	71	5H, 1L (4S, 1M)	4S, 1M, 1W
18	3/4	75	3H	3S
1	-	-	-	-
24	2/3	67	2H	2S
27	4/5	80	4H, 1M (1S, 3M)	1S, 3M, 1W
22	4/4	100	1H, 3M (1S)	4S
Mean	3.6/4.9	74	2.9H,0.8M,0.3L (2.3S, 0.5M, 0.1W)	2.9S, 0.5M, 0.8W

NCA High   (N = 10)

Int No.	No. of Religious/ No. in Network		Relational Proximity of Religious Cases	Religious Alters: Strength of Beliefs
30	4/6	67	4H	2M, 2W
32	6/7	86	6H	1S, 3M, 2W
23	7/8	88	6H, 1M, (3S, 3W)	4S, 3W
15	2/8	25	1H, 1L	2S
26	2/3	67	1H, 1M	2S
31	5/9	56	5H	4M, 1W
38	3/4	75	1H, 2L (1M)	2M, 1W
2	3/10	30	3H	3M
25	3/4	75	2H, 1M (1M, 1W)	1S, 1M, 1W
28	0/2	0	0	0
Mean	3.5/6.1	57	2.9H, 0.3M, 0.3L (0.6S, 1.4M, 0.9W)	1.0S, 1.5M, 1.0W

NCA Medium   (N = 8)

Int No.	No. of Religious/ No. in Network		Relational Proximity of Religious Cases	Religious Alters: Strength of Beliefs
8	4/19	21	4M	4S
36	0/6	0	0	0
3	5/8	63	1H, 3M (1W)	2S, 1M, 2W
17	4/6	67	2H, 2M	4M
5	1/2	50	1H	1M
16	1/4	25	1H	1M
14	5/5	100	5H	5M
29	5/6	83	5H, 1L (2M, 3W)	2M, 4W
Mean	3.1/7.0	45	1.9H, 1.1M, 0.1L (0S, 1.4M, 0.5W)	0.8S, 1.8M, 0.8W

NCA Low   (N = 12)

Int No.	No. of Religious/ No. in Network		Relational Proximity of Religious Cases	Religious Alters: Strength of Beliefs
13	1/5	20	1H	1M
33	0/3	0	0	0
37	5/5	100	5H	2S, 3W
6	2/5	40	2M	2S
39	5/6	83	4H, 1M (2S, 1M, 1W)	2S, 1M, 2W
21	3/4	75	3H	3W
20	2/8	25	2H	1S, 1M
7	1/4	25	1H	1W
19	3/8	38	1H, 2M	3W
34	1/7	14	1H	1W
12	2/5	40	1H, 1M (1W)	1M, 1W
9	3/5	60	2H, 1M (1M, 1W)	1S, 1M, 1W
Mean	2.3/5.4	43	1.7H, 0.7M, 0L (0.4S, 0.3M, 1.0W)	0.7S, 0.4M, 1.3W

APPENDIX IX. CRITERIA APPLIED TO CLASSIFY INFORMANTS ACCORDING TO BELIEF TYPES[3]

Classify as:	if their beliefs include most of the following ...
CONVERSIONIST[4]	Characterized by a turning point / having been 'saved'. Human nature considered intrinsically bad. Only God can save. Life changes dramatically - a whole new set of ideas accepted.
TRADITIONALIST	Characterized by a cherishing of the received traditions of the established church (RC or CofE) and would not question them. A pattern of receiving, cherishing and handing on. Cannot explain what they believe or why they believe it. Appalled at any opposition to the traditionalist view.
GNOSTICIST (non-traditional)	Characterized by a knowing of the spiritual world. God is a principle or a force, rather than a being or a person. Claims access to the powers of the spiritual world. Not contrary to the teaching of the Church but believes the Church is lacking in knowledge about spiritual matters. Evil belongs to an inferior level of existence.
THEIST (non-traditional)	Characterized by trust in God - the solution to evil is to trust God. Jesus Christ is viewed as a fine example but not regarded as God. Focuses on God the benevolent creator and his creation. The world is considered to be very good and humanity is not 'fallen'. The Church can make God inaccessible - typically theists are unchurched.
LIBERAL	No clear doctrinal views held. Questions Church dogma and doctrines. Situational ethics. Generally a CA.
CUSTOMARY[5]	Experienced a formal religious socialization, characterized by conventionality. Espouses beliefs and practices derived from official religion but not subject to continued control by the churches. * Beliefs subject to trivialization, apathy, convenience and self interest.
ACTIVE CUSTOMARY	As above, excluding *. May well have more active personal religious life than many CAs - the only difference is that 'active customary's' are not CAs. Actively and regularly engaged in prayer, meditation, Bible reading, religious discussions with others, etc. A cardinal reliance upon their beliefs for a sense of meaning and purpose.
AGNOSTIC (non-traditional)	Simply do not know if God does or does not exist. Cannot arrive at a knowledge of any absolute truth. Tend to keep an open mind on religious matters.
ATHEIST (non-traditional)	Convinced there is no spiritual dimension - just a material universe. There is nothing beyond that which can be experienced by the five senses. Not necessarily a closed mind on the subject, but atheistic views firmly held.

---

[3] Sufficient information was obtained from the informants to facilitate their classification according to various belief content typologies. These have been formulated in the Weberian sense, in that:

> An ideal type is formed by a one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. (Weber, 1949:90)

[4] The first four types in this table have been derived from Towler's (1984) five types. There were no 'exemplarists' in this sample, hence only four of Towler's types have been used. Towler classifies an exemplarist as: characterized by hope; human nature is perfectible; Jesus Christ is an example to follow, but is not considered to be God; no belief in conventional doctrines nor prayer; critical of the Church.

[5] Derived from a definition of 'Customary Religion' by Hornsby-Smith, et al (1985). These are C of E unless otherwise indicated.

APPENDIX X.   BELIEFS HELD BY THE 39 INFORMANTS

Importance level/ Interview number	PSEUDONYM	BELIEF CONTENT TYPE	Contact with CAs * Minimal network contact with CAs ✓
CA 10	Jennifer Reed	Gnosticist	*
CA 35	Nicola Sims	Liberal/Conversionist	*
CA 04	Lindsay Kennedy	Conversionist	*
CA 11	Helen Frazer	Conversionist	*
CA 18	Paul Tomlin	Conversionist (Mormon)	*
CA 01	Graham Appleton	Liberal	no information
CA 24	Sanjay Patel	Conversionist (Hindu)	*
CA 27	David Hutchinson	Conversionist	*
CA 22	Mark Saunders	Conversionist	*
H 30	Alison Pemberton	Active Customary	School
H 32	Sarah Walker	Traditionalist	*
H 23	Wendy Loveridge	Active Customary	School
H 15	Virginia Rothwell	Gnosticist	✓
H 26	Sylvia Clifton	Gnosticist	✓
H 31	Simon Lonsdale	Active Customary	*
H 38	Justin Palmer	Theist	*
H 02	Peter Gregson	Traditionalist	School
H 25	Michael Hayward	Traditionalist	School
H 28	Adrian Dempster	Theist	✓
M 08	Emma Gordon	Agnostic/Gnosticist	✓
M 36	Janet Wensley	Gnosticist	✓
M 03	Sarah Rogers	Gnosticist	✓
M 17	Lucy Pearce	Traditionalist	School
M 05	Margaret Buckingham	Active Customary RC	*
M 16	Clive Willis	Customary	*
M 14	Chris Hansford	Active Customary	*
M 29	John Greaves	Customary	*
L 13	Melanie Salmon	Gnosticist	✓
L 33	Ann Williams	Agnostic	✓
L 37	Jane Langdon	Active Customary RC	*
L 06	Caroline Abrahams	Agnostic	✓
L 39	Matthew Hayes	Customary	*
L 21	Neil Reid	Customary	*
L 20	Robert Lawrence	Customary	School
L 07	Ian Lewis	Agnostic	✓
L 19	Tim Knight	Agnostic	✓
L 34	James Murdoch	Atheist	✓
L 12	William Remmington	Agnostic	✓
L 09	Nigel Grantham-Wright	Atheist/Agnostic	✓

Percentages of respondents, aged 18 - 44, indicating 'yes' to less traditional belief questionnaire items

LESS TRADITIONAL BELIEF QUESTIONS	EVS 1981	EVS 1990	GRANGE PARK 1996
8. How often, if at all, do you think about the meaning and purpose of life?	(N = 759)	(N = 737)	(N = 228)
Often	31	31	23
Sometimes	34	36	45
Rarely	22	21	20
Never	13	12	9
Don't know	n/a	n/a	3
Total %	100	100	100
14. Do you find you get comfort and strength from your beliefs or not?	(N = 724)	(N = 713)	(N = 228)
Yes	33	34	39
No	67	66	31
Don't know	n\a	n/a	30
Total %	100	100	100
12. Do you take some moments of prayer, meditation, contemplation or something like that, outside organised religious services or meetings?	(N = 755)	(N = 728)	(N = 228)
Yes	42	45	44
No	58	55	54
Don't know	n/a	n/a	2
Total %	100	100	100

a) Further examples of cell group churches

Other examples of churches within the cell group movement include: Brisbane in Australia, which has, among other cell churches located in Australia, one cell group church of approximately 40,000 members; Santiago in Chile has a cell church with 40,000 members; in Africa a cell church located in Abidjan on the Ivory Coast grew from 638 to 23,000 in only eight years, and so on (Neighbour, 1990:ch.1). Numerous examples could be cited from other countries. All of these religious organisations have employed network marketing techniques similar to the 'pyramid selling' of companies such as 'Amway International'. This is the common denominator which relates all of the above examples. The important point here is that structure is more influential to the process of organisational growth than specific substantive beliefs (although the substantive content in these examples is generally oriented towards the meeting of personal needs).

In fact, although Amway International is a purely commercial company with materialistic, this-worldly goals, they operate as a quasi-religion in generating fervour for the network selling of their products and by paying attention to the motivation of the workforce through the use of psychological and inspirational literature. Amway distributors are constantly on the look-out for new 'converts' - within their own relational networks in the private sphere - who will themselves become distributors of the products. The parallels with religious organisations, particularly in terms of the methods used by the Soka Gakkai, the Rissho Koseikai and the cell group movement, are very pronounced.

b) The distinction between the 'cell group' and 'house church' movements

The world of business has recognised the structural developments of modernity and has used them to its advantage. In 'pyramid selling', the whole operation is confined to the wider network relationships which already exist in the private sphere. 'Cell

meetings' are arranged in people's homes among those who are contacted through the relational networks of the distributing agents. The cell meeting is the means through which the distributors initially sell their products and recruit new clients and distributors. The new distributors are then supported and supplied with stock by the person who introduced them to the company.

Similarly the Soka Gakkai, the Rissho Koseikai, and the cell group movement 'plant' 'cells'[6] in a city wherever the existing networks make them a convenient proposition. This type of religious institutional structure therefore is organised 'city-wide' in the same way that relationship networks occur on a city-wide pattern. The notion of parish is abandoned because it simply does not relate to relationship network structures. Wherever a number of cells eventually 'cluster', local congregations are formed (not new churches). These local congregations then meet collectively as larger 'celebration meetings', typically at monthly intervals. Congregations seldom, if ever, purchase property in which to meet; they tend to rent suitable buildings. The growth of the religious organisation is therefore never restricted by building size or by specific location. It simply continues to spread all over a city. The cell, however, is always viewed as the focal point of the structure, based as they are on naturally occurring network relationships. People introduced to the organisation therefore join a cell. They do not join a congregation and then become placed in a 'home group' as occurs in conventional house churches. This distinction between 'cell structure' and 'house church' is an important one which requires further elaboration.

These cells are not viewed as 'holding containers' for the members of the organisation, which tends to be the case with traditional church structures. Each cell, which commences generally with seven people and divides when the number reaches fourteen or fifteen members, is extremely active in terms of membership recruitment and is expected to grow and divide at the rate of once every six to twelve months (i.e. this is the expectation, and usually the outcome, in most of the countries listed above). Exponential growth therefore accounts for the large membership numbers which these churches eventually achieve.

---

[6] A 'cell' is a small group of committed believers. It has particular functions and characteristics. These are outlined further on.

The cell also performs a specific function: the provision of a highly relationally proximate group of alters with whom ego can share personal problems. Takenaka notes this function of the cell in his reference to the 'hoza', used by the Rissho Koseikai Buddhist religion:

> Hoza is a kind of informal discussion and dialogue circle which takes place daily ... It provides an opportunity for the believers not only to know each other but to share one another's burdens and personal problems. This indicates that in modern society where people have left the homeland of traditional religion, they need a common ground to share their own problems. It clearly indicates that such a small circle of sharing each other's problems is one of the most important functions of religion in modern society.[7]

These cells also include time for prayer and worship whenever they meet together (alternatively the Soka Gakkai use some of the time for chanting). The moral requirements for commitment and obligation in relationships are paramount in cell structured organisations. There is no room for dilettantism in the cell group. Entry into a cell by a new convert demands absolute commitment in terms of life-style and vision for recruitment.

In cell structured organisations the religious professionals tend to view their role as that of the equipper of the laity, rather than that of the primary transmitting agent. Every cell member is trained on a one-to-one basis using sophisticated progressive teaching materials which train every member to become an effective transmitting agent in his or her own right. Strategies are created whereby each cell forms other 'share groups' (consisting of cell members and unconverted alters located within the relational networks of the cell members) who meet on neutral territory, such as the local pub. Lack of contact with NCAs at the level of the private sphere is thereby overcome.

---

[7] Masao Takenaka is Professor of Sociology of Religion at Doshisha University. The quotation is from Kenneth Dale, *Circle of Harmony, A Case Study in Popular Japanese Buddhism with Implications for Christian Mission* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), x., and cited in Neighbour, 1990:26.