

THE PERFECT CHRISTIAN
AN ANALYSIS OF PARADOXICAL ASPECTS OF
CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY IN THE U.S.



Kristen Steiner Noss



THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE M.A. DEGREE

SPRING 2013

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY, University of Bergen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oddly enough, I have to thank God for making this project possible. Regardless of differing religious cosmologies between my informants and I, it was God who set this study in motion. With that in mind, I owe an enormous thank you to all of my informants at Mosaic Church. I am so grateful to have spent time with such warm and welcoming people. You were able to open my mind further with stories of your journeys and I am continually learning from you. Thank you for letting me into your lives and for continuing to be my friend.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Annelin Eriksen, my supervisor and huge support throughout the entire two-year process. You have been a dream to work with from start to finish and I have learned so much from you.

Marius, thank you! Thank you for allowing me to take Oskar to the US, for reading my thesis, and for understanding what the process can be like at times. Your support is and has been invaluable.

Oskar, you are my biggest inspiration. You may have only been a toddler when you joined me in the field, but I hope someday you understand how integral you were to my research. Your spirit is unparalleled and you keep me going on the tough days.

To my wonderful classmates-thank you for sharing this experience with me. I will always treasure the time we spent together at the Institute. The lunches, coffees, and laughs, and discussions made everyday better.

Thank you to the rest of my friends and family, both in the US and Norway, who have listened to me and reminded me that there is life outside of school. There are far too many of you to list, but if you are reading this, I probably mean you. Special thank you to Lisa for your last minute editing and support.

Finally, Mom and Dad-I know you did not always understand what I was doing, but you took it in stride and helped me immensely with Oskar. This would not have been possible without you, the picture of selfless and loving parents. This is for you too.

Kristen Steiner Noss-Bergen, Norway May 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION	1

What is Religion?	3
The Anthropology of Christianity: Current Trends	5
Arrival in Ohio	6
The Field	7
Methodology	8
Non-Denominational/Pentecostal-Like & Clarification of Terms	11
History of Mosaic Church	12
Mosaic NEO (Northeast Ohio)	14
Limitations in the Field	17
Chapter Overview	18

CHAPTER TWO	
CONVERSION	20

Conversion/Deconversion Stories	20
Meghan and Randall: I had no identify before I met Jesus	20
Monica and Doug: It takes a strong person to do a turn-around	23
Mark and Deconversion	25
Fred's Journey	27
Analysis of Conversion Stories	28
Analysis of Conversion	31
Are you Saved or Born-again?	32
Symbolic Action for Conversion	34
Missions through Mosaic	35
Comparative Aspects of Piety in the United States and Egypt	37

CHAPTER THREE	
THE PERFECT CHRISTIAN	

Anna's Story	41
Attributes of a Perfect Christian	44
Humility	46
Discipline	47

First Discipline, then Humility	48
The Perfect Leader	49
The Mature Journey	50
Understanding The Process Of Becoming The Perfect Christian: A Comparison Of Orthopraxy And Orthodoxy	54

CHAPTER FOUR	
SILENCE AND COMMUNICATION WITH GOD	57
The Silent Retreat	59
SHE and The Silent Retreat	59
Men of Mosaic	67
Gendered Language	68
Luhrmann on Analyzing Experiences	72
Prayer	73
Linguistic Ideology	74

CHAPTER FIVE	
FAMILY. RELATIONSHIPS, ADOPTION, MARRIAGE, AND COMMUNITY	77
Marriage	79
Mosaic and the Importance of Children	81
The Parenting Group	81
Adoption	86
Concluding Remarks on the Family and Parenting	89

CONCLUDING REMARKS	90
REFERENCES	94

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an anthropological study of Charismatic Christians in a Midwestern American church called Mosaic. In this study, I will make an effort to analyze the concept of personhood that emerges in this form of Christianity and the kinds of social and cultural dynamics that are generated through their belief. I aim to show how these dynamics entail paradoxical features such as being humble in front of God, but aiming at becoming a perfect Christian.

How does one properly study a phenomenon that is personally close to them *and* based in one's own society? Going against the grain of more conventional types of anthropological fieldwork, this was one of the many questions I would come to consider over the six months I spent in the United States. As Anthony Cohen suggests, "anthropologists are motivated by a personal problematic as well as by mere intellectual curiosity" (Cohen 1995: 222). The choice to study faith was a complicated one, as it was something I had avoided the majority of my adult life. I was advised it would not be an easy topic and while I considered studying something less sensitive, I am grateful that I chose Charismatic Christianity when I reflect back on the people I have come into contact with, the knowledge I have acquired, and the world of thought and understanding it opened up for me.

For outsiders, my area of interest proved to be confusing. Why would a self-professed atheist desire to spend several months attending church activities several times a week? It is not that I am a glutton for punishment. Belief is one of the most fascinating aspects of life on both an individual and collective level. Portraying this sentiment to religious leaders where I hoped to perform fieldwork was no simple task, but in the end, I found a church that readily accepted my many questions, concerns, and even my lack of belief in their God. Throughout my time with this church, I observed, analyzed, and participated in a study that often left me with more questions than answers. Upon my return, I felt I had spent several months studying what it meant to be the perfect Christian in the context of a young and modern, non-denominational church. I wondered how a shift from static labels of strict denominations like Pentecostal, Lutheran, or Baptist to something more open led to people being more open to conversion and faith. I wondered how the trendy use of technology and more contemporary music made people feel less

like they were in a church service and more like a rock concert. Religious rhetoric is still strong, but had it shifted to a more positive and loving tone from one of doom? I discovered different ways the parishioners cut out the “middle man” and spoke directly to God through use of symbols, dreams, and practice. In this sense, they acquired a “live and direct” (Engelke 2007) relationship with God. It seemed as though they had a one-on-one relationship with Him. Another fascinating aspect was the use of silence in this personal relationship with God as well as the apparent gender and age distinctions within these personal relationships. As I will point out more clearly in the coming chapters, a key concept of an inner self emerged from studying the way my informants engaged in a “live and direct” relationship with God. I constantly observed an inner battle my informants faced to get closer to Christ. After fieldwork, I began to understand these ways, which will be expanded upon throughout my thesis. The overarching message one gathers from attending Mosaic is that sitting and listening to a service is not enough. If one wants to be the best Christian one can be (and one rarely wants to be only a half-way good Christian in a charismatic congregation), it is not okay to “remain an island” within Christianity. One must be “proactive” one must “reach out” and one must evangelize the word of God. New and emerging non-denominational churches are winning over the hearts of people that claim they never would have imagined faith or a Sunday service could be so enjoyable. This newer charismatic form of Christianity is not well covered within academia (Robbins 2004) but is already proving to be one that is sweeping the United States and increasingly, the world (Martin 2002).

As Fennella Cannell has explained in “The Anthropology of Christianity” (2006), we tend to shy away from Christianity as an anthropological topic because it is close to us and we have more problems studying it as objectively (as possible), thus making it uncomfortable (2006).

Anthropology has the unique ability through participant observation to uncover the social and cultural dynamics of belief. What is it about the charismatic Christian movement that is so successful in reaching out and converting people? Anthropology cannot ignore the salience of religion’s role in society. I began to study religion as objectively as I could by reading academic texts that outlined the major world religions. This personal study overlapped into my fieldwork, as the extent of knowledge one can have about religion is endless. All the while, I knew I desired to focus on Christianity because of its controversy and lack of place in the spotlight of

Anthropology. Cannell remarked that when one studies Christianity, it is assumed one is a Christian or is danger of being converted (2006). This was always the first question I would receive from both insiders and outsiders of the church. In the end, I did not convert, but I developed more empathy for the world of belief as I begun to understand my informants “journeys.”

WHAT IS RELIGION?

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people." Karl Marx

The word *religion* is used several times, but pinpointing what religion is opens up a large debate with few definite answers. According to Jeremy Carrette and Richard King in their book, *Selling Spirituality*, (2005) the notion of being religious conveys an institutional connotation, prescribed rituals, and established ways of believing, while being spiritual is more personal and experiential, and has to do with the deepest motivations of life for meaning and wholeness (Carrette & King 2005: 33).

I assert that a church like Mosaic lies somewhere between “religion” and “spirituality.” This is a “house of worship” that is a community of believers considering themselves to be Christians by denomination. However, it is a highly individualistic and experiential arena to find God. Mosaic takes on the features of a modern place of worship, which will be discussed throughout this thesis. The word “spiritual” is used frequently; perhaps to replace a more outdated term like “religious.” Whatever the difference between the two, both “religion” and “spirituality” are used to help individuals accept the conditions of life and uncertainty.

A Marxist approach to religion, as mentioned above denotes a more antagonistic view, even though Marx himself declared religion to be “the heart of a heartless world” and a “spirit of a spiritless situation” (1844). Many academics within the social sciences take on a Marxist approach to charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity and claim that it goes hand in hand with capitalism and the emphasis on market control (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). In the recent

work of the aforementioned Carrette and King, they claim that spirituality has found its niche in the market place and capitalists are exploiting individuals by “Selling Spirituality.” Everything from yoga retreats, meditation courses, sweat lodges, and more have become commodities for sale. Religion and spirituality have become large sellers in the capitalistic marketplace, and the Pentecostal and charismatic version of this is the so-called “prosperity gospel” or “wealth gospel.” The bottom line is that belief can bring you paradise not only in the afterlife, but also in the here and now. Belief can bring earthly wealth (Eriksen 2009). However, as antagonistic as my feelings might have been against this kind of “instant spirituality” when arriving in the field, I discovered far less of the so-called “prosperity gospel” within Mosaic. I had initially intended to study the way Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians engaged in politics and economics, but this focus fell to the wayside when my informants’ deep desires to know God and to have a perfect journey with Him came forth as the most important characteristics of their belief system. Mosaic Christians tended to be more concerned with being “perfect Christians” than becoming wealthier or more politically powerful Christians.

As outlined above, Marxist positions on Christianity and, in particular, the wealth gospel, have dominated much of the recent studies of charismatic Christianity. The uncertainty that neo-liberal policies carries makes us “bet on” religion to ensure health, wealth, and stability. As the Comaroffs stated regarding a Pentecostal church in Brazil “the second coming evokes not a Jesus who saves, but one who pays dividends” (Comaroff, John and Jean 2000: 315). While (especially in the third world) one could say the increase in new religious movements is to ensure economic success with health and wealth in a world of capitalistic uncertainty, I can only agree to a certain extent. It makes sense, especially in a country where economic strife and uncertainty is more prevalent. Yet for the people finding faith in middle class America, as I hope to show, the process has more to do with how one understands the individual. Charismatic Christianity presents a very sophisticated map for and of the self for modern middle-class Americans. In other words, one needs to understand not only how and why this religious form connects to economic structures, but also how it becomes culturally and mentally meaningful. Bruce Kapferer makes this point as he critiques the Comaroff’s point of view, by stating the following:

“The reduction to arguments based on notions of “vulnerability” and “uncertainty” reintroduces the psychologism of functionalism and reinsists a foundationalism that deflects analysis away

from considering mediating structural dynamics. Moreover, there is a turning away from the particularities of the phenomena, a tendency to lump them together under the sign of the irrational which must await the true understanding of the anthropologist, the author of the rational.” (Kapferer 2002: 18).

Reducing charismatics and Pentecostal Christianity to its fit for neo-liberal economic policies implies a form of reductionism. My informants reported a deep inner feeling of the Holy Spirit inside of them that they were able to express outwardly through witnessing. In the subsequent chapters, I will try to outline what this inner self was, and its cultural and social implications. Mosaic Christians converted because they experienced their “journeys” as meaningful. Each Christian’s journey was his own as well as a “gift” from the Holy Spirit. Each heard God’s voice speaking to them, and developed inner feelings that became deeply personal and deeply meaningful in their social life, in relation to family and friends.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY: CURRENT TRENDS

“There is a growing consensus that Christian spirituality is a subset of a broader category that is neither confined nor defined by Christianity nor even by religion. Christianity is much bigger than just worshipping a god” (Schneider cited in Luhrmann 2005).

I am not alone in finding Christianity a difficult topic to study. Cannell (2006) has argued that Christianity is the critical “repressed” of anthropology, the repulsive other. Anthropology has a problematic relationship to Christianity, because as a social science discipline, anthropology is deeply secular. The very foundation of anthropology is to question our own belief systems. This vexed relationship between anthropology and Christianity that has made it one of the less desired subjects of study, but also an important reason that anthropologists should not shy away from it as a focus for our discipline. Religion, and particularly Christianity can shape and effects societies fundamentally, yet still remain a blind spot within anthropology. The new and emerging field of the Anthropology of Christianity (Cannell 2006, Robbins 2007) is less than a decade old, which leaves much room for exploration. While studies of Charismatic Christianity are heavy in Latin America and Africa, for example, the place of origin, The United States, is often left out.

Joel Robbins, one of the foremost anthropologists within the field of Christianity agrees that it is understudied, overlooked, or seen as a part of the local culture, rather than a culture in itself

(2007). Robbins asserted the following in his article “Continuity Thinking and the Problem with Christian Culture”:

I take it as virtually self-evident that the anthropology of Christianity in this sense does not yet exist. People working on Christianity have only just begun to read across areal boundaries, and even this beginning has been made primarily by those studying Pentecostalism (e.g., Corten and Marshall-Fratani). Anthropologists who study Christianity also lack a strong sense of a common object or set of comparable objects and are very quick to point to the diversity of kinds of Christianity as a way of excusing themselves from comparative work. Finally, such scholars tend to have as their primary scholarly identities grounded in their areal and theoretical interests. One rarely encounters, even today, people who identify themselves as anthropologists of Christianity. (Robbins 2007: 7).

Robbins goes on to argue that perhaps the most fundamental problem for anthropologists working on Christianity, and in particular Pentecostal versions, is their tendency to look at cultural continuity, when Christianity is at its very foundation, a religion which values breaks with past; discontinuity. According to him, “anthropology is a science of continuity” (Robbins 2007:5), while Christianity emphasizes decisive breaks and the temporal ruptures that allow people to make claims of beginning anew after conversion. I will expand on this notion in chapter two on conversion, which is thought to be an abrupt break, and which supposedly lacks continuity.

ARRIVAL TO OHIO

Prior to my departure, I was urged not to convert, or “go native.” Those around me were concerned I could be brainwashed by the powerful rhetoric of charismatic leaders, but I felt secure and prepared that this was an academic project and not a personal one. Suddenly I was in my “homeland” which had not been my home for several years. My first task was to convince the church I was interested in to allow me to study them. However, my first attempts were fruitless ones. I sent emails to numerous Pentecostal churches in the area, excluding the one I had attended as a child. After not hearing back, I began to speak to people that I knew had connections within different churches. After a week in Ohio, I felt a great deal of anxiety, as I was getting nowhere fast. Finally, after speaking to an acquaintance about her church, I was urged to contact Pastor Fred and attend services at the non-denominational, Mosaic. While I had planned on beginning at Mosaic that Sunday, I received an email back from a well-known local celebrity at the church I initially had planned to attend. We set up an interview and I finally felt as if my project was in motion.

That following week I met with a man who had a familiar face from television. He had an intimidating presence, which made me feel uncomfortable. We spoke for over an hour, however from my point of view, we did not have good chemistry. He explained how they run the church, which has several thousand adherents. The church seemed to be more about business to him and less about faith. I also felt a sense of skepticism coming from him and felt he was trying to shake me down for what I was *really* there for. Above all else, I knew I could not be myself around him. Perhaps it was my guilty conscience that made me feel this way, but while I was not personally a believer, I was open and honest with him as possible from the beginning. If fieldwork was meant to be challenging, then I had certainly met my match. Over the hour-long interview, I was grilled about everything from my marital status to my religious history and everything in between. During the interview, I had already decided that this place was not a match, even though he said he held no reservations about my studying their church. I received an email from him about a week later explaining that they could not approve my research due to the restructuring they were going through within their leadership team. It was a relief because in the mean time I began to attend Mosaic and meet with Fred, the pastor who would become my main informant and friend over the coming months.

THE FIELD

Through my first meeting with Pastor Fred, the charismatic leader of Mosaic, my personal disbelief was questioned and conversion was recommended. I explained to him how I filled my life with other concerns and found my own belief system through my own interests. I had to defend my disbelief and it was then I realized this would become a regular topic of conversation. Fred inquired further and questioned how I could have a moral compass and not believe in God, which was a question that I was prepared to be asked, yet was unprepared to answer. Perhaps I needed to re-label myself as either a secular humanist or agnostic, because to me, saying I absolutely know there is no God was as ignorant as saying I am positive there is one. Regardless of the feelings I had after that first interview with Fred, after many interviews and time spent with the members of the church, I realized there was more to converting to Christianity than just saying a prayer and calling yourself a Christian. I discovered new and surprising aspects of the

“journey” they take to reach their belief system that I could never have understood from viewing Christianity from the outside looking in.

METHODOLOGY

It is generally important to exercise patience and not be quick to make assumptions during fieldwork, perhaps even more so with sensitive subjects like religion. I found it was necessary to strike a fine balance between being too careful and being too pushy. Towards the beginning of my time in the church, it was easier than I had presumed it would be to find the people who would be most interesting, as well as forthcoming, with input. There were surprisingly few who were skeptical about my project. Most of the time, I found people genuinely interested in my quest for knowledge and more often than not, they wanted to know what *my* story was. Even those who were skeptical at first granted me the benefit of the doubt. One of the more skeptical members I came across became a close informant after a mutual trust was established between us.

I found the most resistance within the group of college students with whom I spent every Sunday evening. Fortunately, the pastor took me along and introduced me as his friend and spoke for me a bit the first evening I spent with them. They were fascinated that I would come all the way from Norway to study them, but became less fascinated when they understood that I was originally from the same place as they were. Over the months I spent with these young adults, they became remarkably open with me. Because several of us spent our time studying at the same coffee shop, I capitalized on informal interview opportunities between study breaks. According to Russell Bernard, informal interviews are useful in the first phase of participant observation (1994: 209). I found I needed to observe and participate more with the college students and let them get used to my presence a great deal more than with my older adult informants.

The fact that I have a young child of my own served me well. There are numerous stay-at-home mothers within Mosaic who were looking for play-dates and new friends within the church community. While I openly admitted I was not a believer, I did not feel it was dishonest to say I was open to different beliefs and feelings I might have during my study. Therefore, I could also

be considered “on a journey” to them. Often when I asked questions, they would ask me if I was asking because we were friends or because it was for my project. I always explained that the two were not mutually exclusive.

Because I was from the same place, I did not need time to adjust to the local culture or language. I feel as though I slid into my fieldwork without many bumps in the road. After approximately one month of observing and showing my face as much as possible, I began to truly participate in all their activities. I pretended to pray along with them during services and bible studies. Due to the fact that I was performing research in my home country, I felt more of a pressure to do as they did. I felt it was just as easy to pray along with them than to stick out and really be seen as an outsider. I also posed questions and gave answers just as any other member of a bible study would. My questions often came from their questions, and I admittedly knew less than they did about the bible in the beginning. When I was feeling confused, I would sit back and listen more, concentrating on taking notes to return to subjects I did not have knowledge about.

The true participant observation definitely had its drawbacks and intense moments throughout fieldwork. I will never forget the feeling while sitting in my most intense bible study, which I attended each Wednesday at the Johnson’s, who are a family from Mosaic, I came to know quite well. I looked around a group of adults in their mid to late 30’s whom I had so much in common with. I laughed so much with them and discussed so many interesting topics. I felt the only thing truly separating us was our faith. This did not matter to them, as it was an objective of theirs to take me on a journey with them and open me up to who they know as God.

I felt some difficulties along the way after spending an extensive amount of time in a church setting. On one particular Wednesday evening bible study at the Johnson’s, I looked at these ten people that I had truly come to care about and thought, “If I can just make it to the weekend without converting to Christianity, then I can go away to Chicago and spend time with my non-Christian friends and not feel the guilt for my everyday sins.” This occurred about midway through my time at Mosaic. There were even points during bible studies or Sunday services when I felt I had to tune out what was being said because it affected me so much. Susan Harding has also made this point in her well-known study of Jerry Falwell and his congregation (Harding 2001). She points out that the rhetoric in the congregation is overwhelmingly strong, and that it is

through language that belief and conversion takes place. (see also Csordas 1997 for a similar point). What if they were right, I thought. What would that mean for me? Ultimately, it meant that I would have to change because according to Pastor Fred, “Christianity is HARD!” Although I did not live with my informants or spend all day with them, I reflected on them and their faith constantly. I had many personal confictions throughout my fieldwork to the point where I elected to take a (secular) course in transcendental meditation in an attempt to channel all of my perplexing thoughts into one place. The issues I found with my own personal guilt represent an aspect of the value system that is culturally bound and I found it inescapable and ever-present during fieldwork. Many of my informants were pious and I was a sinner in their eyes if I did not share their values. However, it is not just Christian values that are present. General cultural values in an American context like commitment, sincerity, and honesty were constantly present. Perhaps this is why I felt it so necessary to be as forthcoming as possible with the fact that I was on academic fieldwork and not a Christian as soon as I met new and potential informants. Christian experiences can vary so greatly to the point that they must be considered on their own terms. Going in with assumptions left me astonished by how incorrectly I could assume. My feelings going into my fieldwork were far more opposing than when I left. Reflecting back, I feel I desired to discover something shocking or negative to confirm my somewhat antagonistic views, when reality offered different and more positive outcomes.

Methodologically, I relied heavily on participant observation and informal one-on-one (or two-on-one) interviews. In the first months, I attended all the church services and outside activities I could until I was able to pick out the people I desired to spend the majority of my time with. After about a month, I found myself casually hanging out with my informants up to seven days a week, which surprised me. Far more surprising was the discovery that it did not feel like work, but as if I was forging genuine friendships as well as learning about myself along the way.

On Sunday’s during services, I would try to sit with different people and casually chat with anyone and everyone who would speak with me. Out of a bit of guilt as well as academic responsibility, I felt the need to be honest that I was studying them and not just a new parishioner. I do not feel that this hindered the way they approached me after they knew this. If I attended a group with Pastor Fred, he would always introduce me and make the other group

members feel like they were lucky to have someone so interested in them. For this reason, I was fortunate to be so at ease with the Pastor, who granted me admission to all corners of Mosaic.

Although I started to get to know several people at Sunday services, most of my work took place at bible studies and activities outside of “The Gathering” due to the more intimate setting. Communication flowed better with eight people around the dinner table than with a large group meeting in an auditorium. It was surprising how quickly we got to know each other in the small groups and how after just one time there, I was invited to happenings outside of that small group. It was common that after just one meeting, I would receive friend requests on various social media sites, which after advance planning, I would accept. After all, Mosaic uses the social media sites for general updates and it is important to be a member of these in order to keep up with what was going on not just within the church, but in my informants’ lives. It is also a way to keep up with each other after exiting the field.

A middle school auditorium seemed like an odd place for a church, but Pastor Fred explained to me that it is the people that make the church, not the building. Therefore, all bible studies, activities, and any informal meetings could be considered church to them. After all, Mosaic was established in a nightclub in Hollywood, which is far from the mental picture one might imagine when one thinks of the word “church” in a traditional sense. The subsequent chapters of this thesis will reveal how little importance the actual institution plays in the people of Mosaic’s lives and how their personal journeys come first.

NON-DENOMINATIONAL/PENTECOSTAL-LIKE & CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The classification of Protestant denominations within Christianity can be complex and there is a general lack of agreement on the terminology within academia. I shall also attempt to deepen an understanding of what the movement towards non-denominational Christianity means and what it meant for my research subject. Problems with obscurity make an exact definition difficult, but for my intents and purposes, I will operate by referring to Mosaic as a “Pentecostal-like” church (Martin 1990) although Mosaic is officially labeled as non-denominational.

Newly established Christian churches, which have descended from Protestantism, shy away from labels of strictly Pentecostal, Methodist, or Baptist, for example. Operating with the term non-denominational denotes that the church wishes to remain autonomous from an official denomination, however there are often recognizable characteristics that make a non-denominational church possible to label. While some might be led to believe the title “non-denominational” denotes a less serious establishment, I assert that Mosaic is a church of charismatic born-again believers. Many adherents were previously members of Catholic or Protestant denominations, but there are also several who are born-again Christians who had not been believers before attending Mosaic.

In Pentecostalism, one’s faith is not in-born. One must choose it voluntarily, thus the emphasis on conversion as one of my key foci. This conversion process is known as becoming “born again in the holy spirit.” Converting others to Pentecostalism is an essential trait, as they believe everyone has the opportunity to be born again (Robbins 2004). These key similarities have led me to operate with the term “Pentecostal-like church” for Mosaic. Because the definitions vary greatly, it is useful to accept a wide definition. Allan Anderson, theologian and historian stated, “I think that the term “Pentecostal” is appropriate for describing globally all churches and movements that emphasize the workings of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and on theological grounds.” (Anderson 2004: 103-104)

HISTORY OF MOSAIC CHURCH

Prior to my fieldwork experience, Mosaic church was unfamiliar to me. Through literature, the names I frequently came across were those of Vineyard Churches, Life Church, or Livets Ord (Sweden). I was previously unaware of Mosaic Church as a movement within Christianity. Although Mosaic is just ten years old, it’s roots stem from a movement that began several decades ago. Erwin McManus is the man responsible for Mosaic’s foundation in Hollywood, California in 1993. When interviewed about becoming the pastor of Mosaic, McManus, originally from El Salvador, stated I felt God commanded me to become pastor. I accepted the call.” (Marti 2005, 49).

After a long history of transformations, the Mosaic church came to be what it is today from “growing ethnic diversification, a focus on missional theology, and personal evangelism” (Marti 2005). Mosaic stems loosely from what was originally a Baptist church called Bethel Baptist Church, established in 1943. There were several transformations that led to what Mosaic is today. According to Marti, author of “A Mosaic of Believers,” Mosaic’s sixty-year span is difficult to detail due to an emphasis on oral history in the church. There are few surviving pamphlets or bulletins survived and the most reliable histories come from parishioners that had attended Mosaic in Los Angeles for over twenty years (Marti 2005: 39). When McManus took over as Pastor at Mosaic, a 23-year old parishioner was recorded saying

“The first time I heard Erwin speak, I remember having the feeling like I can’t leave the room unchanged! Like this is crazy. I’ve heard tons of sermons before, but he’s speaking on the passage that I had read a thousand times before and I had missed treasures in it that I had never seen. I was like “What? Where did that come from?””

Throughout my time at Mosaic in Ohio, I heard statements like this on a regular basis from my own informants. This church was “*so different*” and Fred’s sermons were “*so engaging.*” What I came to realize was how much the parishioners appreciated Fred’s ability to relate the bible to his own personal life and show transparency in his faults as a human. He admitted to not being perfect, but that his goal was to be perfect *like Christ*. Their ultimate goal was to become *The Perfect Christian*.

Mosaic’s official website (www.mosaic.org) states the following:

We are a community of followers of Jesus Christ, committed to live by faith, to be known by love, and to be a voice of hope. The name of our community comes from the diversity of our members and from the symbolism of a broken and fragmented humanity, which can become a work of beauty under the artful hands of God. We welcome people from all walks of life, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey. Come to Mosaic, and discover how all the pieces can fit together!

According to Marti, Mosaic has several qualities that make it stand apart from other churches. While the church itself could be written about extensively, I will touch on the eight different aspects that Marti believes set it apart from others.

1. Mosaic is multi-ethnic
2. The congregation is young
3. The attendees come from a wide geographic area
4. Mosaic actively welcomes creative artists

5. Mosaic has more temporary locations rather than one large, central, and permanent one
6. Mosaic is a large church with a significant number of weekly members, attendees, and guests.
7. Mosaic demonstrates a remarkable zeal for the common goals of the church
8. The belief system of Mosaic favors innovation and it is therefore changing all the time

I agree with each of Marti's above statements, except that Mosaic NEO (Northeast Ohio) is a smaller church that is rapidly growing, but Northeast Ohio is certainly less ethnically diverse than Los Angeles. Ethnic variation is certainly present throughout the church, especially when adoptees are taken into account. Attendees come from a wide geographic area when one considers that most neighborhoods have several churches within a few mile radiuses. I knew parishioners at Mosaic who drove up to an hour to attend services because it was their preferred place of worship and no other church would suffice.

MOSAIC NEO

“Live by faith, be known by love, be a voice of hope”

When I asked Pastor Fred to explain a bit about founding Mosaic NEO, he spoke in-depth about his previous church in an affluent suburb nearby. Six years ago, he felt the pull towards his own ministry after being a youth pastor for several years and belonging to a church that he did not always agree with due to their avoidance of, in his words, “big questions.” He was a controversial figure at his previous church and after some time, he was granted permission to leave and start his own community where he could fully believe in the core values of his church. Fred took several parishioners with him in 2006 and started Mosaic NEO. Fred wanted a church where all walks of life could come together, not just those who could afford fancy “Sunday's best¹” type of clothing. Socioeconomically, the parishioners were mostly white, middle class, Midwesterners who earned their livings as civil servants, teachers, or accountants. There were also many students from the local University that belonged. Many of the women of Mosaic, although college-educated, chose to stay home if they had children to care for. Most of the adults in the congregation held college degrees at the bachelor's level. I did not meet many professionals within fields like law or medicine, but many of the teachers held master's degrees, including the Pastor and his wife. It should be noted that there was a heavy emphasis on all walks of life being welcomed into Mosaic. Fred was especially thrilled if someone who was

¹Traditionally, an individual's finest clothing was worn to church on Sunday

having a difficult time would come up and speak with him afterward a Sunday service and ask him to pray over them.

In a middle-school auditorium every Sunday morning there was a hip and contemporary feel as believers gathered around and shared stories of their weekly happenings. The worship band was in place on a theater-sized stage and there was a general buzz in the air for what was about to begin. The technicians were found in the back, putting Fred's microphone in place as they tested the final details before The Gathering began. As one entered the building, he was greeted at the door with a warm embrace.

After attending the Sunday service a few times, I began to be greeted with a hug at the door, and they always knew my son by name. At the entrance, there were tables to sign up for activities within Mosaic. These activities ranged from community to international missions, bible studies, volunteer opportunities for childcare during services, sports enthusiasts, as well as set-up and teardown positions. A white board with a list of needs and a list of things being given away was visible at the entrance of the building that was normally used as a middle school. This white board expressed a feeling of community where the members' primary concerns were first and foremost on each other.

Amongst members at Mosaic there was a joke that everyone was always late. Blame was put on children, traffic, or just general tardiness, but each Sunday, the music would start and people would rush in with their bibles, quickly greet those around them, and start their worship. The band would play two to three worship songs both before and after the Pastor took the stage. Depending on the members' personalities, some would stand and weep, some would sway with their arms in the air, while others clutched their bibles tight and sang the words that filled the overhead screen. The following is the example of a typical worship song at Mosaic.

*Savior of my soul, lover of my life, I love you endlessly
Passion of my heart, everything you are, I love you endlessly
(Chorus) I love you endlessly. You loved me before I knew of you. You loved me and now I give
it back to you.
With your majesty here, I fall to my knees, I love you endlessly
With the beauty of your son, I find myself undone, I love you endlessly
(Ross Parsley-New Life Worship)*

There were upwards of 250 members at Mosaic-services and with the lights down low, I would mime the words myself while observing the unique behaviors of the individual parishioners. Up front one could find the more charismatic members, but they were also sprinkled throughout the crowd. These members were more outright with their movements and would sometimes call out to God in the middle of a song. Often I contemplated whether they felt that they were better Christians if they were more vocal and expressive during the worship songs. One even told me during an interview that her ability to weep for Jesus was her gift. Several of my main informants that were expressive during worship songs were generally more outgoing and forthcoming with “sharing their journey” with me. These observations came to be significant to my research when I began to think about what it meant to my informants to be a Christian. However, it was not enough to just be a Christian who sat and listened. This notion will be discussed in Chapter 3.

One behavior I paid particular attention to was how while some members sat and socialized with their bible study friends, many other people moved around and sat with new people each week. I kept to one side of the auditorium so I could track the changes each week. I observed a great deal of socializing within the members and I always witnessed new connections being made. I had personal connections where I felt I became “fast friends” with members and I also observed this occurring with members I considered my friends. We could be sitting with our kids talking and someone else would come up, we would include them in the conversation, and before I knew it we had another play-date scheduled for the week. While socializing was obviously important to the members, as soon as Fred started speaking, the members would take out their bibles and listen intently. Often they would take notes, which made me feel less out of place with my notebook in hand. Occasionally Fred was not present and the assistant Pastor, Brian would take over for the day.

There were of course whole families sitting together, but most of the children attended Sunday school. From newborn to ten years of age, there were specific classrooms set up each Sunday according to age. As one enters the building, there are signs to guide first-time visitors. Some of the signs stated in bold lettering, “Mosaic! We Love Kids!” and there stood several adult volunteers in green t-shirts with the same saying on the back. There was a place to register your

children for daycare and Sunday school if one was new to Mosaic. I registered my son the first four Sundays, after which he became a “regular” with a nametag that I could pick up without signing in. Once the children were checked in, I would grab a coffee and take a seat to await the arrival of my informants and friends.

Spending Sundays at Church prior to this study was not something I would have pictured myself enjoying, but it was actually rather enjoyable. Pastor Fred had a comical, yet sincere way of delivering his message each Sunday. He explained that he wanted to be transparent as a Pastor and have no secrets from the members of Mosaic. This was a quality that seemed to be appreciated greatly by the members. I once told him that I liked his messages and I could really take them to heart as long as I took God out of the equation. He shook his head and chuckled even though I could sense his feelings of disappointment. Fred was the quintessential charismatic leader. People from all walks of life, including myself, were drawn to his charisma.

The first Sunday I attended Mosaic, Pastor Fred was giving a sermon he called, “The Man Talk.” When he got up on stage he joked about trying to grow a beard to seem more masculine, and straight away I understood that this was a more contemporary church than I was used to. He went straight into very intimate topics, even as personal as his own sex life and how men must sacrifice their egos to keep women holy. When my acquaintance told Ted I was observing for the first time, she said he blushed and felt embarrassed and hoped I still wanted to speak to him. It was the beginning of an unconventional friendship and unconventional fieldwork. Gender roles became clearer as I observed and attended more activities through Mosaic. These gender roles and ways the bible was engendered will be discussed in Chapter 5 with relationships.

LIMITATION IN THE FIELD

I have previously discussed my ease into the field due to my familiarity with my own culture, region, and language, however studying a phenomenon so close to home can provide a host of limitations as well. Although I was at home, the field of Christianity was both unfamiliar and at times uncomfortable for me. This led to much mental preparation and reading prior to my entry in the field. While I have read the bible, my biblical knowledge was rusty at best, and I am continuously making strides to improve my understanding. The main challenge in terms of

studying “at home” in the United States was the risk of missing aspects of my own culture because I deemed it “normal.” When one is abroad, everything can be new and we need to classify all phenomena. However, an anthropologist studying at home must be careful not to miss important phenomena simply because she is used to it. This has been called “home-blindness” (hjemmeblindhet: see Frøystad 2003). Luckily for me, the church was something new for me and I was able to study a distant subject even though I was at *home*. Anthropologist Sawa Kurotani has stated that even though “alternative fieldwork” sites are gaining popularity, when one undertakes research in a nonconventional site, the researcher may experience the tension that comes with disregarding deeply internalized disciplinary norms (2004: 203). I had my anxiety-ridden days, especially in the beginning, when I wished to be somewhere more exotic where everything was new to me and I would not risk overlooking phenomena because I was at home.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

CHAPTER TWO: Conversion

This chapter will address several different aspects of conversion, starting with four different cases from my informants’ personal conversion stories. After the analysis of the conversion stories, I shall briefly discuss symbolic action after conversion as well as the missionary aspects of Mosaic. I will then turn to a comparative aspect of piety in the context of the women’s Islamic revolution in Egypt and compare the aspects of the inner-self in a Pentecostal-like church and in the women’s Mosque movement in Cairo.

CHAPTER THREE: The Perfect Christian

This chapter, the title of my thesis, is an ethnographically rich description of the ideal Christian believer. The notion of no national boundary in God’s Kingdom is discussed in the beginning, and then I paint the picture of an older Christian woman who has undergone much strife to find her journey which so many look up to. The concepts *humility* and *discipline* are discussed here and I return once again to Saba Mahmood’s account of piety in Egypt. The “mature journey” and growing in Christ throughout one’s life will also be taken into account.

CHAPTER FOUR: Silence and Communication with God

Chapter four details my experience at the annual women's Silent Retreat, held at a convent in Northwest Ohio. I apply Luhmann's similar work with a Vineyard Church in Chicago and how Christians have cultivated this deep and personal relationship with God, where the middle-man is cut out. Here, gender differences in the way one speaks about God and the way one hears from God are discussed. Simon Coleman and Mathew Engelke's work will also be used as comparative examples of when silence is not golden and the limits of words.

CHAPTER FIVE: Familial Relations: Marriage, Adoption, And Community

This chapter takes the focus away from the church as an important institution since the overwhelming feeling from my informants was that the personal relationship with God was most important. I focus on marriages with God in the middle, God-like parenting, and adoption. In my conclusion, I zoom in on the experience of what it means to be a Christian in a Pentecostal-like, non-denominational church in Northeastern Ohio. I focus on the everyday struggles of being Christian in a secular world. I outline the main themes I have found in my research such as becoming a perfect Christian and taking a journey to be as close to God as possible. I illustrate how God becomes such an important aspect of everyday life that they must treat him as their friend, their father, and their only love.

It should be noted that the true identity of my informants' is not revealed to protect their privacy.

All names have been changed in this thesis except for the names of public figures.

CHAPTER TWO: CONVERSION

In the words of Simon Coleman, “conversion is a fuzzy term.” Jean and John Comaroff go as far as saying that conversion is so vague that it has no place analytically within anthropology (1991: 249-50 cf. Asad 1996: 264). There is a consistent theme that any definition within religion, and even religion itself, is vague and not agreed upon. Yet, for my research, it is important to operate with the term conversion in order to grasp the life changes my informants passed through in “finding God.” It is widely understood that Christianity has an objective to spread its religious doctrine through missions and evangelization to stretch itself across the world, but how does Christianity’s outreach look as lives are being transformed? Ultimately, through this chapter I wish to show the particular sense of self that is specific to my informants. I will examine several examples of what my informants talk about as their “journeys” to become Christians. After their stories are introduced, I will analyze these stories, give a deeper context for how these stories were shared, and give a comparison of the piety movement within the Islamic revolution and how these two religious movements bear similar, yet contrasting traits. This comparison helps reveal a deeper idea of how the sense of self can vary through diverse cultures and different religious settings. I shall attempt to reveal how the thought of “faking” the feeling of the Holy Spirit is frowned upon within Christianity, whereas the women’s piety movement in Egypt has produced devout followers of Islam that experience God in the opposite way as my own informants reported. I wish to clearly show on the one hand a deep similarity between the Islamic sense of self and the Christian, but on the other hand, also an important distinction. In both contexts the notion of an inner self is important, but the start point of the “journey” differs.

CONVERSION/DECONVERSION STORIES:

Meghan and Randall: “I had no identity before I met Jesus”

Meghan and Randall are a married couple I met on my first evening at an MC² shortly after arriving to the field. I awkwardly approached a home one dark, winter Friday where people were scattered and socializing throughout the large home of Bradley and Sarah. I drove quite a ways

^{2 2} “MC” stands for “missional community”, which is a bible study that meets weekly. These groups meet in different homes of the parishioners in 10-week courses. These groups are where I met my main informants because of the more intimate setting

to get there and was unusually nervous to take my first step into the field. After several hours with this close-knit group, I felt I had successfully begun my work by speaking with everyone, listening, observing, and note-taking. Each Friday, in order to become even closer as a group, two of the members would share their stories of their personal journeys with God. These stories were often a movement from a broken background to a place of ultimate happiness and a God-filled life.

Meghan had grown up in an extremely broken home. Her mother had lost her own parents and as a mother figure, Meghan saw her as immature. Meghan's father was abusive in many ways. He was a principle in an adjoining school district and he had recently been imprisoned for sexually molesting female students, after preying on victims from broken homes. Meghan would spend weekends at her father's and he would ship her off to family friends, one of whom was Brandy, who was present at the MC the evening that Meghan told her story.

Brandy's family attended an evangelical church and Meghan would join her on the Sundays she was at her father's. Meghan was envious of Brandy's seemingly perfect family and vowed to have that herself one day. She wished to have a family that sat down at dinner together and participated in family outings, including going to church. While attending Brandy's church, an old woman approached Meghan and asked her if she had been saved, Meghan replied that she had not, and the old woman handed her a prayer to recite and said it was as simple as that. The prayer is as follows:

Dear Jesus, I understand that I am a sinner and need your forgiveness. I want to turn away from my sins, and I believe that you died for them. I invite you to come into my heart and begin transforming me. I commit myself to trusting and following you as my Lord and my Savior. Amen.

Meghan remembers feeling something different inside her, and believed it was an indication for things to come. She detailed how she felt she had no identity of her own before accepting Christ. She said that before Christ, whomever she hung out with, she became. If her so-called friend

liked something, she was quick to follow suit. If her friends did drugs, so did she. This is exactly how she started getting mixed up with what she referred to as “the wrong crowd. “

Meghan began to make the same mistakes her mother did, such as turning to men for attention. She partied hard, did drugs, but said she never felt whole. She also mentioned OASC (Ohio Association of Student Councils), a student government organization that helped to lead her away from the perceived “bad choices” she had been making, but even through her involvement with more wholesome activities, she still felt she led a double life. After high school she felt something was really missing when she ran into a relative of Brandy, whom she had lost touch with. The two girls had gotten into a lot of trouble together, and were therefore forbidden to see each other. In the two years they did not see each other, Brandy had gotten married and had two children. Brandy and Meghan reconnected and Meghan started going to Brandy’s new church with her. It was at this church that Meghan met Randall, whom she considered to be a good friend, but more like a little brother. Still, Randall was in love with her. He professed his love one night at a fast food restaurant and Meghan claimed her response was “thanks, but no thanks.” She moved on and continued dating “the wrong men.” Meghan said she started making bad choices again and one night she prayed to God that he would help her find someone and after she left it completely up to him. Meghan desperately wanted to be married and have children, but she was always picking partners who were bad for her. The next time she saw Randall, she said it was “like a movie.” He walked into the bible study room and she fell in love with him immediately. She confessed her love to Randall and they immediately started dating. Three months after they began dating, they were engaged and less than a year later they were married. Ten years after they met, they have four young children. From the outside, they seem to be genuinely happy. They stated that they believe the purpose of a marriage is to act out the gospel, and they always put God first in their relationship, a phenomenon that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Meghan’s husband Randall had a similar, but less intense story. Both Randall and Meghan were raised Catholic. He came from a loving family that was not broken, but he claimed to have still made bad choices and got into “dope,” referring to marijuana. He was an experimental teenager, but he found his way into the church through friends and eventually realized that was his calling.

Randall is the lead singer and guitar player in the worship band at Mosaic, and although he holds a regular nine-to-five job, he feels that worship music is what Jesus put him on the earth to do. This is why he spends several hours a week with the other members of the ministry band practicing for the Sunday gathering.

After Meghan and Randall shared their stories, the group prayed for their marriage and for their family. Meghan believes her calling from God is to bear children, and although they could not afford to have another child when I met them, she was pregnant as a surrogate mother with twins. Everyone was touched as she shared her story of the day her first son was born and she stated that she could not believe anyone could not believe in God after the miracle of childbirth. It should be noted that surrogacy is not seen as unnatural or controversial in America the way it is in other countries. She believes her womb and ability to bear children is her God-given gift and she was adding to God's earthly family.

One of the first sentences I heard Randall saying while he was witnessing to God while playing the guitar and singing was "Before I met you, Jesus, there was a Jesus-shaped void in my life. Both Meghan and Randall agree that their lives were extremely different and empty before they got to know Jesus. The way that God influences both of their lives grows stronger throughout the years, according to the couple. They are constantly working on their faith and admit to letting God into every aspect of their lives, family, and marriage.

MONICA AND DOUG: It Takes a Strong Person to do a Turnaround

Doug and Monica Maxwell hosted the Sunday evening MC at their house in a small middle-class suburb. They are both in their mid-to late-forties. Doug is a fire chief for the city and Monica is a stay-at-home mother of five children, two of which are their young adopted sons from Ethiopia. The other children are older and living on their own. The Maxwell's warmly opened their home to anywhere from ten to twenty college students and members of Mosaic from the local university. After my first meeting with Pastor Fred, he encouraged me to join them on Sunday for their bible study, since I too was a student. Although I was roughly ten years older than any of the college students, I continued to attend their weekly bible study in order to have contact with some of the younger members of Mosaic.

Fred sent the Maxwell's an email with me as a blind copy explaining my situation and that I was a "good girl" that they should welcome with the other University students. As soon as I entered the Maxwell's home the first Sunday evening, Monica said how excited she was to share her story with me. She understood that I was interested in studying conversion and she prided herself in the fact that she would witness to anyone and had many friends from all different walks of life. Doug was a bit more of the quiet type, but as we got to know each other, he had many questions for me as well as interesting insights. Although I had planned a private dinner with Doug and Monica where they would share the story of their "journey" with me, it seemed they could not wait. One Sunday evening, we had watched YouTube clips from "The Passion of the Christ" and everyone appeared particularly vulnerable afterwards. We were split up in groups based on gender and Monica began to tell her story from start to finish. Monica referred to her former self as a "drunk with an adultery problem." They were living in a beach community where she was an assistant to a dentist and Doug was a firefighter. Their lives were in shambles as they were financially, spiritually, and maritally broken. They had one small child at the time, but were in the process of getting divorced. Due to their financial troubles, they were forced to live under the same roof, which at times made matters worse. Monica opened up to her colleagues at the dental office who were devout Christians at a local mega-church. They urged Monica to join them at the Sunday service, to which, she agreed. She attended that Sunday's service and said she felt surprisingly "moved by the spirit." While the two were barely talking, she felt compelled to tell Doug what she had felt during the service. She went as far as suggesting to Doug that he should attend a bible study with her. He replied, "I hate you! Why would I do that?" Yet, something came over him and possessed him to do exactly that. He reluctantly attended the evening bible study with Monica. He could not understand what was making him go, but that he knew he had to. That evening, the group fellowship was focused on Doug and Monica. Monica said the group prayed for the couple for hours while Doug and Monica wept in both sorrow and happiness. There was almost a psychic presence as the fellow members were able to tell Doug and Monica things about themselves that they would never have been able to know if it weren't God telling them to say things. From that day forward, Doug and Monica were born-again in the spirit. While the gifts of the spirit are not always spoken about outwardly at Mosaic, Monica believes hers is the ability to show outward emotion when she feels

God's presence. She is expressive with her emotions, body language, and ability to weep for God. She stated she once felt embarrassed about how much she cried for God, but a woman approached her at a religious conference and told her to be proud of her gift to wear her emotions on her sleeve. Monica's ability to communicate with God will be discussed in later chapters, as will the couple's role in adopting children.

MARK AND DECONVERSION

My Wednesday evening MC was a group of well-read and intelligent individuals that kept me on my toes. Around my second week attending, I met a young man close to my age. Most of the members had their spouses with them, but he had come alone. Mark is an old friend of the hosts of the MC and grew up Christian in a very small town a few hours south of the gathering. Like many others, he had experienced "seasons" with his beliefs and had gone back and forth for the better part of his adult life. When Mark got to know I was there to study them, he acted offended and asked, "What am I, your specimen?" He approached me again after a Sunday service and wanted to know more about my project. I told him I would love to sit down with him and discuss it, and our discussions eventually became a regular thing. It took a bit of time for him to trust me, but we eventually became close friends and shared many good conversations. He still comes to me as a confidant and we continue to discuss whatever is on our minds. He has become someone I communicate with regularly, even though I live overseas.

Mark appeared conflicted and slightly distraught the first time I met him at MC. For Fred, who is the leader of this MC, this was not a problem. Pastor Fred left his previous church due to its inability to handle big questions and doubt, and therefore there was plenty of room for discussion and "growth" for Mosaic. In fact, discussion and growth was the primary reason for holding MC's weekly. They constantly used the word "wrestling" with regard to their faith and felt that these discussions brought them closer to God and made them better Christians. When the stakes are high, these discussions can push people who waver between belief and disbelief, like Mark, away.

The first week we met, Mark asked first if we could stop and pray, and he led the prayer. He reported feelings confusion and admitted he had started investigating into other religions,

particularly eastern religions, like Buddhism. We sat down to discuss religion in general as well as his personal journey. He felt cheated that he was not introduced to more world religions as he started to feel like he could identify with other religions just as easily as Christianity, which made him conflicted in calling himself a Christian. Mark does not accept mediocrity in spirituality and is on a self-described “journey” different from one that Mosaic could provide. When I asked him one day if I would see him at the MC that evening, it was as simple as him explaining to me that he would no longer be attending services and that he was on his own personal journey to find his concept of who God is. When Mark asked Fred about the difference between all the religions and why there were such common threads in religions, Fred replied that he truly believed that Christians would be the only ones to end up at the “top of the mountain” because the only way to the father is through the son, Jesus Christ.

One particular MC, the discussion became heated between Pastor Fred and Mark and although they remain close friends, there were tense moments for the rest of the group when Mark shouted at Fred that he felt what he was saying was “complete bullshit!” The situation arose out of the other members teasing Fred for his controversial sermon he gave the Sunday prior when he told people to “GET OUT!” if they were going to do Christianity halfway. While Fred was insinuating that everyone had to evangelize the word and listen to God’s calling, Mark believed that evangelizing is not for everyone. He found it extremely awkward to approach others and ask if they “knew Jesus.” At this point, I observed that Fred truly believed that Christians must go out of their way to missionize, evangelize, and spread the gospel as far and wide as possible. The small disagreements and uneasiness that Mark felt all added up at one point and he decided it had become too much for him and he was only doing it “half way.” Mark followed his heart and decided to abandon the label of “Christian” and keep seeking what truth meant to him. Mark reports to still be searching for truth everyday, but he now feels free from the strict label of Christian. In some ways, I feel responsible for Mark leaving Mosaic because I would answer his questions very honestly just as he answered mine, however ultimately, I see that Mark is searching for a peace that he was not finding by, in his words, “pigeon-holing all his experiences and feelings into Christianity.”

Just as Mark felt isolated and confused in his journey, I could identify similar traits within myself that arose from the loneliness of feeling like the only person in the room that did not feel the power of God. When one is within a group of individuals exclaiming how wonderful it is to know, feel, and hear God, it creates a pressure to feel those same feelings and to know God on that same deep level. Any doubts that arise can make you feel like a bad Christian, and while comparing journeys is frowned upon, I have observed how difficult it is not to compare. Especially at different MC groups, my informants would say things like “I’m just not as good of a Christian as Anna!” “She’s perfect!” While Mosaic and other churches can quench a thirst for God, it keeps the stakes high to feel a deep and personal connection with Him. Through my informant Mark’s experiences, I have highlighted what can happen when the personal connection is not felt from the individual and one feels inferior to other members’ experiences. Still, it is interesting to discover the paths that led people to convert and how a turn-around has helped them to find themselves and to find meaning in an otherwise confusing world, where God has been substituted for other vices.

According to Pastor Fred, religion is man’s effort to get to God, whereas Christianity is God’s effort to get to man. Fred believes that many born-again adherents submit to God because they finally realize they have no choice, like in his case. He recited 2 Corinthians 3:16 to me as follows: *“But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”*

FRED’S JOURNEY

According to Pastor Fred, when God chooses to show someone the light, they must accept that God wants their heart. When one accepts God, the veil is lifted and a new life can begin. For him, becoming born-again is a must when converting to Christianity. A new convert should be baptized to symbolize that conversion is official. Converting to Christianity means giving one’s life away, according to both Fred and Mosaic. Fred personally fought conversion and as he said. He tried “the whole sex, drugs, and rock & roll thing before.” An abusive alcoholic father and a religious mother raised Fred. Fortunately, he attended a Christian college on a soccer scholarship and began finding people that he was able to have fun with without sinning. He particularly liked the youth pastor and felt a real connection there. Although he had grown up in a Christian home, it bored him. He rebelled against it because he did not feel a connection to God and he

was admittedly egotistical and self-centered. Essentially, he was not ready to accept Christ until many years ago when he was on a church-organized bike trip in Colorado. An older man cited a bible verse to him from Revelation 3:16. Fred had been back and forth for many years about his beliefs, and even though he was baptized as a young boy, he had doubts. That is, until an older gentleman recited the following verse from Revelation 3:16:

“So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”-Revelation 3:16

Fred claims that this was his *defining* moment for his conversion, very much like the “a-ha” moment one might think about with conversion. He was walking along outside with the older man that, in his words, “showed him the light.” Suddenly, he looked down and saw a crack in the sidewalk with a tree growing out of it and saw it as a sign from God. A new life was about to begin for Fred and that was the beginning of his journey into the ministry. This bible verse will be revisited in the next chapter when the concept of “The perfect Christian” is revealed. In Fred’s own words, he converted because he wanted his life to count for something “larger than himself” and at that moment, before he realized God was real, his life was only counting for himself. He left behind his egocentric past for a life of serving God, which he believes will allow him access into the Kingdom, which is only possible through Christianity. Fred’s story is not unusual in the realm of conversion stories. Seeing a symbolic gesture and believing it was god-sent can be a defining moment for someone’s conversion. Throughout my meetings with Fred and others in the church, I found that these symbolic gifts from God were greatly appreciated and spoken about often. Fred’s story is what one might see as a model conversion story. He grew up with a religious but rough childhood and begrudgingly attended church. After participating in activities that are morally frowned upon in the United States, he found a way to become a moral, upstanding citizen and not only follow Christ, but also teach about him. This gave Fred the most meaning in his life and made him feel like a better person. Finally, he felt he could be proud of himself and his work.

ANALYSIS OF CONVERSION STORIES:

The common theme in these stories is the focus on the “turn around.” My informants were close to rock-bottom before God saved them from a life less desirable. Doug mentioned how his parents believed that Doug and his wife had made such a quick turnaround that his father drove

through the night from Ohio to save them from the cult he assumed they had joined. Doug's father knew the troubles that Doug and his wife were going through and could not believe everything was forgiven and seemingly resolved overnight. When his father arrived, Doug said he realized they had not joined a cult, but had been moved by the spirit and he was only happy for him. Doug's father stated, "It takes a strong person to do a turn-around," yet that is where Doug disagreed. He said he was at his very weakest when he and his wife submitted. He said it takes a weak person to do a turn-around because he could no longer live the life he had been living. Monica was told explicitly by one of the members of the church she originally joined that if she did not submit to God, she would die. The member of the bible study believed she had heard from God that Monica's life was in danger if she did not stop drinking and accept Jesus. From the outside, I found it to be manipulative, yet Monica whole-heartedly believed that she would have died before her time had she not accepted. The point that Doug, Monica, and the others made over and over was that God chose to speak to them. They were hardly ready to give up their old life of "sin" for a life with God, but they did not have a choice. They felt something so strong on the *inside* that was forcing them to believe. For my informants, they could not fake their belief because it came from the inside. Whether it was a visible symbol from God, audible voice, or the feeling that God "put something on their heart", it had to come from the inner-self before they were able to truly believe in something so intangible and the opposite of what is considered scientifically proven knowledge.

The two couples whose stories I have detailed were tremendously proud of their new lives. Looking in, they seem happy and so enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and evangelizing when they felt moved to do so. Although Fred dismisses the word "saved," these couples would refer to themselves as such. While they reject their lives before Christ, their story is not what it would be without those experiences. The dichotomy drawn between their disbelief and belief is what makes their belief in God so powerful. Without the extreme experiences prior to their belief in God, their faith might not be as it is today.

Returning to the large role religion plays in a person's life, Rappaport (1999) suggests that religion is "integral to humanity, as it addresses existential dimensions of life and its circumstances, offering resolutions that will always be in excess of any other rationalistic

orientation.” It appears that these converted Christians found the greatest resolution of all in religion. They would often imagine how bad things could have gotten had they not found God. Monica’s scenario was the most dire as she believes she would have died young. The others believe they would have been unfulfilled, never truly been happy, or gone down a path that led to more dangerous decisions. Religion has become a true discipline to many that had issues with self-control before. As God is the ultimate authority, their eternal lives are on the line for making poor decisions.

As stated in the introduction, reductionist theories state that the attractiveness of religious belief stretches beyond the actual belief in God. On the one hand we have a more Marxist view of a corporate capitalist takeover of religion, or the rebranding of religion as “spirituality.” This concept is extremely interesting, yet not as relevant for my work. However, the old saying that “religion is a crutch” actually is relevant. It has been shown that religion has been used as a “last resort” when people convert later in life and become born-again. Charismatic variants are not in-born, and it is apparent that it is much more common to find a church like Mosaic when one is searching for meaning or help in one’s adult life, as many of the converts at Mosaic are over twenty years old. According to Pastor Fred, people who might be considered ‘broken’ are attracted to contemporary religious movements because of their previous disillusionments by other religious doctrines. Whether they were previously Christians, non-religious, or from a different denomination, Mosaic has filled a niche where other churches have not satisfied those “hungry for God.” Mosaic is a “different” kind of church. In one word, my informants found it to be a “cool” church, which they previously had not believed existed.

Looking at conversion through the micro-study of one Pentecostal-like church in the United States, I am able to analyze the social significance of the conversion process and how cultural ideas of an “inner self” contribute to this process. Through these conversion and deconversion stories, I have explored why people have converted, how these transformations have taken place, and what it means for the rest of their lives to be converted and “give their lives to Christ.” The three conversion stories bear similar traits, while the deconversion story can provide a contrast and explanation of how one can fall out of the church when unable to feel that radical break from the past to the present. The stories of my informants are not extreme, but rather share similar

features with several parishioners I spoke to, and one completely unique from any other I experienced at Mosaic. Each of these stories led me to examine the paradoxical aspect of how a complete turn-around like conversion could be experienced both continuously and repeatedly. My informants often recounted their “seasons with the Lord,” which denotes an aspect of commitment and recommitment to the Lord after occasionally falling out of their faith and subsequently finding their way back to it.

It should be noted that the language and metaphors used in these stories is not my own, but a genre that comes directly from my informants and are emic concepts. Their use of metaphors was widespread throughout the entire congregation. Terms like “on a journey,” “seasons with the Lord,” “hungry for the Lord,” and “saved” are examples of their language. These expressions are strong and seem to stick to the point where I still find myself using them. After hearing their metaphors and specific way of speaking over and over, it became difficult to avoid using them personally, much like Susan Harding (2009) found in her research within Jerry Falwell’s Evangelical mega-church. Their metaphors were almost poetic to me. They were always “on a journey” and experiencing “seasons” with God. The choice of words denoted their journey was extraordinarily personal and just as a season was bound to change, so would their experiences with God. They expected difficulties during their journeys, which is why it was clearly paradoxical that they would make an ultimate commitment, with the foresight that they would go through difficult times.

ANAYLSIS OF CONVERSION

According to Diane Austin-Broos in “The Anthropology of Conversion,” conversion is a “robust, cultural passage, while possibly experimental at first, it is a deliberate change with definite direction and shape.” To be converted is to re-identify, to learn, to reorder, and reorient. She continues to say that it is not merely syncretism, nor a simple and absolute break with a previous social life. Essentially, according to Austin-Broos, it is a process, that can be studied anthropologically. As mentioned in my introduction chapter, Joel Robbins finds that Christianity is difficult to study due to a lack of continuity. However, in the book “The Anthropology of Religious Conversion,” the authors found conversion in Christianity to be on-going as it is continued and practiced. The authors focused on how conversion can be viewed as a passage,

but can be studied on a continuum. This makes sense when considering how several of my informants felt a radical break with their pasts as they were still negotiating their ways through Christianity, and one even turned away from it. This is a powerful paradox; on the one hand the idea of conversion implies a powerful and absolute break, but on the other hand conversion stories imply “re-conversion” or even “deconversion.” The notion of being born-again, more than once, is difficult to grasp. My informants explained that they had times of doubt and times of re-commitment. Everyone experiences personal highs and lows throughout life, they explained, and this is also the case with faith. Sometimes faith is beneficial and helps one lead a moral life they are proud of, but other times it leads to further confusion, which is of course, not always a negative aspect of personhood. Conversion for the Mosaic Christians was on one hand a radical process of becoming a new person and being “born-again,” yet on the other hand it was a process of struggle, of never really managing the change, and always searching for a more perfect break.

ARE YOU SAVED OR BORN AGAIN?

“I don’t like the term saved,” Pastor Fred explained to me over coffee. “I did not get saved once and then life is suddenly perfect.” According to Fred and several other informants, salvation is on going and they are being saved over and over again. What Fred explained was, “one can’t just go to church and cry out to God and then go home and avoid him.” Several informants explained that as they go through seasons of life, they feel they are being re-saved. What Fred did believe was that every Christian was “born again.” He believes the phrase has been misused and may have a negative connotation attached, as he pointed out Jesus himself was the first to use this phrase. Fred explained that to be born again, one must be spiritually reborn and commit to have a personal relationship with Jesus. According to anthropologist, James Bielo (2007) “born-again” is an umbrella term that encompasses several forms of Christianity. These categories include Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Evangelicals alike. The common thread within these diverse forms is the orthodox in theology (Bielo 2007). The Bible, for example, is understood as:

Absolutely authoritative, eternally relevant, and completely void of error. Born-againists also emphasize that the only path toward spiritual salvation is through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and that God (via Jesus and the Holy Spirit) desires a personal relationship with every person on earth” (Bielo 2007: 318).

The term “born-again” implies dramatic changes. Several of my informants felt they had to cut off ties with former social circles that proved to be a negative influence on their religious practice. Inter-familial relationships were sometimes strengthened, but often severed, due to conversion. Such a dramatic change can be good for relationships outside of the church, but often leaves outsiders feeling as if they no longer know the converted individual. I found with my informants that in the beginning outsiders found the converted individual’s sudden change odd, but that over time they learned to accept and respect his or her newfound faith. The converted Christians talk about this as caused by “an inner change” that has occurred. While the converted might feel like a completely new person inside, the outward change may not be so great that they are shunned from their former social and familial circles.

Pastor Fred argued how Jesus himself said in *John 3:3* that *unless a person is born again, they will not see the Kingdom of Heaven*. There is a clear-cut emphasis on starting over after one has asked for forgiveness of their sins. For many of my informants, this was an enormously freeing concept that all their past mistakes could be learned from and they would receive a clean slate, and thus, a second chance. A commonality among conversion stories was that my informants simply “could not be trusted on their own.” Left to their own devices, they claimed to have failed miserably, but when faced with the eternal life or eternal damnation choice of Hell or the Kingdom of Heaven, many of them accepted Jesus and began new lives. I see the concept of “being saved” to describe something that was on the brink of being lost, and that there lies a very fine line between being saved and not saved. This fine line can attribute to the reason Christians are still in danger of de-converting once they have accepted Jesus, as we have seen through Mark’s story.

The anthropological analysis of Christianity in Africa shows that the notion of being “born-again” is also prevalent in Africa. Birgit Meyer (1998), for instance found through her work in Ghana that the Pentecostal discourse of breaking with one’s past and leaving behind witchcraft and ancestral worship meant that more modern forms of religion would be practiced. Meyer also found this born-again paradox that it is not as much of a radical break as one might expect. She states that Pentecostalism seeks a rupture from tradition or past, yet her subjects in a church in Ghana also found difficulty completely breaking with their past. However, Pentecostalism

helped them “address their ambivalent stance against modernity” (Meyer 1998: 318). Of course, Meyer’s subjects were dealing with feeling of anti-colonization and this was their problem with making a break with the traditions of their people. Therefore, missionaries presented their former beliefs as in-line with the devil and convinced them to turn away from the power of the Devil and his agents, i.e., the “local” Gods (Meyer: 1998, 319). This ultimately aided in the conversion to Pentecostalism in many churches throughout Ghana. However, without the use of the Devil rhetoric it seems the members would have been less inclined to convert. In the Ghanaian Pentecostal church as well as within Mosaic, the alternative to conversion can be dangerous or life-threatening. In other words in these very different contexts, where the effect and meaning of being born again are very different (ancestral break versus break with lifestyle), the common theme of the break, and the level of difficulty of the break, points to a common Pentecostal theme.

At Mosaic, conversion may have happened with the reading of one prayer, but it was not a matter of reciting the prayer that suddenly made them Christian. This was only a symbol of the beginning of their new journey. I realized that deconversion was real and some felt they had to leave the church when they felt they were “faking it.” Stories of conversion and stories about how my informants reached each stage in their journey were mostly encountered through my time during the week at different Missional Communities and informal interviews. Discovering the difficulties Christians experience through conversion would have been extremely difficult to understand without extensive time with my informants in performing participant observation.

SYMBOLIC ACTION FOR CONVERSION

Each Sunday at Mosaic, those in attendance, whether new or long time members, were invited up to the front after the gathering if they wished to be prayed over. Fred often saw this as a starting point for many members’ journeys. The language that was most often used was “I *know* there are broken and hungry people out there today who so badly want to talk to God. Today I am giving you that chance to leave your life behind and begin anew.” Fred told me on more than one occasion that I was welcome to come up and be prayed over, which I already understood. I walked up one Sunday to observe closer what actually happened in these prayer sessions. I kept enough distance to create a clear boundary, but here one could observe people who felt they were

in desperate need of help. While these prayer sessions could set in motion a new membership in the church or salvation, a symbolic version of converting was offered to members every couple months through group baptisms.

Baptism has held part as a sacrament in Christianity since the very beginning and my informants believed Jesus was the one who decided baptism was necessary for all Christians. Jesus Christ was allegedly baptized in the Jordan River, by the preacher, John the Baptist. According to Fred, baptism marks ones journey into a life with Christ by symbolically washing away one's sins. In the entryway of the Gathering, there was a sign-up sheet for Easter baptisms. The piece of paper depicted a person in her early twenties, and it said in large letters "GET DRENCHED." Anyone could sign up to be baptized on Easter Sunday. There was a short survey to fill out if one decided to sign up, which asked "Have you made a focused commitment to Jesus?" I asked Fred if someone could be baptized if they checked "No." He said that technically they could. He allowed for people who did not sign up to come up if they felt so moved by the spirit that they wanted to be baptized. I noticed two of my informants from the bible study with college students went up on Easter Sunday. On the middle school stage, there was a large inflatable pool. Fred was standing in the pool in his regular clothes and it was there he dunked them in the water after speaking to each of them quietly, one on one. Easter Sunday, the college bible study gathered together to eat. I realized there was a real buzz in the air about the baptisms. My two informants that had decided on a whim to be (re)baptized were being treated like celebrities that evening and were asked to share their stories and why they chose to re-commit. They both felt it was symbolic in their journey; that they needed to re-commit as they were prepared for yet another new start. The washing away of one sin is symbolized through physically drenching the person being baptized with water. The person is considered clean and new again.

MISSIONS THROUGH MOSAIC-A.R.M.: ANONYMOUS RELIEF MISSION

"Where there is a crack in society, get in!"

After one is converted, baptized, and born-again, it is expected that one will take the word of God further through missions and evangelization. Mosaic is no exception to this rule and they start at the community level and work their way outward internationally. In the words of Pastor

Fred, “Where there is a crack in society, get in!”

What exactly is a “mission?” When one imagines a mission trip, a far-away land or third world country might come to mind. However at Mosaic, anything outside of the church is considered a mission. They have one on-going local mission that helps local families in need and this is called, the “ARMS” mission. The ARMS mission is kept solely within the local communities and not outside of a driving distance. Those who work on the ARMS mission feel there is not only work and evangelizing to be done abroad. Need in a local setting can be just as important as need abroad. According to their website, the ARMS mission has been able to assist over five hundred individuals, families, and single parents. People moving out of safe houses and homeless shelters are the highest priority. ARMS works closely with the local social services, the local battered women’s shelter, as well as several other philanthropic organizations throughout the county. ARMS is a nonprofit organization that collaborates with several other organizations and they join together to serve. Their motto is as follows:

*We are the hands and feet. We are the arms and legs
We carry the boxes and blankets
We fill the trucks and fill the apartments
We distribute couches and beds and pots and pans.
We find tangible things that people need
We help people start life over... from shelter to home
We hope they can live their lives without fear. Who are we? We are anonymous*

“But why is the outreach anonymous?” I once asked Fred. “Because once you say you’re involved with a church, people want nothing to do with you!” Through anonymous outreach, those involved were still able to recruit new members to Mosaic. While attending the Silent retreat that will be discussed in chapter four, I met several women who were staying at the Battered women’s shelter that ARMS had a “pampering night” for. The women’s group, “SHE,” organized small gift bags and gave them away to all the women at the shelter. In addition to this, we took baked goods and gave manicures and pedicures. To some extent, I want to suggest that this focus on “pampering,” decorating, and styling the body was a symbolic action that reflected a desired parallel, inner process. The change they offered to the outside of the body (facials, manicures, and pedicures), symbolized the change they hoped these women would eventually feel on the inside.

At the silent retreat about 2 months later, several of the women from the shelter were present, and were thus seeking this parallel inner change. Many of them had extremely difficult situations due to domestic abuse, drug and alcohol use, or financial difficulties, but had quickly found a friend in Mosaic and were eager to learn about God.³ Moving from the U.S. to the women's mosque movement in Egypt, we will see that in both contexts molding of the self is essential, though, in very different ways.

COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF PIETY IN THE UNITED STATES AND EGYPT

From the stories I have outlined above, we can understand Christian conversion in the United States, as a process where the Holy Spirit enters the body. The converted accepts the Holy Spirit into his soul and becomes renewed. This inward embodiment of the spirit then works its way outward and the converted will speak in tongues, witness, proselytize, and become Christian. My informants reported feeling the Holy Spirit, hearing God, receiving signs from God, and following "His" queues. If asked whether they felt skepticism, many of them would immediately report feeling no doubt whatsoever. The risk of not actually "feeling the spirit on the inside" could mean the difference between actually converting or not, as we saw in the case of Mark.⁴ The feeling of "faking it" was not enough to convert; one had to feel it, embody it, and then one could become Christian. This is absolutely central to the process of becoming Christian and being born again.

A comparative aspect of conversion can help illuminate the different concepts of conversion and embodiment. Saba Mahmood recently covered the topic of the Islamic revival and feminist subject in Egypt, through her book entitled "The Politics of Piety(2005)." Mahmood conducted fieldwork over a two-year period on women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. She focused on the teaching and studying of Islamic scriptures, social practices, and forms of bodily

³ It is not only local missions that take place at Mosaic. There is currently an ongoing mission in the Dominican Republic with the "Doulos Discovery School." (<http://www.doulosdiscovery.org>). A married couple at Mosaic started this mission to the Dominican Republic. They felt as though their calling was to move to the Dominican Republic and serve through educating and also converting youth to Christianity. ³

⁴ As a sidenote; this was perhaps what made me feel different, and thus not "go native" and convert. I did not "feel it" on the "inside"

comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self. The teaching and studying was done by women and for women in a time when women could or could not resist against the patriarchal teachings of Islam. This particular movement was part of the Islamic revival that has blossomed since the 1970s. Women began meeting privately in homes, and then in the Mosques to read the Quran (2005: 3). Not only did they study the Quran, but they also participated in discussions on how to become more pious Muslims, much like my informants discussed Christianity in their weekly Missional Communities. While the MC's were generally not a gendered movement, the overarching focus was always on how one could be a more devout Christian: more pious, more perfect. In many respects, the women's pious movement in Egypt and the Mosaic Christians share a common focus on molding the self into a pious and perfect religious subject.

The setting for Mahmood's analysis is the grassroots women's piety movement in Cairo. Her ethnography is based on fieldwork from three different mosques. Previously, these mosques had been exclusively male domains. Through Mahmood's account, we are able to see how agency is given to the women of the mosque movement as they are in charge of their quest for piety as women provide lessons to other women on moral holiness. The women were on a quest for personal piety, much like my informants. These women reject the westernization and secularization of Egypt and choose to embody Islam to the best of their abilities, while challenging the secular liberal norms. One woman, Abir, recalled how as a young woman she only followed the obligatory acts of worship out of custom. However, after attending the mosque gatherings, she became interested in the piety movement as well. She "read the Quran, listened to taped religious sermons, prayed five times a day, fasted for Ramadan, donned the Niqab, and stopped socializing with males" (Mahmood 2005: 176). Like many other women in the Mosque movement, Abir embodied the practices of Islam in order to convert to become a more pious Muslim. The mosque movement is unique in the extraordinary degree of pedagogical emphasis it places on "outward markers of religiosity ritual practices, styles of comporting oneself, dress, and so on (Mahmood 2005: 31). The women feel these practices are necessary to realize the form of religiosity they are cultivating.

This change in outward appearance to change the inner self was not something I experienced within Mosaic. In fact, I felt the opposite was true: even though the inside was transformed, there was no visible outward change. Meanwhile, the women of the mosque movement learned how to analyze the movements of the body and soul to coordinate between inner states and outer conduct (Mahmood 2005: 31). While both Christians and Muslims convert and agree upon moral obligations and asceticism, the outward change to transform the inside is not as prevalent within Christianity. Rather, the change comes from the inside. While my informants might have adopted different language like a reduction in using the Lord's name in vain and swearing, dressing more modestly, and so on; these were not as stringent requirements of the moral code in a cultural and religious context. For them the essential sign of change was a feeling on the inside. Among the Muslim women in Egypt who live also by more gendered Islamic virtues, this process of changing the self could be achieved through change on the outside. One particular woman reported the following feeling:

"I used to think that even though shyness was required of us by God, if I acted shyly it would be hypocritical because I didn't actually feel it inside of me. Then one day, in reading verse 25 in Surat al-Qasas I realized that shyness was among the good deeds, and given my natural lack of shyness, I had to make or create it first. I realized that making it in yourself is not hypocrisy, that eventually your inside learns to have shyness too."

The young woman continued to explain how the virtues could be faked until they feel real, unlike what I experienced within Mosaic. At Mosaic, the idea of "faking it" was negative. Conversion must be "real" and felt on the "inside". The mosque women on the other hand, needed to "fake it" as this was a specific methodology in their conversion process. If one did not feel something inside of them, they could not believe it was real. In this sense, conversion became real after training oneself to believe it was real.

To sum up, in both the Islamic revival in Egypt and the Christian revival in the U.S., the focus is on the transformation of an inner self. However, the crucial difference in these respective revival movements is on the idea of "pretending", or "learning", or "faking". The Islamic self "learns to be pious", by pretending first, at which point it can then become real. The Christian self must "feel it" for it to be real.

At Mosaic, there was a saying I learned while attending the Silent Retreat. They say the journey begins *inward*, moves *upward*, and finally one can direct their renewed energy *outward*. If I were to explain the piety movement in Egypt in these terms, I would say their journey began *outward*, moved *inward*, and finally reached *upward*. I found unabashed honesty in the Islamic piety quest. These women attempt to embody virtues that are crucial to their religion even if they do not initially feel them. Doubt and the paradox of conversion can be further expressed throughout the next chapter, entitled “The Perfect Christian.” Doubt and struggling with belief is nothing new, as the Gospels themselves expect doubt. “Do you still not see or understand?” According to the Gospel, Jesus asked this himself. *“We live by faith, not by sight.” -2 Corinthians 5:7*

CHAPTER THREE: THE PERFECT CHRISTIAN

Therefore you shall be *perfect*, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Mathew 5:48).

Our biggest threat today as disciples of Christ in America isn't persecution but of being seduced; a luring and seducing threat to conform to the patterns, behavior and customs of this world.

Romans 12:1-2 says "Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you."

The preceding excerpt comes from the modern day interpretation of the bible, entitled “The Message.” This translation was written by Eugene Peterson as an idiomatic interpretation of the bible to fit into contemporary society. At Mosaic, The Message was a popular read alongside the King James version of the Holy Bible as it keeps the biblical language clear, comprehensible and set in contemporary American culture. Just as the “Story Formed Life⁵” series that each of the missional communities were working through over a ten-week period, The Message makes ancient history relatable. With the emphasis on making the bible easier to understand and relate to, the parishioners were working towards becoming better Christians in the present day United States, where, as they would constantly point out, all the outside pressures make living a life with Christ difficult.

ANNA’S STORY:

We were speaking about The Kingdom one Wednesday afternoon at MC when my main informant, Anna gave a heartfelt sentiment about how difficult it can be as an immigrant to the United States. We bonded over a Scandinavian connection and became friends, despite our religious differences. She said to our MC group, “we are not just Americans, Swedes, or

⁵ The Story Formed Life is the 10-week series of bible studies that the missional communities were working through during my fieldwork. SFL is considered a training process designed to expose and increase the level of faith participants have in God’s Story, as revealed in the Bible, from Creation to Re-creation.

Africans; we are citizens of God’s Kingdom and we have to stop thinking of ourselves through these national labels!” She stated that God’s kingdom has no borders. She felt that she needed to give up her “homesickness” because no matter where she was in the world, she would need to obey God’s plan for her and longing for home was only distracting her from her religious journey. She continued to explain how she was now able to read the book of James with a new perspective. James is focused on obedience and not only observing the outward traditions like praying, fasting, and attending worship services, but also practicing with deep, inner faith. This idea harkens back to the previous chapter on conversion, where it was not enough to observe traditions; one must be an active Christian. It was of the utmost importance to actually feel God on the inside. In James (1:19) it reads, “*my brothers and sisters take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*” When Anna spoke about really absorbing the chapter of James in a different way, I began to read and interpret what she meant. It brought me back to a moment when we had our children to a singing class together and had coffee afterwards as usual. She had commented on one of the other women’s parenting (or lack thereof) as she had five little boys running around, somewhat out of control. The next week, she sat me down and told me how God was punishing her for the way she spoke about the other woman. Anna had found out that she was a foster mother to all five boys and had taken them in out of the goodness of her heart. Anna explained that whenever she disobeys God’s word, he has a way of punishing her, like the guilt she felt from speaking ill of the woman in the children’s group. However, she also explained that he always shows up when she needs him most.

Prior to Anna’s epiphany, there were several aspects of her home country that she truly missed. She had lived in the States for almost seven years, married to Phillip who, although he was American, had spent most of his life living throughout Africa with his missionary family. Anna believed that the Kingdom was “now” and that she had to think of herself a citizen first and foremost of the Kingdom over and above any country. She missed aspects of daily life in Sweden, but she was now prepared to give up longing for something that was out of her reach, since she knew she had everything she needed inside of her. In sociologist Peggy Levitt’s recent monograph, *God Needs No Passport*, she provides an account of the ever-changing religious landscape in America and how religion crosses national borders. Levitt argues that religion is the ultimate boundary crosser (2007: 12). God needs no passport because faith traditions give

their followers symbols, rituals, and stories they use to create alternative sacred landscapes. Anna believed she had God's Kingdom within her reach, where she felt there were no national boundaries. The fact that the Kingdom was on Earth was exceedingly empowering to Anna. It was not just about Heaven and it was a Christian's responsibility to "get out and do something," just as Fred had preached about in one of his more controversial sermons.

Returning to "The Message," this modern approach to the bible indicates that the days of singing hymns from a dusty hymnal with pipe organs playing in the background are long gone. Christians are no longer just sitting in the sanctuary surrounded by stained glass windows, reciting prayers, and repeating after the minister. Christians are taking responsibility for their own personal journey, generating a "live and direct" relationship with God, and living to become perfect Christians. But perfectionism has its downfalls. The pressure can become too much, as Pastor Fred and numerous others have explained through their stories. The overwhelming opinion from the members of Mosaic is that Christianity is *difficult*, especially set within contemporary America, but for them the strength and discipline it takes to be a Christian merits great rewards that make the struggle worth it now and in the future.

In this chapter, The Perfect Christian, I wish to express the collective personal goals of my informants to be "The Perfect Christian." While it is obvious that human perfection is impossible, my informants admitted their standards were sometimes set to an unreachable level. This often ended with self-deprecating thoughts and negative self-images due to comparisons to other parishioners and general feelings of being unworthy in the eyes of God. The qualities that my informants sought to possess will be discussed along with examples of what believers from Mosaic might consider to be perfection in Christianity. Pastor Fred played an especially large role in this push towards perfectionism and his story unfolded in an imperfect, but not so unlikely way after I exited the field, as he eventually left the church. Ethnographically, I will paint a picture of what my informants' ideas of the perfect Christian might look like by telling the story of Rebecca Petri who came to know God better after suffering a terrible accident, and how her character traits of discipline, unwavering faith, and suffering were thought of as ideal. I will also discuss the notion of suffering in Christianity and how suffering is perceived as a tool to bring one closer to God. The discussion of orthopraxy versus orthodoxy will conclude this

chapter for the purpose of providing the reasons why some Christian communities emphasize these kinds of perfection (specifically “inner” perfection), while other religious communities search for perfection in other ways.

THE ATTRIBUTES OF A PERFECT CHRISTIAN

When I asked Fred to describe to me what “the perfect Christian” is, he directed me to an excerpt from “The Message,” which addresses the question using a verse from Colossians. It is as follows:

So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides.

Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you.

Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ. And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better.

But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, and dirty talk. Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on, everyone is defined by Christ and everyone is included in Christ.

*So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: **compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, and discipline**. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this “going off and doing your own thing!” And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing! Sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

Colossians 3:1-15

It was within the first few weeks at Mosaic that I observed the high expectations placed on the followers of this church. Over and over again I heard from Fred's mouth that it was not enough to be a "pew sitter" or what he would call a "scratch and sniff" Christian. At Mosaic it was not sufficient to attend church then go home and forget about God. It got me thinking constantly about the parishioner's goals as Christians. Understanding the theology Mosaic followed was central to understanding their beliefs. Like the Vineyard Church, Mosaic adheres to an inaugurated eschatology, where the end times were inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, the Kingdom was both "here" and "not yet." For Christians from Mosaic, there is a duality of an earthly and heavenly Kingdom. While the Kingdom does exist on Earth, it does not exist to its fullness...yet. After Christ's second coming, all of Satan's evil will be eradicated and God's complete rule of Earth will be established. This is how the basis of Mosaic's theology was explained to me in a meeting with Pastor Fred. He stated that for him, The Kingdom was like living life without electricity and then suddenly experiencing the lights being turned on for the first time. Fred said so enthusiastically, "It's going to change your life, but you are going to learn to live differently and it's going to blow your mind!" When challenged on the subject, Fred said that those who cannot see the Kingdom either do not work hard enough or do not realize they are already living in it, which served as a prelude to a discussion we had during a car ride.

Weeks later, Fred told me that he had had a dream about me, and doing so, he had come to realize that he no longer needed to convert me to Christianity. He realized that it was no longer necessary, because I was "already a member of the kingdom," and that I "just hadn't realized it yet." He believed the only reason I couldn't see the kingdom was because I didn't work hard enough or want to yet. After Fred said this to me, we arrived at the Wednesday night MC where the members slowly revealed the traits that were ideal for a Christian over the months I spent with them. It was also at this particular bible study that I realized how individual journeys were often compared to each other how Christians who were striving to be perfect needed to follow examples of better Christians than themselves in order to improve. One of these stories, which I will return to later in the chapter, was particularly important as a model story of a perfect Christian. I suddenly understood how Mosaic Christians looked to others' journeys for help in their own. The MC, although a bible study, was also like a support group where members would

openly admit their recent faults of failures. *Humility* and *discipline* were two of the most important concepts that were frequently discussed. Later in this thesis, both of these concepts will be discussed in-depth to understand what they represent and what it means to my informants to possess these sought-after attributes.

HUMILITY

According to Stephen Hare, philosopher and author of “The Paradox of Humility,” humility as a virtue or character trait can be regarded as a sign of as low self-regard or a negative form of meekness. It can denote a tendency to downplay one’s own strengths. Hare says that at its best it is “a saving grace for the mediocre and at worst, an excuse towards human wrongs” (Hare 1996: 235). He toys with different definitions and explanations of what humility actually is, and states that perhaps it is just a disposition to take a very modest view of oneself in relation to a transcendent and super-personal standard like a God or some other ideal (Hare 1996: 237). In a traditional view of humility, one would see it as self-effacement in relation to one’s fellows (Hare 196: 238). The existence of humility is derived from the belief that one is inferior to the omnipotent creator, God or gods. One should not think of oneself as any better than anyone else because compared to God, we are nothing. In accordance with humility, individuals should be striving for the most God-like existence *humanly* possible. While humility was a sought-after trait at Mosaic, I found yet another paradox. One strove to be the best Christian possible and my informants would admire their own accomplishments from time to time and congratulate themselves for doing such great work on their journey. If humility was the goal, any kind of special achievement, even moral should not be self-celebrated, but held in comparison to a God whose perfection is obviously far greater. According to my informants, humility is like modesty, but taken a step further. When taken too far, it could make someone feel low and leave all her faults exposed. This is where humility becomes humiliation, which is not the goal. When I posed the question, “What does humility mean to you?” informants would answer by saying it was not okay to be boastful about achievements, overly confident, or pompous. Security was permitted with respect to one’s relationship with God, but humility as a tool for better relating to God is desired. I will give an example of this type of humility in Chapter 4: Silence and Communication with God, when I speak briefly about Brother Lawrence, who, according to Fred, embodied humility. Brother Lawrence was a monk who claimed to “pray without ceasing”

just as the apostle Paul had preached about. Brother Lawrence's ultimate devotion to God was inspiring to Fred and other members of Mosaic because of the discipline and humility he exemplified.

Humility was a highly regarded character trait especially when we had discussions outside of The Gathering at Mosaic. Humility was sought after, but often my informants took it further. As previously mentioned, members of the Wednesday night MC would speak honestly of their failures in a self-deprecating manner. They were "not good enough in their own eyes, or in the eyes of God." They were shameful, embarrassed, regretful, and wished to be better Christians. They would often compare themselves to others within the group. Pastor Fred was held to a very high standard as the leader of Mosaic, but he himself would readily admit he was far from perfect. One Sunday morning Fred stood before the congregation and said, "if you knew the kind of thoughts I have, you would not want to be my friend." This was Fred at his most vulnerable, and also a sign of things to come. As shown through Mark's deconversion story in Chapter Two, the pressure put on members of the church could sometimes become too much. Fred himself would stand up on Sundays and demand that everyone "GET OUT" if they were going to be what Fred referred to as "scratch-and-sniff Christians" or in other words, insincere Christians that simply go through the motions to make themselves feel better. Fred was unimpressed by those not willing to put their heart and soul into their faith, but he also fell victim to the difficulties of being a Christian, which I will come to discuss further in this chapter. Merely attending church on Sundays was not enough to be a Mosaic Christian.

DISCIPLINE

My informants often expressed how challenging it was to be a Christian in America. The pressures of outside forces and the lurking opportunities lurking to commit sin were sometimes overwhelming. Hyper-consumerism, overt sexuality, greed, and other "dark forces" were difficult to avoid. The starting point for their discipline and self-control began with being disciplined enough to make it to church each week. According to Galatians (5:22-23) those who decide to go to church often are those who want "more." The church says those who come to Christ will enjoy more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They thrive in a community around them with goals similar to their own.

Because families are busy and have various obligations, it is not expected for members to come each and every week. A Christian at Mosaic also had to be disciplined enough to spend alone time with God, as well as at MC during the week. When life offers so many distractions, it takes inner strength and discipline to achieve the goal of being a better Christian.

FIRST DISCIPLINE, THEN HUMILITY

Although there are several desired characteristics of the perfect Christian, both humility and discipline were the two that stood out consistently and were often spoken about. Possessing discipline was a starting point for any Christian's journey. This is confirmed by my prior mention of my informant's belief that the inner self must be transformed before one can outwardly express true belief. Transforming the self into a disciplined individual inside meant that one could express a trait like humility from the outside. Often my informants would speak of their daily routines with God and how if they started the day off with "Him" then the day was likely to go better than if they hadn't. However, with families, jobs, and other obligations, it could be difficult to begin early enough to devote time to God in the morning. Monica, whose conversion was spoken about in the previous chapter, told me how excited she was when she went to bed because she "got to spend time with God the following morning." She admitted it took serious discipline to get up at 5:30 in the morning before the rest of her household in order to achieve this early goal. If she overslept, she would risk having a difficult day because she had missed her morning meditation with God. Having spent that time with God in the morning was enough for many of them to work towards the other traits, like humility in their quest for perfection in God's image. Discipline as an avenue toward perfection is reminiscent of the Egyptian Muslim women I described through Saba Mahmood in the previous chapter. The most important quality for them to observe in the beginning was the discipline to act a certain way and closely follow the rituals of Islam. Once they were disciplined enough to transform their life from the outside, they could feel differently inside. This is of course, the opposite direction my informants' experiences, but both religious practices required a deep sense of discipline to stay aligned with God. The difference between following rituals or theology will be discussed later on in this chapter when the differences between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy are discussed.

THE PERFECT LEADER

Fred's natural charisma drew many adherents into Mosaic, and his charisma usually kept them there. The members raved about his openness, eccentric personality, intellect, and transparency as a church leader. These were qualities that members reported to having been missing from previous churches. Pastor Fred was also transparent and open about how difficult it could be to be a Christian in a world of uncertainty. His personal suffering was mostly silent until the day that he stood in front of the entire congregation and admitted to an extramarital affair he had been having. His infidelity led him to make the decision to leave the church entirely. Although I was not there when he announced his decision, I received details about his announcement via email because my informants kept me up-to-date on what was happening at Mosaic. While Pastor Fred's announcement served as a blow to the Mosaic community, my informant was careful to explain that it had really brought the church together and that everyone was "so full of grace." Members were praying for Fred's marriage, for Mosaic, and for their pastor's well-being. All the while, the suffering of Mosaic was bringing them all closer to God as a community.

Although my fieldwork was technically finished when these events had taken place, Fred's story is an important aspect of the difficulties of being seen as a leader while simultaneously being unable to reach perfection. Time and time again, we see leaders of churches also falling victim to pressures from outside the church. I returned to my field site six months after completing fieldwork. I had planned long in advance that I would be meeting many of my informants, including Pastor Fred, if he was willing. Fred greeted me warmly with a big hug when we met again. He was aware that I understood all that had happened in the recent months and he told me "Well, I'm living out of my car and I have no friends," which he followed with nervous laughter. We discussed how common these adulterous occurrences actually are, and he stated that he heard from an unknown source that approximately 52% of all pastors commit adultery. He assured me that although he had been "seeking the darkness," he had never felt God's power so strongly through his personal suffering. He said it was like good and evil fighting within him, like "black and white." When asked if he thought he would return to the church, he stated, "If it's what God tells me to do, then yes." Fred detailed a story about visiting some mutual friends of ours that had been helping him out tremendously throughout his difficult time. They are a married couple

and also member of the Wednesday night MC. The woman was well versed in deliverance prayers and Fred spoke about how she had prayed over him. Physically, he felt fine when they began the praying. He had not eaten much that day, but when she began praying, he began burping. The burping turned into vomiting and the vomiting was profuse and violent. He noted how he did not feel sick at all, yet continued projectile vomiting until she finished the praying. When I asked him how he felt afterwards and he said he felt “clean.” Fred believes he had demons that he needed to be cleansed of, but that he is still fighting a battle with them. Fred’s difficulties arose when he began to feel doubt *on the inside*. He explained that he allowed himself to sin and sin feels good, but the guilt he felt was unbearable. He had to confess to the church that his journey had taken a downturn and he was having problems hearing God. His doubt inside meant he could not express himself as a perfect Christian on the outside. After everything Fred had said and all the pressure he put on the congregation to really feel God and act out their beliefs. Fred felt he would be a hypocrite to stand before the congregation and do anything but tell the truth when he was not obeying God and not feeling his presence. He could not tell the members to “Get out!” and then not personally leave when he was not practicing what he preached. This pressure became too much for him and it was not enough to follow the rituals of Christianity. When he did not feel it, he had to do as he instructed his parishioners to do, and so he left. Faking belief was not an option for Fred, regardless of whether it left him unemployed or not. Despite his sins and wrongdoings, many of the members of Mosaic could take him even more seriously because of his struggle and they continue to pray for him.

THE MATURE JOURNEY

“Life is a Journey. A journey is one step after another. The beauty of journeying is that each step makes way for the next. As we live our lives to serve Jesus, the steps of yesterday prepared us for today and today’s steps prepare us for tomorrow. Each of us is on a journey; that special way that Father has prepared us to walk.”-Rebecca Petrie

Anna and Phillip, the hosts of the Wednesday evening MC, and two of my main informants spoke often about Philip’s upbringing. As a child to parents who started Evangelical churches throughout the entire African continent, Phillip spent most of his life as a missionary child.

However, the Petrie family was much more than missionaries, as Mr. Petrie Sr⁶. claimed to have started over 300 churches sprinkled throughout Africa, concentrated in Sudan, The Congo, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. The Petrie's took their family with them, including my informant Philip, who first told me the story of his mother, Rebecca. Later, I would receive his mother's book, "Falling into his Grace", an autobiography detailing her fall down a flight of stairs that changed her life dramatically, leaving her quadriplegic, but strengthened in her relationship with God.

Rebecca and Paul Petrie were living in Belgium at the time of the accident. That particular day, Rebecca was leading a women's prayer group. In the foreword, Paul Petrie told the story of Rebecca's journey as a Christian. He described her as someone "deeply committed to Jesus, and hungry to know Him better." She was a traditional pastor's wife who stayed home to raise their three children, but she was also greatly involved in the ministry and gave talks to large audiences all over the world. She led many women's prayer groups and was an active member of the Christian community.

After Rebecca's accident, it was unknown whether she tripped down the steps, or if she had suffered a stroke. The sure thing was that it was a life-threatening fall that would leave her immobile and completely dependent on others for the rest of her life. Due to her neck injury's location, she was unable to breathe on her own for several months. There were times when her survival looked bleak and they considered removing her lifelines. Through this time, her entire family was with her in Belgium and her husband kept their large network of friends and family updated on her condition daily. During their difficulties as a family, Rebecca and Paul stayed faithful to God even though they could not understand just why he would inflict them with such a painful struggle. After Rebecca's breathing tubes had been removed, Paul wrote:

Sunday we felt the Lord say to us that this is a new beginning. It is an end to one season. But every conclusion is also a beginning. We will see the Lord's faithfulness to us now. We will be strengthened in our relationship with him and with one another." Rebecca wrote about her accident and how it "taught her to climb." She felt thankful that the Holy Spirit was by her side during the most trying times and she was able to find courage from discouragement. The courage she found helped her to trust that this was all in God's plan.

⁶ Actual names are used here as this is based off Rebecca Petrie's published autobiography.

Rebecca described the time when she was finally able to come home from the rehabilitation facility. It was on the way home when she began to feel sadness as they drove past a place where she and her husband had previously enjoyed many walks. The following day, she spent her morning devotional time with God and was reminded that she was to let go of the past and embrace the things he had planned for her. According to Rebecca, there is a place in our lives for “thanksgiving” where we can be grateful for what we have had, but longing for the past is a sin. For her it was vital not to dwell on the past. Through her trials and tribulations, Rebecca showed how devout and disciplined she could be and she cultivated her strength and power through God. Rebecca remained positive to the extent that she told her nurse, one year after her accident, “Today is my anniversary!” The nurse replied with a sympathetic “I’m so sorry.” However, Rebecca assured her there was nothing to be sorry about. She felt lucky that someone at her age got to have a whole new beginning. As we can understand from this short excerpt from her biography, it is common among Christians at Mosaic to focus on these feelings, and in this case, she could convince herself that she was lucky to have experienced such a terrible accident so she could feel God on the inside.

Of course it was not just Rebecca who was victimized by this accident. Suddenly Paul had a different life, as did their three children. Growing up, the Petrie children had been used to a very active mother who suddenly could not move around or care for herself. They were spread out throughout the world at universities and on mission trips and were not always able to be there. Paul continued his ministry and also felt stronger in his faith. When his son asked him about aspects of his life that had changed such as sex, for example, Paul replied that it was no longer an issue. The Lord had simply “taken away his desire.”

Today Rebecca and Paul still live in Belgium, where Paul leads the International Prayer Breakfast⁷ and also serves as a public speaker, strategist, and mentor. He is no longer a pastor, but instead mentors those who are. Everyone from Mosaic knew and spoke highly of the Petrie family and their ability to overcome hardships to become ideal Christians. The Petrie’s were a

⁷ The International Prayer Breakfast is a spin-off of the National Prayer Breakfast, which takes place annually in Washington D.C. The Fellowship Foundation, a conservative Christian organization, organizes the National Prayer Breakfast. Both the European and American meetings are for politicians around the world for the elite to build relationships. Paul Petrie started the European Prayer Breakfast.

model for how one could have unquestioning faith in God and learn lessons from the struggles he gave them. Pastor Fred held great respect for both Paul and Rebecca and he met often with Paul, who visited Ohio regularly.

Those members of Mosaic who spoke of the Petries, including Pastor Fred, spoke admirably of the strong faith the Petries displayed despite the life changing events that had occurred. They served as strong role models to younger generations of Mosaic members and acted as an example of “Perfect Christians.” I observed how younger members of Mosaic seemed to look up to those older than them. When we spoke about how my members heard from God, some of the girls from the college student MC envied the way older women heard directly from God. While interviewing some of the college aged women about how they spoke to God, they seemed lost and unsure what to say. I explained that Pastor Fred’s wife described God’s presence as a “non-scary haunting” as an example. They replied “Yes, that’s it!” It was almost as if they had not thought about it and perhaps they had not yet heard from God at all yet. The daughter of the woman who organized the Silent Retreat was with us during one interview. I asked her if she has ever heard from God and she replied, “I pray everyday, but it feels like I’m talking to the air.” The relationship with God is fostered over time and is naturally strengthened the older one gets. Just as the college students looked up to older members of Mosaic, those members looked up to even older Christians, such as the Petrie’s. Life experience and age gave way to the ability to become a more “perfect Christian.” The expectations of my informants was that their journey would improve as they came to know God better, despite the fact that they expected ups and downs throughout their journey.

This brings me to the point of Caroline Walker-Bynum (1995), who writes extensively on the subject of Christianity and suffering. Obviously, suffering is a common theme throughout Christianity beginning with Jesus dying on the cross and suffering for all of mankind’s sins. Walker-Bynum’s groundbreaking book entitled, *Holy Fast and Holy Feast* differs greatly from my own work, due to the fact she was focused on medieval religious devotion of women and how “devotions, such as those to the body, wounds, heart, and blood of Christ [as being] were at the very center of women’s piety” (Walker-Bynum 1995:4). However, Walker-Bynum points out how especially painful practices such as fasting, extreme asceticism, and physical suffering were

ways for women to identify with the suffering Christ. Aspects of what she describes with the medieval women can be seen within Rebecca's story. Her suffering brought her closer to God than ever, and her suffering was well respected by other members of the Christian community as a means for doing just that. The difference between Rebecca's journey and the women mystics that Bynum writes about is that the mystics journey was self-inflicted; fasting, for example was one way to suffer that could relate a mystic's journey to God's. Rebecca did not choose to fall and suffer, but she was able to make her suffering something positive that God wanted for her: the ability to have faith and discipline and not lose trust in God, even after a horrific accident.

Walker-Bynum's work is focused on the female gender. At Mosaic, this conception of suffering to be closer to God was not exclusive to the women. I will turn to this notion in the following chapter focused on silence, as the women of Mosaic fasted and were silent, while the men suffered physically to be closer to God. While there was a great deal of suffering, self-deprecation, and feelings of inadequacy in the eyes of God, my informants understood they could never be perfect, and this was why Jesus died for their sins: because they were sinful by nature. Trying to live the most perfect life they could and understanding the ups and downs, or "seasons" throughout their journeys meant that they were constantly fighting to become better Christians. Many of them would look back on their lives and admit that although they were not perfect they had come a long way. One of my informants recited a quote that stuck with me, and it helped me to understand how she viewed her personal experience. She said, "we cannot be discouraged by how far we have to go, we have to be happy about how far we have come."

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF BECOMING THE PERFECT CHRISTIAN: A COMPARISON OF ORTHOPRAXY AND ORTHODOXY

When attempting to understand how Christians work towards becoming "perfect Christians", and the importance of ritual and practice within this religious community, I turn to the concepts of orthopraxy and orthodoxy as developed by Catherine Bell (1997). The differences between these two types of traditions can clarify what makes a "perfect Christian" and why. Through Bell's work, one can understand how other religions; such as Judaism have a completely different ideal than the type of Christianity I observed.

Although no religion is strictly “one or the other,” in order to differentiate between the two, orthodox traditions emphasize correct *belief* in theological doctrines, while the orthopraxic tend to emphasize the correct *performance* and *behavioral responsibilities* (1997). Judaism would be considered an example of a highly orthopraxic tradition. Adherents strictly observe the rituals, but the theological importance of the religion is less important in many cases. It is a misnomer to think of the ultra-Orthodox Jews as “orthodoxical” because their religion is tied to *practices* and not *belief* (Bell 1997:193). From the time an orthodox Jew awakes it is about observing the rituals and rules that are prescribed to him (Bell 1997:195). A community that observes such strict traditions makes for a more tight-knit community. According to sociologist Solomon Poll in his study of a Hasidic Jewish community in Brooklyn, New York, the greater number of rituals one observed, the more esteem is accorded to a person (2006).

This is quite contrary to how the Mosaic Christians perceive the “perfect Christian.” After observing Mosaic for several months, the most respected members of the community were the ones who had the most unwavering *belief* and felt God the most from the inside, even though it was also important to observe ritual traditions in combination with theological belief.

I can vividly remember attending several Missional Communities where the members would (constructively attempt to) criticize Judaism for being so much “about the laws” and not enough about the true belief inside them. I believe this is exactly what Pastor Fred was trying to convey when he would ask that the members of Mosaic to be more than “pew-sitters.” Only observing the ritual of going to church was inadequate and he desired that they take the extra step to truly feel it from the inside. Of course the theological tenets were also important, but they were secondary to being active Christians with true inner beliefs. This is what I understood was necessary to make them a more perfect Christian. The perfect Christian had the “true belief.”

One of my outside informants, a professor from the nearby university, was a Jewish man who had himself studied religion. We often spoke about the differences in the major world religions and the motivation for belief. He told me he liked being Jewish for the “wiggly room.” He did not feel as constrained because he was Jewish by birth, and the mere observation of traditions was enough to satisfy him. As Bell clarified, one could be Jewish by birth, but one could be a

better Jew by observing the rituals. This practice allows for much more of a community of people maintaining a rich heritage, rather than cultivating individual relationships with God, as in Mosaic and other Christian churches. Ritual is a secondary compliment to the true belief inside the members at Mosaic.

Orthopraxy tends to exist more noticeably in places where the national identity, religion, and culture are intertwined (Bell 1997:191). However, Orthopraxic traditions tend to transcend these boundaries, which is precisely what I found within Mosaic. Mosaic members adhered to the theological beliefs, but while the actual rituals were less important, they were still very present. The traditions were a part of their beliefs, but as previously stated, it was not enough just to perform the rituals, members needed to feel it on the inside. The actual name Mosaic denotes a mixture of religious backgrounds, but I believe the essence of what Pastor Fred was hoping for was a combination of both Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy. According to Bell, all Christians would contend that a personal commitment is required in their religion. It is therefore inadequate to simply be born to Christian parents, as this does not denote true inner belief. Having this inner belief where God resides within a Christian's heart is an essential part of being a perfect Christian. Once this is present, one must be an active member of the community participating in functions to strengthen the church as well as reaching out to non-Christians to spread the God's word. The many requirements make it difficult for members of the church to feel like adequate Christians. With exceedingly busy schedules; I understand how my informants felt inadequate since religion should be taking up more of their time. In addition, when sinful things take up the time that should be devoted to Christ, a Mosaic member could find herself spiraling out of control from the guilt she felt. I observed this guilty spiral several times at Mosaic; individuals renounced their religion for different reasons, but feelings of inadequacy were the most common. On the flip side of this, when a member felt strengthened through the hard work, discipline, humility, and host of other admirable traits, their journey becomes stronger, which I also observed at Mosaic.

CHAPTER 4-SILENCE AND COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

Cultivating a live and direct relationship with God and feeling him on the inside has been described as ideal for a Mosaic Christian. Through several conversations and observations with my informants, I discovered the ways one can hear from God and develop a personal relationship with him. Perhaps one of the more interesting characteristics was the importance of silence in this personal relationship with God, which I experienced through the annual Women's Silent Retreat at Mosaic. As Luhrmann (2012) has pointed out, in contemporary Pentecostal Christianity, Christians fine-tune and train their ability to sense God's presence. They listen for him, hear him, speak back to him, and behave accordingly.

While performing fieldwork, psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann, published her most recent book entitled, "When God Talks Back," which comprehensively handles the topic of communication with God. This monograph helped guide me through my own work and helped confirm my own findings. In Luhrmann's book, she argues against the theory that people believe in supernatural beings because of their "over-interpretation of the presence of intentional agents." In this theory, which Luhrmann called "shortsighted," the belief in God arose from the evolved tendency to attribute intention to an inanimate world and thus religion is an "accidental by-product of the way our minds have evolved" (Luhrmann 2012). While Luhrmann rejects the above theory, she does explain that it is a part of a very difficult puzzle to solve, but one worth looking further into.

Luhrmann's work became crucial as a comparison as well as contrast as I worked through my research. I chose not to delve into her work until my final months of study, as I did not wish to become too influenced by such a similar study, I was, however, pleased to find more similarities than differences, which helped validate my own discoveries. Luhrmann's approach to the study of Christianity was one of openness and respect for a religion she does not necessarily adhere to. This was precisely what I came to aim for when I dropped my antagonism in favor of attempting to understand my informants directly through their experiences, while never ruling out having my own. In this sense, I became my own informant, just as Luhrmann has done in her own studies. She began her research with the Vineyard Church as a non-Christian and while she did

not convert through her years of experience, she did come to accept the validity of spiritual realities and the value of spiritual direction. Luhrmann was able to distinguish between Evangelicals and the members of the Vineyard Church by defining adherents of the Vineyard church as “renewalist Evangelicals.” Much like referring to members of Mosaic as Pentecostal-like, referring to a Christian, as a renewalist is an umbrella term which encompasses the diverse and ever-changing modern denominations within Christianity. According to a 2006 Pew study, twenty-three percent of a representative sample of Americans could be called “renewalist.” Twenty-six of them reported having had direct revelations from God and eighteen percent reported having spoken in tongues at least several times a year (Luhrmann 2012: 333). A “renewalist” is experientially oriented and they attend a Pentecostal (like) church, describe themselves as a Pentecostal or charismatic, or speak in tongues (Luhrmann 2012: 333). As we see here, the boundaries are fluid, but the emphasis is on the direct experience of God.

Fully understanding the born-again relationship with God takes far longer than six months of fieldwork would allow for, however as forthcoming as my informants were, and with the help of Luhrmann’s psychological/anthropological analysis, I was able to see how many of these relationships were fostered. My informants did not simply convert and begin speaking to God immediately. Just like any worthwhile relationship, it takes work to attain results. Many of my interviewees went through the motions for years until they began to notice the merits of their hard work. One woman explained to me that as an avid gardener, she began to hear God speaking to her while gardening. He would even speak to her in gardening metaphors. “Dig deeper, Lana, and you will discover the truth.” It was in those quiet moments when she was doing what she loved that he would reveal Himself to her. Others heard God audibly through silent mediation or through dreams.

In this chapter, I set out to explore the diverse personal relationships believers foster with their God. First, we will see how the women of Mosaic attempted to strengthen their relationship with God through silence. I will also highlight the gender and age distinctions within the practice of communicating with God, and how men receive God’s presence differently from women. Although I spent a great deal of time with the women at the retreat, who were on average in their thirties, I also interviewed both men and younger members about their communication with God.

I will then move on to explain some of the other's experiences and how Tanya Lurhmann describes the "training" aspect of communication with God. During my brief time at Mosaic, I came to understand this notion of training to be a better communicator and how Christians train themselves to become better at hearing God. Finally, I will focus on prayer and the importance of prayer, particularly at Mosaic. Simon Coleman and Matthew Engelke will help provide a theoretical framework within the linguistic ideology debate to highlight the notions of silence, non-silence, the written word, and how meaning can become lost within the Church. Although the Silent Retreat was merely a weekend trip, it served as a turning point in my research where I began to understand my informants' distinct journeys with God.

THE SILENT RETREAT

Dear Attendee:

Welcome to your guide for your personal retreat of solitude. That you have this guide tells me that you have taken your walk with Christ seriously. It tells me that you know God and yet desire to know him even more intimately. This guide is to be just that, a guide. Together with your bible it can draw your spirit into a contemplative communion with the Almighty in a significant and special way. You may use this guide either in the fuller context of a silent retreat with others, or an exclusively personal journey of solitude and meditation. I have drawn upon some writers that I have found very challenging and refreshing during my own times of spiritual silence. May this guide lead you towards being still and knowing that he is God.

SHE and the Silent Retreat

Above is the letter I read as I opened up my retreat guide at The Silent Retreat. It was at a SHE⁸ meeting where I first heard of such a concept as a silent retreat. SHE meets the first Tuesday of each month and is a female-only group of believers, started at the original Mosaic, in Los Angeles. The concept was adopted into Mosaic NEO and a woman named Kari opened her home to approximately thirty women once a month. I was intrigued when I first entered my first SHE meeting. The home was immaculate, and downstairs the women were anxiously gathered to begin a meeting that entailed a bit of bible study and a bit of practical information regarding upcoming projects and retreats. At my first meeting, one woman in her mid-forties stood up and spoke about the upcoming silent retreat. She said how important it had become to her, as she had already attended four of them. Sign-up was then opened and the number of spots was limited, so

⁸ Mosaic SHE Community is a sisterhood of dreamers and activists committed to creating space in the greater Los Angeles area where women can find authentic relationships with one another and Jesus Christ.

when I left, I called Pastor Fred and asked if I was permitted to attend as an observer. He seemed thrilled I was interested, and I later understood why. Fred confirmed my place on the list and introduced me to the women who were in charge of the retreat.

Two days prior to the retreat I received a frantic phone call from Pastor Fred. We had been meeting regularly by this point, and a phone call was not out of the ordinary. However, this time he explained that he had another “dream” about me and simply had to speak to me immediately. He understood my background and childhood experiences with Christianity, and he tried to explain that he really wanted me to be open to let the Holy Spirit do work through me. I nervously laughed and explained how I would read and follow the guide just as any other attendee would. Going in, I felt I had some nervous energy because of past experiences in a church camp setting, but I felt if it became too much, I would focus on my notes, relaxation, and meditation. I could tell when I hung up the phone with Fred that he did not truly feel like he could convey his message to me and he was frustrated. I was not sure what his dream entailed, but I reminded him I was primarily researching, and not searching for the Holy Spirit. I assured him I would let him know if anything spiritual came over me, though. He tried to explain that it is not always the Holy Spirit that gets in and evil forces can be present too. I felt that this warning was another effort to convert me.

I drove to the retreat together with two of my main informants from two different missional communities. The drive was around two hours and I tried to steer the conversation to what they were hoping to get out of the retreat. It would be the first time both girls were attending, but they were expecting big things. Anna was the mother of a toddler and at that time, pregnant with her second child. She was looking for the peace to have “alone time with God.” She felt like God had directed her to her first SHE meeting when they spoke about the retreat because he knew she needed it.

Jocelyn was an African American student, working on her second master’s degree. She is physically disabled with Spina Bifida⁹ and walks with the aid of crutches and a back brace. I met

⁹ A birth defect which occurs when the bones of the spine (vertebrae) do not form properly around part of the baby’s spinal cord

her my first evening at the Friday night MC. She holds one degree in disability counseling, but felt that as once she entered her field, her work was limited to bureaucratic paperwork, and she did not feel that she was doing any good for those whom she had hoped to help. She decided to pray to God about what her next move should be and she found herself in a new masters program for special education. Her own disability provided her with the compassion needed to provide such an education. She had dealt with great difficulties throughout her life and she claimed that prior to finding God, she felt a lot of self-hatred, which manifested itself into her daily life. She first found God when her former roommates introduced her to the Vineyard Church. She started by attending the nearby Vineyard, which had recently closed down and she found herself at Mosaic shortly thereafter. She had been attending Mosaic for almost two years at the time of our meeting. Jocelyn was excited to calm some of the noise that she had going through her head, but she also hoped to hear from God and hear what he had in store for her in a turning point in her life. In her own words, she had so much “crap” that she had been focusing on that she wanted to recommit and make more space in her life for God. Jocelyn was the most liberal member of Mosaic I spoke to. We often conversed about legalizing gay marriage and other similar social issues. She once lamented, “Bible passages about gay marriage are sandwiched between many other demands, like not cutting one’s hair. It is just culturally outdated.” I found it interesting that she interpreted such a controversial subject so nonchalantly, while others I spoke to were vehemently opposed to such moral issues because of what they believe the bible is clearly against.

During our car trip, the conversation flowed easily even though Anna and Jocelyn had not previously met one another. We spoke about our children and even though Jocelyn is not a mother herself, she chimed into the conversation because of her experience with young children. It was a bit surprising that they had never met before, but I felt that since these two women were new to Mosaic, a retreat like this could help to bring new members of the church together. It appeared as though many of the women who attended the retreat were first-timers like Anna and Jocelyn. Although it was standard practice to make communication off-limits for twenty-four hours, the gatherings before and after the silence were useful in bringing the women much closer together through the sharing of personal experiences.

As we drove to a location in the middle of nowhere, there were beautiful rolling hills that stretched for almost 200 acres, with tall evergreen trees shading the grounds. If there was a good place for relaxation and solitude, this was certainly it. As we entered the building where we would be sleeping and gathering before and after the silence, we were greeted by a nun who was in charge of the programs at the convent. She directed us to our rooms, checked our names off her lists, and we were able to move in for the weekend. The rooms were predictably simple and decorated with religious décor. After unpacking, I left my room on to explore the grounds. At this point, silence was not required because we would have one official gathering before the silence commenced. The more I explored the grounds, the more impressed I became. It was simply majestic, and as much as I enjoy talking, I could not wait to rest and meditate on my first months at Mosaic.

After everyone had arrived, we gathered in a circle in one of the many meeting rooms. There were approximately twenty-five of us from what appeared to be all different walks of life. The majority of the women were in their late 20s to early 30s but there was also an 18-year-old and several older women as well. Retreat guides were distributed and the meeting was called to order by the organizer who had first spoken about the retreat at the SHE meeting. She gave a heartfelt speech about how important these retreats had become to her journey with God and how much she had grown from them. We were then asked to tell a bit about ourselves as well as our reasons for attending. At first, everyone had the same objective: to converse with God. I felt it was a good opportunity to explain to the others who were not aware that I was researching, but any information shared would be confidential unless I was permitted to use it. Some of the women came with witty answers as to why they were attending. Pastor Fred's mother-in-law was present and she was well known for her sense of humor. When it came time for her to share why she was there, she said, "everyone seems so addicted to the silent retreats, so I thought to myself, I've got to try more addictive things!" There was a lot of laughter before the silence began and most of the women admitted to never keeping quiet. They were predominantly outgoing women with much to say, so the silence would be welcome, but would also prove to be a challenge.

There was very little time to chat with the other women, so other than those who already knew me, I was unsure how they felt about me being there. As each woman in the circle shared her

hopes and reasons for attending, the tone changed when some of the women who had already been to retreats started to share their experiences. Many of the women felt that in the past, they had put so much pressure on themselves to hear God, that they missed the point of the retreat and left feeling emptier because their expectations had too high. They urged the others to lower their expectations and try to find God in the little things. I would understand this more about this after the silence had commenced.

When I returned to my room, I was unsure of what to do first, but it was getting late so I felt the most natural thing would be to begin reading the retreat guide. The first quote I came across was one from Brother Lawrence¹⁰ that said, “*Believe and count as lost all time that is not spent in loving God.*” I thought to myself about how undeniably intense the thought of that was. I then remembered Fred telling me about Brother Lawrence and how he meditated on God over long periods of time, because he believed we become what we meditate on. For some reason, I was still feeling a bit uncomfortable in my room. Perhaps it was all the crosses and paintings of God that I was not used to, but I dozed off for a bit and awoke in a panic with a very strange feeling. I decided to go back to sleep with the lights on for the first time since I was a young child. The following morning I awoke early and hungry, but remembered that it was not only a silent retreat, but we were also fasting for 24 hours. We were permitted coffee and small crackers so that we did not collapse, and I afforded myself these small luxuries as I was preparing to take a long jog around the grounds. First I decided to meditate in a room appropriately called “The Meditation Room.” So far I felt nothing out of the ordinary, but I had done a great deal of thinking. Later as I ran through the grounds, I saw women were scattered about on that beautiful sunny day. I was unsure if it was acceptable to train during the silent retreat, but I felt better about my decision when I passed another retreat-goer on her own jog. As I ran past the women who were still, it seemed that each of them had a bible and a journal with them, which was recommended prior to our arrival. I decided that after I ran, I would follow suit and I found a spot near an old graveyard to sit alone with my thoughts, my retreat guide, and a journal. I turned to one of the first pages and came across the following quote:

¹⁰ Brother Lawrence was a French Monk known for his personal relationship with God.

We have to remember that we look for solitude in order to grow there in love for God and in love for others. We do not go into the desert to escape people, but to learn how to find them; we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good. But this is always only a secondary end. The one end that includes all other is the love for God. ...Let there be a place somewhere in which you can breathe naturally, quietly, and not have to take your breath in continuous short gasps. A place where your mind can be idle and forget its concerns, descend into silence, and worship the Father in secret. “

Again I felt this familiar pressure during the retreat that perhaps the reason why I felt nothing was because I was not putting in the necessary effort. Even though this was far from my objective with this project, this particular discourse ran through my head often. The “maybe they *are* right” feeling and the feeling of guilt for not trying harder to really believe. These thoughts were however, fleeting when I looked back on my whole life’s experience with religion. I refocused and meditated again in the warm sun and felt like my overload of thoughts was what fieldwork should be like, even if my thoughts wandered from my informants back to my personal experience often. Even though I was the researcher, I had become my own informant because these experiences were open for me to try as well.

There were a few more hours of silence and fasting before we gathered again as a group. Although silence can be difficult, it passed quickly and I felt thoroughly refreshed when we gathered again. It was odd to break the silence, and we did so with a dinner first. I sat together with a few women I had not previously met. At the beginning of the retreat, one of the women had sobbed as she shared how much she needed this weekend. I came to find out she was one of the founders of the local Vineyard Church that had closed about a year prior. The conversation was more about getting to know each other than our individual experiences from the weekend. One woman spoke of her profession as a teacher at a Christian school, which was intriguing since she taught science from the creationist perspective. I latched onto this conversation, but did not interject any personal beliefs and just listened. As usual, they were equally fascinated that I was there as a non-believer and I awkwardly moved the dialogue back to their experience instead of my own.

The conversations about experiences at the retreat would be saved for the closing session when we went around and shared what we had either created or picked up throughout the weekend.

This item was referred to as an *Ebenezer*¹¹. I was unsure whether I would share or not, but in solidarity with Anthropology, I created a sort of kinship chart of what I had learned throughout my time at Mosaic and things I desired to focus my energy on. I decided to share this with the women, as several of them had been so obliging with me and I felt it was only fair to reciprocate. The women were not as open about their experiences at first as I expected them to be. The first who shared, broke the silence with a funny quip. Danara was a Christian who had converted from Judaism a few years prior. It was her third silent retreat and she said, “the first time I came here, I was just a Jew who was freaked out by all the crosses and Jesus paraphernalia. Now, I feel like I can’t do without Jesus and I cannot believe it took me so long to know him.” She reported that although she did not audibly hear God, she was sitting in the garden and wishing she had her music to listen to, but she decided to sit in solitude. Suddenly, a gust of wind came and the wind chimes started playing a song to her. She felt it was God providing her with the music she had longed to hear at that moment.

I believe the opening session had undeniably lowered everyone’s expectations for the weekend. One of the women who had previously attended a silent retreat urged everyone not to feel let down if they did not speak to or hear directly from God. He was there, and he was available through symbols, thoughts, and feelings. The feeling as we went around the room and shared our experiences was that no one felt they had truly communicated directly with God, but there was an abundance of symbolic communication whether it was wind chimes playing a song or something similar. One woman who was asking God a specific question while wandering through the graveyard immediately saw a tombstone with a name that she felt answered her question. Many of the women had outpourings of emotion during the sharing portion of the retreat and the overwhelming feeling was that each woman needed this weekend to reconnect and give her journey a new start and “realign” herself with God. The paradoxical aspect of converting and being re-born again was present here as each woman felt they needed to re-commit during this weekend.

¹¹ A biblical reference when God assisted Samuel, he set up an “Ebenezer” or “stone of help” to commemorate and remind himself of God’s hand in his life at that time (1. Samuel 7:10, 12).

After the retreat, we drove home and both Anna and Jocelyn were satisfied with their experiences. Jocelyn asked me if I was “freaked out” by the retreat. I explained to her I was not, but of course it forced me to think and face my own faith and lack thereof. It was a challenge for me to be quiet and for everything around me to be quiet as we live in a culture where being busy is encouraged and actually having downtime is in fact, frowned upon. Taking 24 hours of silence is a luxury that can bring anyone closer to one’s own “mind” so to speak.

Attending the silent retreat prompted me to contact the woman who arranged it, with whom I had previously had minimal contact. I had emailed her prior to the retreat weekend to briefly explain what I was doing, and she thanked me when we met at the retreat. I asked if we could meet the following week and speak more about her experiences and journey, which we did. Beth is a stay-at-home mother of three and in her early 40s. She grew up attending The Chapel, the church I had originally envisioned for my fieldwork. She had Christian parents that followed the “rules” and went to church every Sunday. Beth also met her husband who also attends Mosaic at the Chapel. She did not feel anything particular spiritually awakening at The Chapel and decided to attend Pastor Fred’s previous church in Hudson. When Fred left that church, they followed him, as they were part of his bible study and felt a deep connection with him. I inquired about Beth’s passion for the Silent Retreat and the SHE group. Beth told a story about how troubled her marriage used to be and how it did not get better until she was able to open up to the group of women and be honest about it. For her, SHE provided therapy and she wanted to become a better Christian. Before she would faithfully attend church as a “pew sitter,” but then return home and act like a self-described “jerk” to her family, whom she was meant to care the most about. She began to pray to talk to God about these problems and he urged her to speak out because there might be others going through the same issues. Beth said she does not audibly hear from God, but at the retreats she is always able to realign and he “puts things on her heart” that do not go away until she acts on them. Just as several women informants described, God’s messages to Beth were like a “non-scary haunting.” By training over many years to take heed to these feelings, these women were able to distinguish between when it was God and when it was their own conscience. When a feeling would not go away or when something suddenly came over them, whether it was a voice in their head, or a symbol, they realized it was out of their

hands. A time just for God, like the silent retreat, was a perfect time to understand what God had in mind for them.

As the organizer of the silent retreat and an active member of SHE, Beth attended the pampering night at the battered women's shelter. After she left the pampering evening, she felt God was telling her that she had to call and invite one of the women to attend the silent retreat, even though she did not know if the woman was a believer or not. That particular woman could not believe Beth had called her and was thrilled about her outreach. She had begun a journey with God after dealing with the despair of a violent relationship and eventually having her children taken from her. Her emotions poured out at the retreat sharing, and Beth knew that God told her to do the right thing by inviting her. She felt satisfied that her outreach to the woman from the battered women's shelter was perhaps going to change her life for the better. To her, that was what evangelizing the word was all about.

MEN OF MOSAIC

My own gender allowed me to reach women at Mosaic easier than the men. However, I was still able to discover apparent gender differences when speaking to my informants about their experiences with God. A comparative aspect is helpful to see how the women's journeys differed from the men's and vice versa. The men have a similar group to the women's SHE collective. Their group is called CRASH and according to Mosaic's website:

CRASH is the name of the men's discipleship ministry at Mosaic. When a group of rhinos gather they are called a "crash of rhinos." The name is very significant because a rhino can run at high speeds. Can you imagine a rhino running in your direction at 30mph? That would be quite frightening. What's worse is that rhinos can only see 30 feet in front of them. They have horrible eyesight. What happens when a 6,000 lb. rhinoceros runs 30 mph but can't see beyond 30 feet in front of them? Yes... crash. Even when rhinos are standing still they are still called a crash because of their potential. We are very similar to rhinos. We don't know what the future holds. We can't predict what lies ahead, but that shouldn't set us into a fearful paralysis. We must move forward with the mission that God has commissioned us with: Go, make disciples, and teach them to obey.

CRASH also meets once a month at the leader's home. I was unable to attend the all-men's sessions, however I was permitted to join their fitness group that ran together Saturday mornings

in preparation for a competition called, The Tough Mudder¹². There were women who partook in the Tough Mudder as well, but the Saturday morning running group consisted of all males and myself. The men of Mosaic seemed equally serious about their journey as the women, but through my time with these men, I learned of the distinctions present in the ways men and women experienced God. The most obvious to me was that women often used silence as a tool along their journey; men used physicality and tests of strength to connect with God. While there was certainly a cross-over in both men and women, the majority of the women I spoke to did not feel a sense of God when they were training or pushing themselves to physical limits. I was previously unaware that one could feel something so spiritual through training, even though I personally use running as a type of meditation. As previously mentioned, I was unsure whether it was acceptable to train during the silent retreat until I ran past another attendee. When the silence was over and we shared our experiences, another woman stated after the silence was over that she felt her most connected with God that day while she was on a beautiful morning run. This was the one and only time I heard a female refer to physical activity as special time she shared with her savior. During the Saturday morning runs with the men's group, we would pray beforehand and for the most part, the runs were in solitude. Everyone was of different ability levels and I understood quickly that this running group was not meant for socializing, but for connecting with God and disconnecting from the rest of the world. Although the conversation was minimal during the morning runs, we had connected enough to forge relationships that carried over into other events at the church as we had something in common.

GENDERED LANGUAGE

The kind of language used by men differed from the women's more intimate and sexually-loaded language. While a woman might refer to God's presence "filling her." A man would generally say something along the lines of "God spoke to me" or "God provided me with the extra strength I needed." Or more simply, "God guided me through" a miscellaneous task. I experienced both men and women referring to God "putting something on their heart." One male congregant stated that prior to finding Jesus, there was a "Jesus shaped void" in his life, but this does not compare

¹² The Tough Mudder is an endurance race with several obstacles, which require teamwork, strength, agility, and a high level of physical fitness to complete.

to the more sexually loaded language and experiences that women often describe both at Mosaic and other similar places of worship. In a previous work, Luhrmann describes this phenomenon as *Metakinesis* (2004), which is a term to describe when a dancer conveys an emotional experience to an observer through movement. In a religious realm, Luhrmann's version of metakinesis entails congregants building remarkably intimate relationships with God. She describes the newer direct relationship with God that has been discussed previously where God is a friend, or sometimes more than a friend. According to Luhrmann, in the intensely experiential U.S. evangelisms, God becomes an intimate relationship, like a buddy, a confidante, or the ideal boyfriend (Luhrmann 2004: 519). Luhrmann goes on to admit that not every person has these intense experiences, but it is the model of the practices that produce these experiences that are central to this direct experience with God. Often times, my female informants would talk about how they could not wait to wake up and be with God and "just feel him working through them." The fact that many of my informants believed God was a part of their marriage is proof enough to show they believed in this intimate relationship with him, where they put him over their own spouse. Luhrmann describes that phenomenon of "God dating," where her informants would go as far as setting a place for God at the dinner table and pretending (or not) that they were on a date with him. They described God as the perfect boyfriend.

My male informants never used such language and especially strayed from the intimate "boyfriend" kind of wording, but they often became emotional when speaking about their experiences of resistance and finally giving in to God's will. They would use words like "fight," "wrestle," "resist" and other masculine language to describe their journey where God finally "pinned them down" and made them a believer. Going back to the men's group CRASH, instead of a silent retreat, they had an annual "marine-style" obstacle course and weekend of physical activity and teambuilding projects that were meant to make them closer as a group of men and closer to God. Although I was unable to attend the men's retreat, I spoke with several of the men about their weekend. The men returned with military-style haircuts to The Gathering. They seemed like more of a banded team and described how supporting one another in their journeys was of the utmost importance. One younger member said to me, "there is so much temptation out there in our society, and to have these other guys keeping you in line means all the difference. We are best friends and we are there to support each other," he explained to me.

Working as a team, experiencing God through the physical, yet still speaking to him through prayer were the main components I extracted from the male experience. While the female experience was more difficult to nail down, women seemed to hold a more inner, personal journey with God, where they silently meditated, prayed, and listened for God to speak or put things on their hearts in order to understand what he had in store for him. Regardless of their differences, both sexes practiced a relationship with God that was live and direct, whether it was through symbols, thoughts, audible voice, or just feelings of something put on their heart.

To further illustrate the gender differences, I will rely on the experiences of Doug, Monica, as well as Fred for empirical examples. When I visited Doug and Monica for an all-day interview and hangout, the conversation was very much dominated by Monica, and at one point Doug even disappeared from the room. I found it generally more difficult to get men to even speak about their personal experiences with God even though they were often more vocal than the women in the various groups I attended. Doug agreed that God “puts things on his heart” and shows up when he least expects it. He alluded to a warm feeling that would come over him at times and that he felt safe because of His presence. When I described what another woman referred to as “a non scary haunting, he said, “Yes, that’s exactly it!” It is a voice in one’s head that does not go away.

I spent one weekday afternoon with Doug and Monica, outside of the normal Sunday evening missional community. We had been planning this day for a long while, as they wanted to share their conversion story with me. However, they could not wait to share their story with me and they had already witnessed to the group of college students about their previous broken life, which I discussed in the chapter on conversion. I decided to instead focus our informal interview on how they communicated with God. I had once heard Monica say that she did not care how bad her day might have turned out, because “every morning was a fresh start, and she got to spend it with God.” She had intimate “one-on-one” time during her morning devotionals. She explained how her relationship with God was so cherished and she often became emotional when speaking about it. I probed further to understand if she hears from God in her silence or if there are other ways he communicates with her. She said that he has little “tricks and jokes” with her that she believes he reveals through numbers. She finds God to have a sense of humor. When she

glances at the clock and it reads 3:33, she knows God has something in store for her that day and she believes he jokes with her and sends her messages through numbers.

Doug, on the other hand was more reserved about his experience with talking to God. For him it was much more of a feeling than an audible voice and if something was “nagging” and his heart was telling him to do something, he would use his best judgment to decipher whether it was God or his own conscience talking. Just as God told him to go to church with Monica when their marriage had hit rock bottom, God had also encouraged him to go through with adopting his children from both the U.S. and Ethiopia. He always “conferenced” with God and asked him over and over again if he was making the right decision. His relationship was less emotional, and more practical. He sought God for guidance for big decisions, but less on an everyday basis.

As Pastor Fred often explained, God spoke to him through symbols, like the aforementioned crack in the sidewalk, but he also would tell him things audibly. Fred once said, “People often think just because I’m the pastor that I have a direct hotline to Jesus, but that is not the case. I have to be patient and always be aware of his signs.” Fred told stories about how his experience could be just as difficult and confusing as anyone else. We spoke briefly one day about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and I was curious about his thoughts on speaking in tongues. I had heard members of Mosaic speaking in tongues, but never Fred. He explained how he attended a national conference for Pastors and his fellow attendees prayed over him so he could receive this “wonderful gift.” At first Fred was into it, but then he just could not continue. He became frustrated and took a walk far away from the conference. It was then that God audibly said to him “Fred, do you love me?” He answered, “of course!” God replied back, “Then trust that I love you too.” From then on, he stopped wondering why he did not receive this gift and why it bothered him. He trusted God’s love for him and that was enough. When Pastor Fred called me prior to the Silent Retreat, I explained my confusion and how I had no idea how to communicate with someone I am unsure exists. He assured me “everyone is confused.”

LURHMANN ON ANALYZING EXPERIENCED:

As Tanya Lurhmann could be considered the foremost anthropological expert on how Christians perceive communication with God, I have focused mainly on her work due to the similarities within our type of fieldwork, her in-depth analysis, personal experiences, and conclusions. The aforementioned “renewalist” term was coined to show the infusion of a more intensely expressive spirituality. This has also been called “neo-Pentecostal” to represent the adoption of a Pentecostal ethos, and its flamboyant emphasis on the direct experience of God, into a form, which is acceptable to the white mainstream. Lurhmann’s most recent work took place at a Vineyard Church in Chicago, Illinois where she also attended several bible studies weekly over a much longer period of two years. She claims that throughout those years she interviewed hundreds of individuals on their experiences with God. In her earlier work, “The Art of Hearing God,” she asserts that if one listens and meditates the way she is taught, one can have the *darndest of experiences* (Lurhmann 2004). For Lurhmann it is important to convey not only *how* Christians perceive their God, but also *why*. She shows in her analysis that hearing and sensing God is not necessarily irrational. Cultural models shape the way we think, and how we hear and see on the psychological level. In this article on hearing God, Lurhmann reports there were many explanations for the shift as well as anxieties as well as social and political implications. The behavioral consequences were clear, that the practices of hearing God encourage their followers to experience the divine “vividly, immediately, and through unusual moments of altered awareness (Lurhmann 2005: 141). All of these experiences, in common with my own research, emphasize the ability a person has to personally and intimately connect with God. In other words, Pentecostal Christians, or Renewalists, do not need to speak through a middleman and experiencing close contact with their God is possible through years of training. This is the ultimate focus for these Christians.

Lurhmann explained that for someone raised in a mainstream church, the live and direct presence with God could seem odd (Lurhmann 2012: 39). Her informants spoke about God’s “voice” and the things he said to them about what they should do with their lives. Similar to my time at Mosaic, God “puts things on someone’s heart” and that is his will for them. At the Vineyard Church, the worshippers had to recognize that when God was speaking to them through their

conscience, they had to train to distinguish between God's voice and their own thoughts. Luhrmann explains that in experiencing God in the renewalist tradition, Christians must develop a new theory of mind. She goes on to explain that in the basic theory of mind is where we act on the basis of what is in our minds. We are, as humans, able to distinguish what is in our mind (thoughts) and what is generated from external experiences (perceptions). The theory of mind at the Vineyard (similar to Mosaic) is less straightforward because some of the thoughts are more like perception. Since God is participating in someone's mind and they hear what he says as if it were external speech (Luhrmann 2012: 41). Luhrmann explained that no one gave her a clear overview of how to experience God, but the list she came up with herself matches what I would describe as the steps that were explained to me in experiencing God.

1. God wants to be your friend
2. You develop a relationship through prayer (or silent meditation)
3. Prayer is hard work and requires both effort and training
4. When your relationship is well-developed, God will answer through thoughts and mental images, sensations, and feelings in your body.

Christians who hear and sense God are looking for, and interpreting, signs so that they can develop their sensibilities for the Divine.

PRAYER

From an anthropological and psychological perspective, the central act of prayer is paying attention to internal experience—thoughts, images, and awareness of your body and treating these sensations as important in themselves rather than as distractions from the real business of your life (Luhrmann 2012: 158). Luhrmann describes prayer in the evangelical fashion different from other denominations because God is immediately present and can speak back to the one in prayer. In the evangelical world, there is an acronym for what one should do during prayer. A.C.T.S. stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. In Luhrmann's chapter "Lord, Teach Us to Pray" she explains that the goal of prayer is to express your sense of the Lord's greatness, confess your sins and shortcomings, give thanks for what God has provided for you, and then ask for what you *think* you need.

When in attendance at my first SHE group, I became perplexed as they explicitly stated that one should not ask for particular things from God. Previously, I believed this was the purpose of

prayer. I went to Pastor Fred with my confusion, and he reassured me that one should strive for exactly what is described in the ACTS acronym. He told me one “should not supplicate, but appreciate.” Fred explained that there is no magical formula, but the more one prays and develops a relationship with God, the more natural the conversations with him becomes, just as Luhrmann has suggested. He went on to suggest that if your prayer is answered, it is because it is God’s will. If your prayer is unanswered, it is not and you were incorrect to believe it was what you needed. For me, this was the simplest explanation a Christian could give to explain why some prayer are “answered” and some “unanswered.”

In her recent monograph, Luhrmann (2012) recounts the comparison of learning to pray and learning to run which one of her informants spoke of.

It reminded me of learning to run. I began to run back in college, and initially, I ran to lose weight (those pesky 10 pounds). But as I learned to push one mile to two, and then to three and five, more changed than my weight. My legs grew lean and taut, their muscles more defined. It was like just opening it up, opening up your perceptions and tuning them up in a different way so that even just walking down a street and looking at flowers took on new significance.

This “training” aspect of the renewalist tradition became a pattern I recognized frequently. If the results were not noticeable, then one was “not doing it right.” One would need to try harder, push harder, pray more, listen harder, or pay more attention to create this one on one relationship that was so desired by my informants. Over and over again, I heard about the merits of not giving up and working harder to be the best Christian they could be. Although they had “seasons” in their journey, it appeared that over the years, their relationship with God matured and became better.

LINGUISTIC IDEOLOGY

Silence and the juxtaposition of language are detailed through Simon Coleman’s contribution to *The Limits of Meaning* with *When Silence isn’t Golden*. According to Coleman, who has worked extensively in the Word of Life (Livets Ord) church in Sweden, silence and stillness are no strangers to ritual. While it can imply the mere absence of sound, it can also signify messages ranging from political protest to receptivity to the divine (Coleman 2006: 41).

Coleman described a situation from his fieldwork at the Livets Ord Church (Word of Life) in Sweden, where silence was “not golden.” One particular Sunday service, Preacher, Svante Rumar interrupted the songs of praise to ask, “have we ever noticed the difference between a stillness that is empty and one that is full of God?” These words preempted his use of silence in the end of the service that day, which was normally reserved for alter calls, speaking in tongues, and worship music. At the end of the service, he stood still and said absolutely nothing. This particular silence proved to be an awkward change for the congregation, as they began to file out of the church instead of observing the silence to communicate with God.

Coleman’s observations, as well as my own, fit within the linguistic ideology debate within Anthropology of Christianity (Engelke 2007) and how language is deeply immersed in larger cultural systems, as we see through both Coleman and Engelke’s work. Language ideology and concepts of the person are linked, according to Coleman. He goes back to the Quakers, whereas the ideal Quaker is silent but the ideal Charismatic is both hearing *and* speaking (Coleman cited in Engelke 2006: 44). For Charismatics, it is expected that one will actively deploy language by expressing oneself. To some degree, silence plays a part in all religions, but the awkwardness of the silence Coleman presented in his chapter was not well received by the members of the church. Had the women of Mosaic held the Silent Retreat and left without afterward being able to speak of their experiences, I believe they would have left more confused than upon arrival. Christians in America are urged to share, prostetelyze, evangelize, speak the word, but also keep silent and listen for God. They crave quiet, but only in small doses, as the speaking and sharing aspect was far more important. I found it fascinating that these women were predominantly outspoken ones who “never kept quiet.” Yet, they felt like they had to challenge themselves to be quiet to receive God. At Mosaic, silence was important, but was nothing without sharing one’s experience during silence in a discussion afterwards.

Engelke stated that the Masowe Apostles dealt with “the problem of presence” in a similar way to liberal Protestants because there is a simultaneous “presence and absence of God” (Engelke 2006: 9). God is not physically in the room with neither the Masowe or members of Mosaic, however they must deal with his presence/lack thereof that they have become used to feeling, using all different senses to “make sense” of how to communicate with this invisible force. This

is another one of the many paradoxes I have been introduced to while researching the anthropology of Christianity. Luhmann has explained the way Evangelicals deal with the problem of presence with specific faith practices. “They experience an immaterial God that cannot be seen, heard, smelled, or felt in an ordinary way, so they don’t know if he is real or, if real, where and in what he is—a problem particularly acute for churches that encourage an intimate personal relationship with the divine” (Luhmann 2012: 132). In this sense, words are material obstacles that stop the direct relationship with God, however Charismatic leaders must be careful when using words or silence in order to lead their congregation to a direct relationship with God. Words (and the written word) can be an obstacle, but silence must be carefully employed. The concept of the inner self comes back as my informants (especially the women at the retreat) needed to feel God from the inside before they could speak about it. As I have previously discussed in the second chapter, only when my informants felt God from the inside could they begin to speak about it “on the outside.” Christian semiotics took on a different dimension than I had expected going into my research when I came to know the important part that silence played in their belief. It was not only important to attempt to grasp the written word, the words and symbolic interpretations they brought forth, but also what was happening when they were not speaking. At Mosaic, my informants had to feel something inside of them to “know what was true” and the spoken word became an obstacle to their quest for true knowledge.

CHAPTER 5 FAMILIAL RELATIONS: MARRIAGE, ADOPTION, AND COMMUNITY

The previous chapters have shown how the actual institution is not as important as one's true inner belief from the point of view, and in the experiences, of the members themselves.

Furthermore, we know that the idea of an inner self, which is primary in any kind of social relation among charismatic Christians, is a value that seems to structure social life generally among contemporary Christians (Dumont 1986, Robbins 2004). Therefore, in this chapter I look specifically at social life outside of Mosaic Church. What is the status of social relations in a cultural context of what one might call "extreme individualism?" What is the value and how can one understand relationships within a Christian community that privileges inner dialogues with God and individual responsibility for conversion to such a great extent? The focus of this chapter is primarily marriage and parenting as social relations. As will be apparent throughout this chapter, both marital and familial relations are of high importance for these Christians, but they are defined in very specific terms.

Ever important to the Mosaic Christians was their one on one relationship with God. A marriage could not survive without this relationship and especially for the women, it was thought of as intimate relationship. Worship songs had sexual undertones, the language they used when speaking about "him" insinuated that they had a real relationship with Jesus that was more than just a worshiper/God relationship.

My informants and the other members of Mosaic behaved in ways that were influenced by god, but very much tied to American value systems of consumerism, capitalism, and individualism. They attempted to be god-like, but to the degree that was comfortable within the framework of contemporary American society. They were Christians, but they are citizens of a country with conflicting values. America is a secular nation although heavily influenced by Christianity. Separation of Church and State stands strong, but many believe it is a Christian nation founded on Puritan principles of hard work and individual freedom. There seems to be a hierarchy within the church where God is clearly at the top, followed by men, women, and lastly children. The man as the patriarch is the "decider" for the family, but the woman is generally more responsible for child rearing and can be found more often in the private sphere, often as a stay-at-home-

mother. While American society has developed and more women are economic contributors to the household, I found Mosaic to hold more conservative and traditional gender roles.

As Fred pointed out, “man is not an island within the Christian community.” Growing together, whether through marriage, family, or community was vital to the members of Mosaic. The micro-examination of families within Mosaic can shed light on the value systems of contemporary Christians in America and what it means to have God as the primary partner on the one hand, but create family relationships in this image on the other. I will look at the specific effect of the Christian values on the organization of family, marriage, and relationships. Several paradoxes become apparent through the ethnography used in this chapter.

As my analysis of these relationships in this chapter, as well as the previous chapters have shown, the members of Mosaic are striving for a true inner belief and are constantly reaching for Christian perfectionism. These values seem to reflect contemporary American values in several ways. They are attempting to be the perfect parents, the perfect partner, and a mirror of God’s image, all while navigating through contemporary American society.

I will look into the phenomenon of adoption within the Christian community and compare this to what anthropologist David Schneider understood about the symbolism behind American kinship. Do we find yet another paradox or does Mosaic’s belief in “shared spirituality” match up with what Schneider found to be salient in American kinship?

What is the role of the social if the individual journey and relationship with God is the most important? While we could recognize another paradox, we can also understand the value of the social through Edith Turner’s anthropology of collective joy. In her monograph, *Communitas*, she describes the joy that groups experience when sharing a common experience. When a group together feels their life is taking on the full meaning, this is *communitas*. A group’s unexpected joy in sharing common experiences, the sense felt by a group when their life together takes on full meaning” (2012). Although their journeys should first and foremost be between the individual and God, their joy increased (or decreased) within the social context and this made a remarkable difference in their perseverance to become a better Christian. The aforementioned silent retreat showed how important the silence was to hear God, but that the discussion in the

social setting afterwards helped the members understand what God was saying to them. They must first start with the inner feelings and then pay attention to what is happening around them in a social context. They used each other's experiences to push each other to be better Christians. They would often claim that bible studies were for "sharpening" and "challenging" each other. When they came together as community, friends, and a kind of family, they reported feeling the most joy in their experiences. Bonds were formed between members of Mosaic that strengthened the community inside and outside the actual institution. They used relationships to act out the Gospel. The bonds and social relationships within Mosaic include friendship, marital, and familial bonds, which will be elaborated upon in this chapter.

MARRIAGE

Several weeks were dedicated to the topic of marriage when I first began observing at Mosaic. The main focus was on the vital part that God plays in matrimony. In familial relations, both biologically and through marriage, it is crucial to have "God in the middle." Strong rhetoric conveyed that failure was imminent without God in parenting, marriage, or relationships in general. One Sunday morning, I entered the Gathering room to see what appeared to be a wedding altar. I was unaware that it would be used for a real and surprise marriage ceremony that Sunday. The usual worship music was replaced and the lights were dimmed. I walked a woman in a traditional white bridal gown. I initially believed this was some kind of skit to illustrate the marriage the members of Mosaic were supposed to have with God; however this was a real wedding.

Alicia and Paul, the couple that was briefly mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, was marrying and renewing their vows. A slideshow of photographs began to play on the big screen as Fred narrated the story of their relationship. It was a familiar story I had already heard several times at Mosaic much like the stories I have written about in Chapter two on conversion to Christianity. This couple had had their ups and downs together. They got together young while stationed in the military in Japan. Their relationship included drugs, drinking, and other habits they considered unhealthy. Their marriage was anything but holy. Not unlike many of my informants prior to committing to God, they were on the verge of divorce and then God came into their lives and saved them. That day at Mosaic, they were asking Fred to re-marry them, as

they were ready to officially re-commit their lives and marriage to God. It was a typical wedding ceremony, complete with the white gown. The only difference being that Fred did not ask them to make their vows to one another, but to God. They had already committed to each other, but now they had to secure their marriage in God.

My first weeks at Mosaic were during the marriage series so I immediately began to understand how important God was in their private life, especially within the family. For my informants, a happy marriage was impossible if you did not have God “in the middle.” This rhetoric could make anyone feel insecure about one’s marriage if they were not a believer. The overwhelming opinion was that a satisfying marriage is generally difficult, but impossible without God.

Temptations and the stress of having children can end unions and the members of Mosaic felt that without their faith in God, their marriage was doomed to fail. Some of my informants were already divorced or re-married, therefore it was not frowned upon to have a failed union, but ultimately it meant their first union lacked God on at least one side. Divorce is looked down upon, but not like the Catholic Church where one must seek an annulment¹³. The Christians reflect the American belief (outside polygamous pockets within the U.S.) that marriage is monogamous. The majority of my informants believe only in heterosexual unions, which is evolving in the United States, but currently not legal on the federal level. Marriages in this church reflect traditional and perhaps even conservative values that Americans place on marriage. When Pastor Fred spoke out to the Mosaic community about his own infidelity, he knew he had to leave the church. He had “borrowed” his wife from God and he did not perform his husbandly duties to keep his wife holy. Ultimately, he felt it was his fault and he reported feeling extreme guilt and could not go on preaching about how to have a successful marriage, when he was personally sinning. Other married couples respected his honesty and hoped that he would be able to get the help he needed to have a successful union with his wife. For Fred, he had to stop “seeking the darkness” and trust God working through him if he was going to get back on track. He felt that he still had some “fighting” to do because he felt darkness inside.

¹³ Annulment differing from a divorce as an annulment states that matrimony never took place.

MOSAIC AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN

Similar to the marriage series, there was a consequent series on parenting, children, and the family. “We have kids to show us about God!” Fred exclaimed one Sunday morning while on a Sunday series on the family. “Just think about how much you love your children, multiply that massively, *and then* you can begin to understand how much God loves us!” He spoke candidly about how he became “naked before humanity” when his first child was born. He now has three small children and explained that while he was an egotistical man, when his first daughter came to the world, he “crumbled”. Fred said he better understood how God felt about him when he realized the love he had for his daughter. This was a notion many Mosaic parents agreed upon. The pastor once again stated that while it is not always easy, he felt closest to them when they disobeyed, just as he knows Jesus is the closest to him when he disobeys. “One does not run to God when one is behaving,” he clarified. This was a sermon given by Fred on his 40th birthday, when his own family, with whom he had a difficult relationship, had come to visit from out of town. The significance of family was therefore both explicitly and implicitly stated in this sermon. The tone changed and he became very serious as he spoke about a recent school shooting in the area. “This is the kind of world we are raising our kids in! The temptations and distractions are far more serious”, he said as he began to pray for those affected. This was a segue-way into his introduction about the upcoming parenting classes that would be offered at Mosaic, which I was able to attend. In this section I will examine yet another paradox within Mosaic concerning parenting. When does a parent leave their child’s heart up to God and when is it their place to step in and discipline and how does one know the difference. As I will clarify, it often goes back to a feeling within.

THE PARENTING GROUP

Through correspondence with my informants, the key concept in their parenting discourse was “God-like parenting.” This concept involves simultaneously leaving the job up to God as well as playing God themselves. On the one hand, they could trust God completely, but on the other they needed to put themselves in the position of God to imitate and think as he would. The Gathering at Mosaic commenced at 10:00 each Sunday and the Parenting Group was to meet before it began. For a 6-week period, about thirty parents shuffled in during the early morning hours

where we were greeted by two experienced parents, Britt and Doug. Both of these men had several children, both biological and adopted, ranging in age from toddler to late teens. As far as parents at Mosaic, they were two of the most experienced on the subject. The main theme of the Parenting Group was how to become “God-like parents”, but also to let the parent’s know that their child’s heart and behavior was out of their hands and should be left up to God. Many of them lamented after the first group meeting that they were feeling relieved that they did not have to and should not modify their children’s behavior constantly because ultimately it was up to God. They were told it was God who was the one who should guide them and they should be looking at their own children the same in which He does. For the leaders of the parenting group, they felt they had to encourage the other parents not to look at their children “under the microscope” because “it makes them look profoundly more stupid.” Constantly criticizing and focusing on the negative would leave the parent feeling helpless, they pointed out. The parents were encouraged to “let go, and let God.”

Through the weeks in the parenting group, I understood that the core message was: while God was the center of the family, the job as a parent was to act out the gospel to one’s children. The first week of class, the chalkboard had the following scripture written on it:

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For, if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." (James 1:22-25 ESV)

This scripture corresponds with the belief at Mosaic that one is responsible for one’s own personal journey and one must be an *active* Christian to be a good Christian. It was not only during the parenting group that the mothers and fathers were attempting to actively be more godly mirrors for their children to see. There were upwards of ten emails sent daily from the other members of the group discussing the trials and tribulations that being a parent can entail. The co-teacher of the group, Doug, sent a prayer he came across that was so well received by the group that we spent nearly an hour discussing and dissecting it during week two. This prayer was an excellent example of the deprecating feelings, the feeling of “not being good enough”, and failing that the members of Mosaic often reported feeling. They were attempting perfection and ultimately failing, but alongside this failure they were feeling, they were realigning and

recommitting to leave the job up to God, but also to take control, which creates yet another paradox. The way the members discussed this prayer and solved this apparent paradox was to accept that Jesus was working through them and their actions were his. This particular prayer is as follows:

A Prayer for Gospel Parenting:

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Heavenly Father, it is a liberating joy to address you today as the architect and builder of your own house—including the household of faith and our children’s place in your family. No one loves our children more than you. No one has a greater investment in their future than you. No one can teach us to parent them like you.

As I look back over the years of my pragmatic parenting, I’m saddened, for there have been consequences. But I’m also gladdened, for you’ve always been faithful to your covenant love, even when I was overbearing and under-believing. The move from parenting by grit to parenting by grace has been a fitful, but fruitful journey. Take me deeper. Take me further.

You’ve rescued me from parental “laboring in vain”—assuming a burden you never intended parents to bear. Father, only you can reveal the glory and grace of Jesus to our children. Only you can give anyone a new heart. You’ve called us to parent as an act of worship—to parent “as unto you,” not as a way of saving face, making a name for ourselves, or proving our worthiness of your love.

Oh, the arrogant pride of thinking that by our “good parenting” we can take credit for what you alone can graciously do in the lives of our children. Oh, the arrogant unbelief of assuming that by our “bad parenting” we’ve forever limited what you’ll be able to accomplish in the future.

Oh, the undue pressure our children must feel when we parent more out of fear than faith; more out of rules than relationship; more out of pride than patience; more out of comparison than covenant; more out of threats than theology. Forgive us! Free us! Focus us!

Father, since our children and grandchildren are your inheritance, teach us how to care for them as humble stewards, not as anxious owners. More than anything else show us how to parent and grandparent in a way that best reveals the unsearchable riches of Jesus in the gospel. We want the gospel to be beautiful and believable to our children.

Give us quick repentances and observable kindnesses. Grant us confidence that you can redeem our past parental failures. Convict us quickly and surely when we don't relate to your covenant children, "in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14). So very Amen we pray, in Jesus' faithful and powerful name.

As I have discussed above, God working through the Mosaic parents solves the paradox of leaving it all up to God, but also disciplining children. While they were not responsible for being *bad* parents, they could not take credit for being *good* parents either. The second week of the parenting group, the discussion began by Britt announcing that "it is not me who parents my children, but Christ Jesus *in* me." He confessed that this notion caused him to repent for the lies he believed and acted out as a parent. He repented for relying on his "good parenting skills" because he falsely believed he was responsible for successfully "shepherding his child's heart." He admitted that good parenting does not equal good kids, just as bad parenting does not equal bad kids. It is up to Jesus. According to scripture and Fred, the definition of a biblical model of the family is one where "children obey your parents in the Lord, where the father and mother are honored in the first commandment, and Fathers do not provoke children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 1: 6-10). While my informants agreed upon this biblical ideal, they admitted to the struggles of raising a kid with discipline that did not result in rebellion. Here lies the contradiction since the message was that it is God who is in charge of the child's heart, however the parent still felt they had to discipline, and sometimes harshly so. Britt explained once again that it was not actually he, himself that was disciplining his child, but God inside him, who was guiding him. It was a feeling from God or a conversation Britt would have through prayer that would guild him as a parent. As a church, Mosaic had children's groups to train them from an early age to accept the Holy Spirit into their heart. They trained them to experience God just as the adults do, even though the merits of their work may not show up until later in life, as explained in the third chapter.

Every parent, regardless of the age of their children reported difficulties with children, but the group seemed to function as a support system as well as a learning experience for all. The

rhetoric was absolute and coincided with the marriage rhetoric. It was the “there is no other way, but this way” feeling. I found opposing views from individuals outside of the Christian church. For example, outside Mosaic, corporal punishment was thought of as an extremely outdated method of discipline and the vast majority felt that behavior modification was necessary to raise an upstanding citizen. Prior to beginning the Parenting Group, the mothers and fathers at Mosaic recalled learning to parent from American society through magazines, television, and other media. One woman said “it is always in your face as a mother” and the “tests of society are always lingering in the on-looking eyes of the public who have no problem sharing their criticisms of your efforts.” There was a certain pressure that was spoken about to be the best and to be a “supermom” or “superdad.” When they started to feel like it was more up to God and less up to them, I could sense them feeling more relaxed. Here there is a struggle between the individual and the social. As long as they searched deep inside their self, they did not have to pay attention to the “noise” and criticism outside of their relationship with God or outside of the church.

The emphasis that American society puts on rugged individualism and individual effort could cause these parents to feel alone in their parenting struggles, however, they felt more calm and able because they could rely on Jesus. When I inquired what “successful parenting” meant to one of the group leaders, he replied “hmm... It seems like a loaded or trick question, but if my children know God, speak to him, and have a relationship with him that is so intimate that it effects their everyday decisions and stops in a way I could not, and would not question or take credit for. That they would live with His thumbprint on their life and their actions would be undoubtedly of God.” Here the importance of a live, direct, and even intimate relationship with God is reinforced as fundamentally important to the members of Mosaic. The live and direct was spoken of when the members spoke of how they knew what God wanted for their child or children’s heart. How did they know when to step in and discipline since they were meant to leave the job up to God. According to several parents, God was guiding them through an inner feeling or perhaps even audible words. God was living and acting *through* them as mothers and fathers.

What are the social effects of God-like parenting? Socializing children for Mosaic’s parents was done carefully. While it was clear that options existed for Christian parents to shelter their

children from the secular world outside the church, they were careful not to be too over-protective. After all, outside of the church is the best place for evangelizing the word of God to non-believers. The area of Northeast Ohio offers many options for Christian schooling, however the vast majority chose to send their children to public school. While the children often attended private school, their activities outside of school often took place in a church setting, whether it was a bible study or a sports team with other Christian children. The parents who were friends socialized their children together and the older children often took care of the younger ones. This created a sense of a large extended family. This community was and is an extended family for them and these tight knit groups model an extended family. Spending holidays, vacations, and free time together just as blood relatives would, they would call themselves a community of believers, and often a family. The words exchanged between Mosaic's believers were often loving and affectionate and that it was fate they had found each other as friends, partners, and "family." They experienced *communitas* in the group's pleasure in sharing common experiences with one's fellows (Turner, E 2012: 2).

ADOPTION

Parenting in America, and specifically Mosaic Christians extends outside biological boundaries and adoption is an important side of parenting to Mosaic Christians. Several of the parents within the parenting group had adopted children or served as foster families, therefore the topic became relevant for several conversations. The various reasons for adopting were revealed through informal interviews and group discussions within the parenting group.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." "For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. (Romans 8:14-16)

Christians believe God has adopted them as their own children, and one must simply believe in him to become God's child. To adopt a child of one's own it is to literally follow God's lead and show the best kind of Christian behavior: God-like behavior. In the Chapter of James, The bible also instructs believers to take care of the orphans in their distress (1:27). My informants and the congregants of Mosaic took adoption seriously. They felt that as thankful members of God's family, they needed to mirror Him by rescuing orphans and adopting children into their own

families. This process was a difficult one for my informants, but it was a phenomenon that spread throughout the congregation and does not show any signs of slowing. My informants strongly believe that all Christians are God's children. Jesus rescued the gentiles and therefore they could rescue (and make Christian) others in need by adopting them into their family, which was a microcosm for God's family.

I now return to the notion of relying on God and a feeling that He has "put something on your heart" in the context of the family and adoption. My informant, Monica explained how God put something so large on her heart that she had to set the wheels in motion for her second trip to Ethiopia. Monica and Doug had two biological children, and one adopted daughter from the US, named Faith. Several years prior, Monica was speaking to a woman and mother of five at a church conference and she spoke about the merits of adopting her sons from Ethiopia. She directed Monica to the adoption website and not half a year later, she was at the very same orphanage adopting her first son from Ethiopia. She and Doug had their first son for two years when one day she was going to show another member of Mosaic the website where she began her adoption process. Monica was having lunch with a friend when they started discussing her friend's desire to adopt a child from outside the United States. Monica told her about the merits of adopting a child and detailed their family journey to Ethiopia through words and pictures she showed her. She wanted to show her friend the website she first found her son, Samuel, through. When the two sat together at the computer, she pulled up the website. A young boy's photo appeared on the homepage and she began to weep. "That is my son," she said with urgency. She felt that Jesus clearly told her he was her son and that she had to adopt him immediately. Today, that same boy is her adopted son and she went through with what God told her she had to do. She admits how difficult it can be with two boys who have traces of post-traumatic stress from a difficult childhood and the transition to America, but she believes in modeling God's work because she has been "adopted as a child of God" herself." Monica and Doug were the leaders of the college student SFL and when we arrived to the chapter on "The Adoption" Monica had a great deal to express. The following scripture was discussed over a two-hour evening session:

*Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me I.
(Corinthians 4:15-16 niv)*

Adopting was viewed as “god-like behavior” because the gentiles, or non-Jews, were to have been adopted as God’s children. Both Jews and Christians alike believe the Jews are God’s chosen people as it is stated in both the Torah in the Jewish tradition and the Old Testament of the Bible. More specifically, there is a well-known passage where God takes Israel¹⁴ out of Egypt in order for the people to become his “special treasure” among the nations. In Deuteronomy 7:7-9 we learn that “Israel” was chosen because of God’s love for them. Those who were not his “chosen ones” need to accept Jesus as the messiah and the Son of God, and they would be adopted as his children. Through the work of the spirit, they were possibly creating new forms of kinship and becoming more like god, or in their terms “God-like.”

They were taking their task of living a “God-like” life literally. This phenomenon caught on through Mosaic and presently there are several children that have been adopted into families within the church from the same orphanage in Ethiopia. Many older parents have felt their calling to adopt as well as younger parents who were not able to have children due to fertility issues. Whatever the case for adoption, these parents have formed a strong network and are well respected throughout the Mosaic community for their efforts. The parents agreed that it was often difficult, but being a good Christian entails difficulty and obeying what God tells them to do was of the utmost importance. This returns us once again to the “inner feeling” I have outlined in the previous chapters, and the idea of listening for God’s wisdom, and feeling satisfied because they felt stronger from having had to struggle. Many of them agreed that they felt a sense of peace because they had felt, heard, and listened to God. As usual, the feeling *inside* and the encouragement they felt from their relationship with God was the more important than any hardship or struggle that adoption entailed

However, what kind of kinship is adoption within this American Christian context. Schneider (1968) has outlined perhaps the most influential model for understanding American kinship since the 1960’s. He questioned whether kinship was a useful concept at all within a Western context. What he discovered was a cultural symbolic explanation for kinship where ideas of kinship are closely tied to ideas of and shared substance and ideas about nature. In the US, kinship is a symbolic system that conveys ideas and metaphors of shared substances. For Americans, blood

¹⁴ Israel is interpreted by Christians and Jews as the Jewish people as a whole

(or bodily fluid) was salient. Despite the increase in fertility technology today, and the new ways in which it is possible to reproduce with the help of different kinds of donors, it might still be ideas of shared substance that are dominant for the American way of thinking about kinship.

However, what is the significance of this idea of shared substance for the way in which Mosaic Christians construct their families? The case of adoption within Mosaic (and other Christian communities) is interesting as it simultaneously accepts and challenges Schneider's understanding of kinship in the US. How can one understand the instant sense of kinship that Monica felt when she saw the photo of the African boy on the webpage? One should notice the way in which Monica did not say, "he will become my son." On the contrary, she said, "He is my son." She emphasized an already existing kinship relation. In a way, she eclipsed the whole idea of adoption. It was as if he was already related to her. In other words, the view on adoption that Mosaic Christians express, is one in which they are already related as God's children. How is this possible, if, in America, shared substance is the key symbol of kinship? On the one hand, one could say that Monica shared no substance with this child and she was merely claiming him as her own since they were God's children. However, we could also assume there is truth in what Schneider accounts, if the substance shared could be something other than blood. If blood is something that ties a mother to her child, then the Holy Spirit, or spirituality, could also be thought of as a symbolic substance that ties together the adoptive parent and child, thus confirming Schneider's hypothesis about the importance of shared substance for kinship in America.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE FAMILY AND PARENTING

In the beginning of this chapter, I posed the question, "what is the role of the social if the individual experience is of the utmost importance?" From what I have observed, the individual relationship comes first, however their experiences are emphasized by joining together with the other members of the Mosaic community, as well as through marriage and parenting. In order to act out the gospel, they need a social context like their marriage or the role as a parent to live a "God-like" life. A perfect example of where one could be more "God-like" through parenting was through adoption. Here the members were able to exhibit a behavior just like God as they

felt as if He had adopted them. As described above this notion, may or may not challenge Schneider's basic American kinship theory

As I have attempted to show through the previous chapters, the individual relationship with God starts on the inside and with an "inner feeling." For the Mosaic Christians, it was a feeling that is not possible to fake. Once the Holy Spirit had entered their body, one cultivates a deep, individual, and one-on-one relationship with God. It is then possible that they can act out the Gospel through social relations. The social context is therefore extremely important as the church community, family, and spousal relationships help sharpen their journey and in their own words, "hold them accountable."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to paint a picture of what it means to be a Christian in a contemporary Pentecostal-like church in the United States. The last chapter revealed how the actual institution of the church was less important than one's personal relationship with God. My informants reported strengthening their personal journey through social relations, as they were able to "sharpen" themselves and hold each other accountable. Not only did the social realm allow them to become better Christians, they experienced more joy together in the collective arena. Their sense of personhood was dependent on their very individualistic relationship with God. However, almost contradictory so, they were unable to gauge their own journey without the social realm of the family, their marriage, and their church community. Thus, there is an ever-present tension at Mosaic between much of the phenomena I encountered. How does one understand the paradoxes and tensions involved in my informants' religious journeys? If religion can be looked at as a cultural system, then we can see that there will always be a tension within a value system where individuals waver between "right and wrong."

The tension between conversion and deconversion was present in more than one instance. As it turned out, conversion was not necessarily the radical break one often thinks about. I discovered how it was possible to fall out of belief and back in again, thus re-converting. This created the first paradoxical aspect of Christianity I wrote about where the "complete turn-around" that is thought about within charismatic Christianity was not necessarily a one-time phenomenon. My

informants experienced “seasons” with God where they recommitted and realigned their journey and in a sense, converted again. Because of this, I argued that Christianity is easier to study on a so-called anthropological continuum due to the back and forth nature of their initial conversion. The very essence of conversion becomes convoluted when one can convert many times or reverse their conversion all together. While it is a radical move for many, they are constantly renegotiating this life choice.

One of the most significant paradoxical aspects of Christianity came forth in my chapter entitled, *The Perfect Christian*. Although I felt this was their goal, albeit far-reaching, setting such high standards often left them feeling worse about their relationship with God. They felt they were unworthy and it created feelings of self-deprecation and a certain envy of others’ journeys that seemed to be better than their own. When they felt negative about their journey, they needed to recommit and often it was something like the Silent Retreat that was able to bring them back on track. These retreats were able to fill them with the strength to become more disciplined and practice humility, the sought after ideals of a good Christian.

Through the chapter on the Silent Retreat and communication with God, we see the emphasis on the importance of silence and alone time with God. However, what occurred in this silence was only understood when they began speaking about the different ways God spoke to them through symbols, audible dialogue, dreams, etc. The gendered differences between men and women’s communication with God came through in this section where women displayed a more feminine and sexual manner of speaking about God, sometimes referred to as “the perfect boyfriend.” Whereas the men from Mosaic had a clearly masculine gendered way of “journeying.” The men “wrestled” with God and even the men’s group “CRASH” uses more masculine language than the women’s group, SHE. The women celebrated their journeys in silence, while the men used brute strength to get closer to God. In this chapter, I felt compelled to use myself as my own informant as I participated most heavily while at the Silent Retreat. Although I did not feel the Holy Spirit as Pastor Fred had hoped, it strengthened my understanding for how my informants spoke to God.

Prior to departure, my focus was to research how Christianity could influence different levels of politics and economics, as I had an assumption that they were inseparable. However, when I began to interview members of Mosaic, their disinterest in politics was ironically, very interesting. Discussing politics is not everyone's favorite past time and not something one should delve into upon meeting someone new, however the topic remained faux pas my entire time with Mosaic. It was prior to the 2012 Presidential election, but interest was still lacking. What my informants *were* interested in was their personal relationship with Jesus and how to be the best Christian they could be. Although the institution of Mosaic was not the most important part of their journey, a new and contemporary church offered these Christians a perfect place (for now) to foster their relationships.

The individualist nature of the American's Christian journey should come as little surprise. As Alan Wolfe remarked how American's are "democratic in their political instincts, geographically and economically mobile, attracted to popular culture more than the written word, Americans have for the longest time shaped religions to account for their personal needs. This personalization should come as little surprise in a country that places such high premium on the individual (Wolfe 2003:2).

As I have stated in the beginning of the first chapter, this thesis was to analyze the different cultural dynamics that I have encountered throughout my study. These aspects that presented themselves repeatedly were the deep desire for perfection, as well as the paradoxical nature of their belief when encountering everyday life. They desired to be perfect, however no matter what they did, it was never enough. They always believed they could do better. Conflicted feelings then emerged when faced with the impression that they were not good enough in their own eyes and through God's. From these conflicted feelings, different social and cultural dynamics arose, which I have discussed throughout this thesis. Sometimes not living up to the pressures of being a perfect Christian could incite a move away from Christianity all together, but more often then not, they continued, "journeying." To the Mosaic Christians, God is real. God is immediate. God is there to answer their prayers and guide them. To borrow once again from Tanya Lurhmann, "God is not a rejection of modernity, a refusal to embrace the modern, or a denial of modern ways of thinking. This near magical God is an expression of what it is to be

modern” (Luhmann 2012: 301). This immediate God is helping them to navigate their way through life and providing answers to the many paradoxes that they encounter on their journey. God is their compass.

REFERENCES:

Anderson, Allan

2004 *Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*.
Cambridge University Press 2004

Austin-Broos, Diane

2003 The Anthropology of Religious Conversion: An Introduction, page 1-12. In
Buckser & Glazier (ed.), op.eit.

Bell, Catherine

1997 *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford University Press

Bielo, James

2007 “Belief, Deconversion, and Authenticity among U.S. Emerging
Evangelicals” *Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology*.
ETHOS Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp. 258–276

Cannell, Fennella ed.

2006 *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham: Duke University
Press, 2006

Carrette, Jeremy & King, Richard

2005 *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*.
Routledge Publishing

Cohen, Anthony

1994 *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*:
Routledge Publishing

Coleman, Simon

2006 “When Silence isn’t Golden: Charismatic Speech and the Limits of
Literalism” (In Matthew Eric Engelke & Matt Tomlinson (eds.), *The
Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*.
Berghahn Books (2006)

Comaroff, Jean and John

2000 Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming. *Public
Culture*, Volume 12, Number 2, Spring 2000, pp. 291-343. Duke University Press

Csordas, Thomas

- 1997 *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement.*
Berkeley: University California Press.

Engelke, Matthew and Tomlinson, Matt, (eds.)

- 2006 *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity.*
Berghahn Books, New York
- 2007 *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*
University of California Press. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

Eriksen, Annelin

- 2009 Healing the Nation: In Search of Unity through the Holy Spirit in Vanuatu. *Social Analysis*, 53(1), 67-81

Harding, Susan

- 2001 *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*
Princeton University Press

Harr, Stephen

- 1996 The Paradox of Moral Humility
American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 2 (April) pp. 235-241

Kapferer, Bruce

- 2002 *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery.* Berghahn Books.

Kusenbach, Margarethe

2003. "Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool."
Ethnography, 4 (3): 455-485

Levitt, Peggy

- 2007 *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape.* The New Press

Luhmann T. M.

- 2004 Metakinesis: How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity.
American Anthropologist, 106: 518–528. doi: 10.1525/aa.2004.106.3.518

Mahmood, Saba

2004 *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press

Marti, Gerardo

2005 *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multi-Ethnic Church* Indiana University Press

Martin, D

1990 *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Martin, D

2002 *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*. Oxford: Blackwell

Marx, Karl

1844 "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction
Deutsch Französische Jahrbucher Journal

Meyer, Birgit

1998 "Make a complete break with the past." Memory and Post-colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse. *Journal of Religion in Africa* XXVII (3): 316-349.

Luhrmann T.M.

2005 The Art of Hearing God: Absorption, Dissociation, and Contemporary American Spirituality *Spiritus*, vol. 5: 133-157.

Luhrmann T.M.

2012 *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* Random House 2012

Peterson, Eugene H.

2002 *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs: NavPress

Petrie, Rebecca

2009 *Falling Into His Grace: The Power of a Life Laid Down* Belgium.

Poll, Solomon

2006 *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg*. Originally 1962 Free Press. New York

Rappaport, Roy

1999 *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Robbins, Joel

2004 The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity
The Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 33 (2004). Pp. 117-143

Robbins, Joel

2007 Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time,
And the Anthropology of Christianity. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 48,
No. 1 (February 2007), pp. 5-38

Russell, Bernard

1994 “Structured and Semistructured Interviewing” (pp. 208-220)
*Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative
Approaches*. London: Sage Publications

Schneider, David M.

1968 *American Kinship: A Cultural Account. Second Edition*. The
University of Chicago Press

Turner, Edith

2011 *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*. Contemporary Anthropology
of Religion. Palgrave Macmillian Publishing

Walker-Bynum, Carolyn

1987 *Holy Fast and Holy Feast: The Religious Significance of Food to
Medieval Women*. Berkeley, London, Los Angeles. University of California Press

The Holy Bible

2000 King James Version. New York: American Bible Society: 1999; Bartleby.com,

Electronic Sources:

<http://www.mosaic.org>

<http://www.mosaicneo.com/newsite>

