

TO BE IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT:

AMERICAN EVANGELICALS AND THE DILEMMAS OF BEING CHRISTIAN
IN A SECULAR WORLD

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”To be in the world but not of it” is inspired by the Bible verse John 15:19 (ESV version): ”If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”.

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INTRODUCTION

It was a sunny Sunday morning and me and my informant May, a young woman in her early twenties, were driving on the interstate on our way to church. She looked at me and asked me if I had ever seen anything so beautiful that I could not take my eyes of it. I tried to think of an answer as she continued: “It’s the most beautiful thing you can imagine. Like the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen. Then multiply it with 5000 light years; *that’s* how beautiful the cross is to me”. Her voice was softened and her eyes sparkled as if she was talking about an intense love. As she spoke she looked out the window and threw her arms about while saying: “That’s why I think this day is beautiful and what’s around me is beautiful. Yes, there is pollution in the air and bad things like that, but it’s *beautiful!* And it is something so beautiful that we as humans cannot understand the full beauty of Christ”.

To May, Christ is the most beautiful and important thing in her life and it is through him that she sees beauty. What does that say about her worldview? This thesis will explore American Evangelicals’ worldview and how this as a system of meaning influences their approach to the culture¹ and the society they live in. I have done six months of fieldwork in a town that I will call Marystown which is situated in a southern state in the USA. Mainly, I have spent most of my time in a small Baptist church which I will call Grace Baptist Church and this church is my main source. I have also spent some time in a large Presbyterian church that I will call Dogwood Presbyterian Church, which I will use to show contrasting ideas. The problem at hand in this thesis will be this: With regards to the tension that arises when being in the world but not being of it; how are Christians constantly negotiating this boundary and keeping themselves in the faith, and how does this reflect their engagement in “the culture” and society around them?

¹ The term “culture” will be problematised in chapter five. Here I am drawing a symbolic line between the church and the *worldly* society outside. Thus, “culture” can be read as the American society outside the church and non-Christian ideas and discourses.

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What sparked my interest for this project on Evangelicals in the US was a documentary² about how George W. Bush and his strategist Karl Rove had reached out to Evangelicals to get their vote and thereby sway the election to a Republican victory. A question that came to mind was why there was such an overwhelming support for the Republican Party among Evangelicals, and which political issues were important to them. However, when I entered the field, politics did not seem to be very significant in Grace. Why was that? The answer to that led me into a new perspective after understanding that my informants in Grace Baptist Church saw politics as just another *worldly* system run by man. My new perspective was to research how they related to “the sinful world and culture” which they have to live in. But first, it is important to define what is distinctive of an evangelical.

Evangelicals in the US

“The word ‘evangelical’ has many meanings and associations attached to it, some born of popular misconception, others reflecting the fact that it is applicable to various styles of Christian religiosity”, Elisha argues (2005:20). This next paragraph is my description of my informants’ view of Christianity and of being an Evangelical.

The root of the word “evangelical” is *evangel* which derives from the Greek word *uangelion* which means “the good news”. An Evangelical is someone who is centred upon the Gospel and sees the Gospel as God’s gift to mankind. The Gospel is the story of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection which is often referred to as “the Message”. After the fall (Genesis 3:1-7, ESV) God turned his back on humanity, but sent his son Jesus, fully human and fully God, to die and pay the price for humanity’s *sin* and take on the “wrath of God”. After three days Jesus rose again and thereby defeated Satan in the greatest victory. Evangelicals believe that there will come a time of judgement after Jesus’ second coming, and eternal life in God’s Kingdom for those who follow Christ and eternal punishment in hell for those who reject him. Salvation can only come through faith alone, so whatever deeds or sacraments one might perform it does not have an impact on salvation.

Both churches I stayed in were reformed, and reformed theology holds to Calvinism³

² Frontline” -The Jesus Factor (2004).

³Calvinism is a Christian theology which consists of the belief in five points, also known by the acronym “TULIP”. Total depravity: sin has affected all parts of man. Unconditional election: God chooses his elect without consideration of individual merits. Limited atonement: Jesus both died and bore the sins only for the

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which implies that conversion is a supernatural event. After a person is exposed to the gospel there needs to be a response, but the person cannot decide for oneself. In order to get saved there needs to be regeneration first, which means that God has to open up this person's heart so that the person can be able to morally choose God. However, it is only the elect that get regenerated and saved. Before regeneration all humanity is dead in sin, but afterwards one can turn one's sin over to God and trust in Christ because he lived a perfect and sinless life. Although it is God's decision who gets saved, evangelism is still important because it may contribute "to plant a seed", which was a phrase commonly heard among my informants. Evangelicals believe that they are called upon by Jesus in The Great Commission to spread "the good news" and make "disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19; ESV version).

Evangelicals believe in the inerrancy of scripture⁴, meaning that the Bible is the true word of God without error and they therefore hold it as authoritative. This means that every choice they make will be made on the basis of it *glorifying* God or not. Although that is their ultimate goal in this *worldly* life they are very conscious of still being *sinner*s and that their choices do not always *glorify* God. The term "evangelical" is infused with different meanings according to whose perspective one takes. This section has accounted for my informants' way of seeing Christianity and their way of identifying as an evangelical. In the next section, I want to see how the term "evangelical", along with other terms like "liberal", "conservative" and "fundamentalist", developed historically in the landscape of American Protestantism.

During the First Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth century, evangelical Protestant revivalism, with its emphasis on individual salvation and cultural Christianization, became a dominant element in the religious American landscape (Elisha 2005:71). Karen Armstrong (2000) writes that the term "fundamentalism" was first used by American conservative Protestants in the early decades of the twentieth century. They referred to themselves as fundamentalists to distinguish themselves from the more "liberal" Protestants who they saw as being doctrinally false and did not take the Bible literally (2000: x). The fundamentalists wanted to go back to the fundamental basics of the Christian faith which they identified as "a literal interpretation of the Scripture and the acceptance of certain core doctrines" (2000: x). By the end of the nineteenth century, the denominations were polarized, but both liberals and conservatives were involved in social programs and co-operated in

elect. Irresistible Grace: When God calls *His elect* into salvation, they cannot resist. Perseverance of the saints: The *saved* cannot lose their salvation and are eternally secure in Christ. (www.calvinistcorner.com).

⁴ The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy was produced at an international conference in 1978 and signed by nearly 300 evangelical scholars (www.bible-researcher.com). My informants referred to this statement.

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campaigns for Prohibition⁵ despite doctrinal quarrels (2000:169). Liberal Protestants developed the “Social Gospel” which was intended to “sacralise the Godless cities and factories” in this Progressive Era⁶ (2000:169). Walter Rauschenbusch was the prominent leader of the “Social Gospel” and its ideas were rooted in the conception of Jesus as an advocate for social justice in that he fed the poor and clothed the naked (Elisha 2005). The conservatives however, would later become very critical of the “Social Gospel” by arguing that it was pointless to save a world that was already doomed (Armstrong 2000:170). Fundamentalism was a religious movement that was in strong opposition to Darwinism, scientific rationalism and social liberalism which all challenged the foundations of evangelical faith (Elisha 2005:78). This opposition was reinforced in the Scopes Trial of 1925 where this notorious case became a symbol of the Fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Schoolteacher John Scopes was prosecuted for teaching evolution which in Tennessee was a violation of the state law. Although the Christian Fundamentalists/Creationists won legally, they were ridiculed by public opinion and presented as ignorant in the major media coverage of the case. The Fundamentalists took a hard hit and stayed relatively clear of the limelight during the next half a century, but they still worked hard with building institutions at the grassroots level (Elisha 2005:78).

In the wake of this, in the 1940s, a new movement took shape which identified themselves as the “neo-Evangelicals”. They thereby claimed the term “evangelical” as a religious identity, which up to that point had been generally referring to Protestant revivalism (2005: 79). Neo-Evangelicals fought for a middle ground by placing themselves between Fundamentalism and Liberal Protestantism and this movement took off with the formation of The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). According to Woodberry & Smith (1998) “the neo-Evangelicals” were Fundamentalists who were embarrassed by the anti-intellectual image of the Fundamentalists and wanted to differentiate themselves from the more extreme elements of the movement by having a more open and engaged version of Protestantism. They did not want to separate from the world, but to be active participants in modern public life, promote social responsibility, create unity between denominations and downplay the overt apocalypticism which the Fundamentalists had (Elisha 2005:81). Although it was not a Protestant revivalism as in the late nineteenth century, it lasted for nearly thirty years from the

⁵ Prohibition is the period in the US from 1919-1933 where alcohol was prohibited. On December 18., 1917 Congress sent the Eighteenth Amendment to the states which was ratified in January 1919. Consequently, the manufacture, sale, and transport of intoxicating liquors was banned nationwide (Tindall, Shi & Percy 433: 2001).

⁶ By the turn of the century so many activists were at work seeking to improve social conditions and political abuses that it resulted in people speaking of a “Progressive Era” (Tindall, Shi & Percy 2001).

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end of the war into the 1970s. With the great visibility of Billy Graham⁷ and the institutions that he favoured, it gave the impression that a unified, culture-shaping evangelicalism had returned to America (Noll 2001:18).

In the 1960's and 70's two rulings by the United States Supreme Court led to politicization of American religion (Noll 2001:22). Prayer got eliminated in public schools and in 1973 in the case *Roe V. Wade* abortion was legalized. These rulings were perceived among Christians as a decline in national morality, but there were different ways of reacting to this "decline". Evangelicals of the "Billy Graham sort" remained politically unobtrusive or apolitical. Others, like the Baptist Jerry Falwell⁸ and James Dobson⁹, entered politics in a much more confrontational way (2001:22). Noll writes: "They, rather than the 'neo-Evangelicals' were the ones who created the New Religious Right and have made conservative support so important for the Republican Party since the campaigns of Ronald Reagan" (2001:23).

Anthropologist Susan Harding (2000) has written a monograph on Jerry Falwell and what she calls his "fundamentalist rhetoric". She writes that "during the 1980s, Bible-believing, white Protestant Christians in America broke through the array of cultural barriers that had quarantined them from other Americans for half a century" and that this Fundamentalism (as Harding names it) seemed to be everywhere (2000:79). The so-called "televangelists"¹⁰ like Falwell, Pat Robertson and Jimmy Swaggart were visible leaders of this countercultural movement. This kind of Fundamentalism had re-entered public life and became a force in the formation of the New Christian Right (2000:79). The tone was militant and confrontational as in "winning the culture back" and they were engaged with the politics of public morality in matters like abortion, gay rights, feminism and school prayer rather than

⁷ He formed the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1950 which performed extensive advance work in the form of favourable media coverage, cooperation with political leaders and coordination with local churches that provided a follow-up program for new converts. Although theologically conservative, Graham refused to be a sectarian like other fundamentalists and has remained one of the most recognized religious figures in the US (www.britannica.com).

⁸ Jerry Falwell (1933-2007) founded the organization Moral Majority which is credited to have played an important role in the election of Republican Ronald Reagan in 1980. Falwell was seen as a force in the religious right, but made lots of controversy with remarks such as blaming feminists, homosexuals and "abortionists" for the 9/11 attacks (www.britannica.com).

⁹ James Dobson founded the evangelical non-profit organization "Focus on the Family" and has been involved in politics including consulting both Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush in their presidencies on family matters. "Focus on the Family" is very vocal on moral issues like marriage, sanctity of human life and the value of male and female (www.focusonthefamily.com).

¹⁰ "Televangelists" are profiled preachers who used TV as a medium for evangelism.

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social justice (Elisha 2005:98). The leaders claimed to be influential in Republican counsels and for swaying the election in Ronald Reagan's favour in 1980, who was a self-identified "born-again"¹¹ (Perkin 2000). However, after Reagan's election the Christian Right did not gain access to the inner sanctum of political power and they found that he was a more traditional conservative than they had expected (Perkin 2000:83). Eventually the Christian Right was haunted by high-profile sex scandals¹² and financial problems, and evangelical leaders got weary of the stigmatization that was put on them after the "culture wars". It had been an undeniable force, but during the 1990's there were shifts in the political winds and conservative evangelical leaders started to veer away from the confrontational moral politics of Falwell and Robertson (Elisha 2005:99).

Again, in 2004 George W. Bush's political advisor saw potential votes in the conservative Christian population. In the 2000-election Bush received 70% of the evangelical vote which was actually the lowest of any Republican since Reagan (Coleman 2005:660). Rove advised Bush to speak openly about his evangelical Christian faith and about his pro-life views. In the election of 2004, this resulted in 78 % of the evangelical votes (2005:660). When one reviews the history of Christians in America it is clear that Evangelicals have had a visible role in public life and politics throughout the decades and that there is a polarization between "liberals" and "conservatives". But how does one distinguish a "conservative" from a "liberal", or a "fundamentalist" from an "evangelical" today?

Clarification of terms

Susan Harding (2000) uses the term "fundamentalists" for both self-declared fundamentalists and more generally for Bible-believing Protestants who may identify themselves as Evangelicals or Christians. I think that "fundamentalists" is a term too extreme to use for all conservative Bible-believing Protestants. Therefore, I want to use the term "fundamentalist"

¹¹ "Born again-Christian" is often used interchangeably with "evangelical" and it refers to the idea that one is spiritually born again in accepting Jesus Christ as *saviour*.

¹² Susan Harding calls this series of scandals "The Born Again Telescandals". This was "a year-long sequence of scandals that rocked the world of televangelicalism in the late 1980s" (Harding 2000:247). This included televangelist Oral Roberts claiming that he needed 8 million dollars or God would "take him home". His life was "spared" when he received the money from a gambler and he responded that "all money is green". Televangelist Jim Bakke was sentenced for fraud and accused of sexual misconduct and televangelist Jimmy Swaggart was caught visiting a prostitute (2000:247).

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for conservative Christians who believe in a strict interpretation of the Bible and who separate themselves as much as possible from the World which they see as dangerous in a *sinful* way. This is more in the line of Woodberry & Smith's (1998) definition where they refer to "fundamentalism" as a small subset of conservative Protestants who "emphasize strict literal interpretation of the Bible, pre-millennial eschatology¹³, dispensational theology and institutional separation from 'apostasy'". This institutional separation from apostasy¹⁴ is for instance separating from liberal Protestants and Catholics (Woodberry & Smith 1998:28). "Pre-millennials" generally believe that the world will become worse and worse ending with a period of suffering referred to as "the great tribulation". Dispensational theology is the interpretation that Jesus will come back and take the Christians out of the World before the *tribulation*.

Thus, when I use "fundamentalist" I am aiming for the cultural approach of these Christians and how they separate from elements of *Culture*. My informants' use of the term "culture" will be elaborated and discussed in chapter five, but I refer to it as the World outside the church. I want to emphasise at this point that I am using "culture" as an emic term and not as an analytical one. Hence, when I use "culture" I refer to my informants' perception of *Culture* as worldviews, ideas and discourses which are perceived to be secular and non-Christian.

When it comes to "liberal" and "conservative", these are complex terms that will be used differently in different contexts. There is "liberal" and "conservative" in the theological way where conservatives take the Bible literally and liberals see the supernatural incidents

¹³ Disagreements on eschatology (the doctrine of last things) and Jesus' return deals directly with the interpretation of the passage in Revelation 20:1-6 where "a thousand years" is mentioned. In the passage, this millennium ends with the last judgement where alive and resurrected Christians will be taken up to heaven and non-Christians will be sentenced to forever punishment in hell.

The pre-millennial belief is that Christ will return *before* the millennium where he will reign for a thousand years, but before he returns there will be a period of great suffering on earth, also called "the great tribulation". One variation of the pre-millennial view is the pre-tribulation one. This means that Christ will come back before "the great tribulation" to take Christians out of the world and then seven years later Jesus will return yet another time to the earth with the Christians to reign with him. The pre-tribulation view is also referred to as dispensational which means that one distinguishes between the church and the Jews. Therefore, when Christ and the Church is absent from the earth the Jews will trust in Christ as their Messiah and preach the gospel to those left on earth. The pre-millennials believe that the world will get worse and worse ending with the tribulation.

The post-millennials however, believe that the world will get better and better where the millennium will come gradually with revival where society will be more and more in the line of God, ending with Christ coming back at the end of the millennium as a fulfilment.

Lastly, the a-millennials believe the millennium to be a symbolic one and that Christ is already reigning from heaven with the Christians who have already died in a spiritual sense. The a-millennials believe that when the millennium ends, Jesus will return for the last judgement (Grudem 2005:26).

¹⁴ A definition of "apostasy" is renunciation of previous faith and abandonment of previous loyalty (www.merriam-webster.com).

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more as allegory and interpret the biblical stories as not necessarily translatable to the present time. However, in an emic use of “liberal” among conservatives it is infused with pejorative meaning with the liberals being doctrinally false. I will also use “liberal” and “conservative” as ways of approaching the “culture” where “liberal” will describe a more open, positive and engaging attitude towards the World and “conservative” will describe a more critical attitude to the World and not embracing it openly. This is where I want to use “fundamentalist” as an extreme to being culturally conservative. Now, it is important to note that “conservative” and “liberal” have a different meaning when used in reference to the political system. In US politics, “conservative” is mostly associated with the Republican Party whose traits are “small government” and low taxes, conservative moral values and market economy. “Liberal” is generally associated with the Democratic Party who values more government intervention in the market and is more concerned with social progressivism and alleviating social injustice.

Generally, my informants refer to themselves as Christians and I will mainly be using that term in this thesis. I will often refer to only the name of the church as representing a general attitude. This does not mean that I believe the members in each church to be totally homogeneous, but there are general attitudes which are utterly identifiable. However, I will be using the term “Evangelicals” in chapter five when I am exploring the evangelical spectrum on a more general level and comparing the churches in my study. I will use “conservative” and “liberal” within the evangelical spectrum to describe both their theological point of view and their approach to the World. I see Evangelicals operating between fundamentalism and liberalism as sociologist Christian Smith explains here:

What the evangelical movement *did* accomplish was to open up a “space” between fundamentalism and liberalism in the field of religious collective identity; give that space a name ; articulate and promote a resonant vision of faith and practice that players in the religious field came to associate with that name and identity-space; and invite a variety of religious players to move into that space and participate in the “identity-work” and mission being accomplished there (Smith 1998:14, cited in Elisha 2005, author’s emphasis).

D. G. Hart (2004:17, cited in Elisha 2005:90) argues that as a religious identity evangelicalism does not even exist. He states that it is just a construct for political leaders, academics and pollsters and that it is void of any discernable features. But on the other hand, as Elisha comments, the label and its religious history serve as a meaningful framework “with which Protestant leaders and churchgoers today structure their social and religious lives”.

In public discourse and the media “Evangelicals” is often referred to as a conservative based voting block which is important to win over in a presidential election. This voting block

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is described in the media as “social conservatives” or “values voters” who are focusing upon the pro-life issue, family and marriage and preserving morality in America. An example of this can be seen in an article in the “New York Times” where it says “Evangelicals and other Christian conservatives, a critical voting bloc for Republicans” and that John McCain in his presidential campaign of 2008 “has been ramping up its outreach to Evangelicals over the last month, preparing a budget and a strategic plan for turning them out in 18 battleground states this fall” (www.nytimes.com). In public discourse there is a stereotype of all Evangelicals as being politically conservative Republicans who only care about repealing Roe V. Wade and opposing same sex-marriage and beating people over the head with their Bible. The picture of Evangelicals in public discourse is not showing their diversity in terms of both theological and political approaches¹⁵. Elisha argues that Evangelicals tend to lean toward social and political conservatism, but that “there is greater diversity among those who call themselves Evangelicals than the use of this category usually accounts for” (2005:21).

Christianity, anthropology and me

Often when I tell people about my fieldwork among Evangelicals the most common reaction I get is that they ask me in a jokingly manner often followed up by laughter: “Did you get saved?” Several times I have also gotten reactions like “how could you endure that?” If I had done my fieldwork in India I doubt that people would be asking me in the same way if I had become a Hindu. This is also something that Fennella Cannell makes a note of:

...it is surprising how many colleagues assume that a research interest in a topic in Christianity implies that one must be a closet evangelist, or at least “in danger” of being converted – an assumption that would not be made about anthropologists working with most groups of people around the world (Cannell 2006:5)

Why is it that we have these reactions to Christianity? Is it something that is so close to us so

¹⁵ An article in The Washington Post reports that Evangelicals say they aren’t well understood beyond their “Bible-banging, evolution-hating caricature” and that many equate Evangelicals with fundamentalists. Sociologist Peter Berger is leading a two year project which aims to crack evangelical stereotypes by better understanding “evangelical intelligentsia” which the project claims has been prejudiced by a religious-secularist opposition (www.washingtonpost.com).

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that we, both as academics and general public, do not have the same tolerance and cultural relativism that we have towards other religions? The answers to these questions will not be given in this thesis, but I think that it is important questions to ask. However, one answer might be that in countries where Christianity has been the predominant religion there is a tendency of seeing Christianity as narrow-minded and non-progressive if the country has become more secular.

Christianity is actually one of the last fields within anthropology that has been explored and it has functioned as “the repressed” of anthropology, Cannell argues (2006). Christianity in anthropology has often been presented as something that has been forced upon others and mixed with local religious traditions (Robbins 2007). Robbins argues that this neglect is being actively produced and that anthropologists are denying Christianity cultural status in the places they study (2007:6). John Barker who is working in Melanesia puts it this way: “Christianity is the perennial outside force- threatening, corrupting, or merely dusting the surface of the authentic focus of the anthropological concerns. In and of itself, it is of no interest. It can never become ‘cultural’” (1992:165). Robbins suggests that one reason for the lack of Christianity within anthropology is that anthropology traditionally has focused on differences and “the others” and therefore studying Christianity becomes a study of oneself. Additionally, Cannell states that “there has often been a tendency to assume that Christianity is an ‘obvious’ or ‘known’ phenomenon that does not require fresh and constantly renewed examination” (2006:3).

In this thesis I want to portray Christianity as something which is not “known” or “obvious” and attempt to show how people choose to restructure their lives after being converted and how it results in Evangelicals’ approach to the World around them. Cannell also argues that anthropology seems resistant to the possibility of taking the religious experience of others seriously. By stating this she is referring to that although religious phenomena may be described in detail they are often explained on the basis that they have no foundation in reality “but are epiphenomena of ‘real’ underlying sociological, political, economic or other material causes” (2006:3). For my informants, being a Christian is a conscious decision that the believer has made and not something “imposed” upon them. My goal in this thesis is rather to focus on how my informants individually work to maintain and strengthen their faith through mechanisms. I also argue that the church has mechanisms that support this self-improvement.

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Moreover, anthropology favours the claim to be exercising a completely secular¹⁶ analytical approach (Cannell 2007:3). My aim in this thesis is not to evaluate whether Christians are right or wrong. However, by analyzing from a secularist and relativist point of view I am in a way saying that there is no ultimate claim for truth just by the fact of being an anthropologist, which I will show below. Still, even if my informants see Christianity as the answer to the universe it still needs to be reproduced everyday among and within my informants. I do not want to contribute in the creation/science-debate which is highly relevant in the US, but rather try to give an insight through anthropology in a better understanding of Evangelicals.

I am aware that there is an opposition between anthropology and my informants' worldview. This opposition can be seen in an interview I did with the pastor in the church I spent most of my time in. We were in his office and he was sitting across from me in his rocking chair. Earlier in the interview he had asked me what I had learnt during my time there and what the Gospel was.

Pastor John: Well ,like I said, I'm impressed that you are able to articulate to some degree what we believe, you know, what the gospel is.

Anja: I'm glad. And that means a lot to me because I'm here not to express my views but to try to understand what your meaning is.

PJ: Of course, I have a critique of that too, because I don't think you can be the objective researcher without any presuppositions.

A: Of course, I was just about to say that, and of course subjectivity will always be there and that has been a part of anthropology too, and a part of the postmodernism within anthropology. But I guess the answer is that as long as you try to be aware of your subjectivity, you may come to a "true" conclusion.

PJ:What's true?

A: Well, there you go...

PJ: That's where I would say, you know, what scares me about your worldview, to be honest, and the worldview of your...your...fellow Europeans and just people who are secular in general. What scares me about your worldview is what's right and wrong? What's right and wrong?

¹⁶The term "secular" can be problematised as by theologian John Milbank who is stating that "Once there was no 'secular' ...The secular as a domain had to be instituted or *imagined*" (cited in Cannell 2007:3). A definition of secularism is here given by João de Pina-Cabral (2001:329): "Secularism would, therefore, be that aspect of modernity by which questions of divinity were separated both from the way in which the material world is seen to operate and the way in which society is regulated".

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What I want to show with this excerpt is that there is a clash between the anthropologist who is a cultural relativist and does not have one claim for truth but sees truth as relative. The pastor however, thinks that there is only one claim for truth which is God's truth. This is also a personal meeting between me as a Secular and the pastor as a Christian. This difference in worldviews both personally and as an anthropologist has sometimes made it difficult to write this thesis when trying to show the respect I have for my informants in my writing. That the involvement of the anthropologists' personal beliefs and attitudes has consequences both for the production of scientific knowledge and the construction of personal relationships in the field is not something new in the anthropology of religion (Blanes 2006). Evans-Pritchard wrote in 1976 that he did not feel that he had to reject his own religious faith in order to consult the oracles during his study on Azande witchcraft (Evans Pritchard 1976:Appendix IV). However, Blanes (2006:231) points to the importance of an ongoing reflexive and introspective process that should be central to all research activity and to what Clifford Geertz (1978:23) defined as the core of ethnographic research: the interplay between scientific enterprise and personal experience.

Method

Before entering the field I pondered a lot over how people in the churches would receive me and my personal beliefs. I am both christened and confirmed, but consider myself an agnostic. Being both a participant and an observer was therefore difficult, because I could never really contribute to the Bible Studies or for instance pray with them. Although I participated in the social life in church such as during meals, I mostly became an observer during church events. On the outside of the church when Christianity was not in the forefront, I could both participate and observe. However, even outside of the church Christ was never far away and was often an underlying theme in my informant's interaction. An example of this occurred when the pastor invited all the college students for lunch one Sunday after church. We were playing volleyball outside in his garden and we only had the net, but no drawn up lines. One of the guys who often had a witty comment uttered: "Playing with no back line is like a church without a confession". What he was aiming for here is that what one believes needs to be clear and is not something one can negotiate on. Either you believe God's word or you don't. In this sort of setting I could enjoy myself as if I was just playing with friends and felt

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proximity. But Christ was never far away and the barrier between me as an unbeliever and them as believers was neither far away. Because of this barrier I could never try to “go native” and I could never become an insider. In a way it was impossible for me to operate within a realm between being an insider and an outsider, because in this kind of Calvinist Protestantism one is either a believer or a non-believer. As the pastor in Grace once said “there is *no* middle ground in Christianity”. However, I did feel that I found another way of being a sort of an insider. When it came to being a member of the social network in the church one could say that I was in a way an insider socially. One of the women said graciously to me once that “you are one of us now; we didn’t even have to water you”. She meant that I had quickly become a part of the group, but she knew that I was a non-believer. I was there when they were there, but I was never there spiritually. This non-presence would colour every conversation and every negotiation of my role in the group. Ruy Llera Blanes who has also done fieldwork within a church illustrates very well my position:

So, rather than a progressive incorporation of myself as a member of a community what developed throughout the construction of my “field” were certain relationships of a more intense character that built on a sense of familiarity but not belonging. Different degrees of proximity and distance were negotiated along the way, but always with a line drawn between my personal religious beliefs and their own (2006:227)

The space between being an insider and an outsider, and between participating and observing can be said to be the anthropologist’s space. Borchgrevink writes that when one begins to feel at home one should get out, and that the homelessness is the operational space of the discipline (1997). One can argue that with a fieldwork like mine, that this space does not exist because one is either inside or outside; a believer or a non-believer. However, I feel that I managed to find this space with being open, emphatic, curious and respectful of their belief. I was trying to understand uncritically their words. Susan Harding argues that listening and struggling to understand her informants did not make her a born-again believer, but that she crossed the barrier in tiny ways by acquiring the knowledge, vision and sensibilities of a believer (2000:58). She argues that, yes, one cannot both believe and disbelieve, but on the other hand that is precisely what it means to be “under conviction”. I believe that during my fieldwork I was operating in this fuzzy realm which Harding calls the space of ethnography: “The irony is that this space between belief and disbelief, or rather the paradoxical space of overlap, is also the space of ethnography. We must enter it to do our work” (2000:58). An

example where I feel that I was able to do this was during one early Saturday morning at the weekly *Women's Bible Study*. We were finishing up and we always closed in prayer. This time, one of the ladies came with the suggestion that we all pray for the woman on our left. I thought to myself; "how do I solve this"? I did not want to offend anyone. So I asked the woman to my left, an elderly lady who I had come to know at the time if it was alright if I did not pray for her. She said it was, and the women started praying. Before the turn came to the woman at my right I whispered and asked her if she would pray for the woman on my left and she did. Afterwards the lady to my left said to me: "I saw what you did. That was a very nice thing. You're thinking of others". This way, I did not feel like an outsider and felt proximity to the women even though I could not participate with them as a believer. She also accredited me with one of "the fruits of the spirit"; gentleness¹⁷.

Limitations and advantages in the field

In this section I want to elaborate on the limits and advantages I had in the field. The main part of my observations took place in the church-building during events there. This put restrictions on my time with informants since I did not live with any of them. My fieldwork became very influenced by the routine of the church which was Bible studies, joint meals, Sunday school and worships. During these events I was mostly observing and listening, but I tried to get in on social activities outside of the church like going over for diner at people's house, having lunch or just hanging out. In these activities I had a larger participating role. In addition to participant observation I did formal interviews with pastors and other main informants. I took every opportunity and invitation I had and followed the social networks that people led me in. After a while, I identified with the college student group of girls and people who did not know me and knew why I was there also identified me as this.

I spent most of my time in Grace Baptist Church, but after one month in the field I also started to visit Dogwood Presbyterian Church. However, I did not by far get to experience as much church activity there because on Sundays the services were simultaneous with the service and the Sunday school in Grace. This meant that I always had to choose which church to attend. The Sundays became my most valuable day of the week where I could spend all day with informants.

¹⁷ The "fruits of the spirit" is found in Galatians 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (ESV).

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Another practical limitation was that I did not have a car. This may have led to that I missed out on certain events around the city that I wanted to go to, but I think that in the end it was an advantage for me not having a car. People in both churches were very generous by offering me a ride and these rides often led to very good conversations. People were very concerned about me not walking home in the snow, the heat, the rain, the cold weather, the storm that was coming up or because “this is a bad area”.

By being foreign there will always be things that one will not understand because one may not know the context for it. However, being a foreigner also gave people something to talk about with me, and being a Norwegian especially. I got in contact with several informants because they had a special connection to Norway, either through relatives or they had traveled there. However, by coming from Europe people also automatically saw me as being very secular which was their view of Europe and for some that may have created scepticism about me. But then again, by not knowing too much about Christianity people wanted to teach me and by not being a believer people wanted to tell me about the Gospel.

Another methodological limitation may have been that I am a woman, because the gender-roles are complementary, especially within the Baptist tradition. Gender was more visible because the two sexes were seen as being “equal in essence, but different in function”. They had different tasks by the man providing for the family and the woman was often a “staying at home-mom”. This may have led to the fact that I had more contact with the women. For instance during meals in church, the boys and the girls among the college-students mostly sat at different tables. On Saturdays, the Bible study was divided into one for women and one for men which I obviously did not have any access to. There was never a problem with meeting the men in the church for interviews, although it would have been interesting to have access to the Men’s Bible Study also. But other than this, it was not a big limitation for me being a woman and I definitely had the advantage in getting closer to the women in the Bible study group.

Chapter outline

In chapter two, I will describe the setting of the two churches, with more emphasis on Grace. I will describe a week in the life of the church to show the flow of routines and how the church is a big part of people’s everyday lives. Being two different denominations I discuss how

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Baptists and Presbyterians differ both historically and at present. I also want to present the two main pastors of the two churches and give a brief introduction to how they differ both theologically and in their approach to *Culture* and society.

In chapter three, I will present two of my main informants to illustrate how their belief in Christ is an important part of their life and creates a “filter” for their way of seeing the world. I will argue that the transformation entailed by becoming a Christian is never complete and has liminal characteristics since they are facing dilemmas by moving across a border of the profane and the sacred; between the World and the Church.

Chapter four will follow up my argument that Christians live within a situation of liminality by preparing for the afterlife while still being in the World and I want to explore what mechanisms there are for keeping oneself in the faith. I will identify reproduction mechanisms on the collective level and mechanisms of “selving” on the individual level. This chapter will also give an insight of the social life in Grace. In relation to this, I will show how there are different arenas in church that are including or excluding and how these arenas play out in social borders that cannot be crossed by everyone.

After having explored borders within the church, chapter five will deal with the boundaries that arise in the relation between the churches and the world. Here, I will compare three churches and identify how they are placing themselves within the evangelical spectrum. This positioning is resulting from how they approach the secular and non-Christian ideas in the society they live in. I will discuss their idea of a “fallen culture” and how they need to protect themselves from it. Lastly, I will discuss how this approach affects how the churches try to make the world morally better, using evangelism or politics as a tool.

2

PREACHING, LEARNING, FELLOWSHIPING: A WEEK IN CHURCH

”Either the southern most northern city or the northern most southern city”

This quote from the pastor in Grace captures the atmosphere in Marystown. The city is situated in a southern state, but not too far south not to be influenced by the more liberal big cities up north. Nor is it too far north not to be influenced by the south, which is seen as more conservative and the main part of the “Bible belt” in the US¹⁸. In this chapter I want to present Marystown and the two churches. I will present the two denominations which the churches are a part of and continue with describing the church’s routines and the buildings. The emphasis is on Grace Baptist Church and I want to show how important the church routines are and how people structure their lives around them. There is a constant flow of patterned routines in the church which are rarely interrupted. At the end of this chapter I present the two pastors which have been two of my main informants. By presenting one pastor from each church I want to show some of the different approaches that the two churches have to *Culture* and the World outside of the church-building’s boundaries.

¹⁸ The Bible belt is in public discourse referring to the south of the USA from approximately Texas to Virginia, and up to Missouri. According to The Association of Religion Data Archive the demographics of Evangelical Protestants is far higher in this area than the rest of the US, ranging from 25-70% (www.thearda.com).

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My informants characterised Marystown as a “liberal¹⁹ city” and they generally explained that this is because of the city’s university which has always been secular. The university, which campus is a big part of the city centre, is the city’s vein which brings a constant flow of people moving to and from Marystown or just passing through. Politically, the city is situated in a county which generally votes Democratic, but the state in general has a history of voting Republican in presidential elections. Although there are churches on every other corner, my informants in Grace said that there were not many Christians in the city and that there was even an anti-religiosity coming from the university and the intellectuals there. There were also opinions about Marystown being “liberal” because of the influence from the “liberal” big cities farther north, like Washington (DC) and New York City.

Marystown, with its population of about 50 000, has a cosy small-town atmosphere with beautiful hilly scenery surrounding it. In the spring months the nature awakens into lush green scenery and blossoming cherry trees. The interstate runs through the city and there are lots of tourists in the summer months when the humid subtropical climate can hit 40 degrees Celsius. Along one of the main-roads there is an enormous shopping area with huge department stores and fast food chains and the small-town feeling suddenly disappears. Even so, it is small enough for people to run into each other when picking up a coffee at Starbucks. The streets are never crowded as people usually drive wherever they go, except for the students who are constantly jogging through the streets wearing the university’s colours. The city centre’s buildings are inspired by architecture from the early 1800’s with majestic red brick-buildings. Walking down the city’s pedestrian street one sees whites, blacks, a South American street-vendor selling scarves in every colour, a war veteran begging on the street next to a fancy restaurant. The word is that Marystown is becoming more of a middle class city and that the prices on real estate are becoming more and more expensive. The houses I got to see through my informants were new, light and spacious modern houses. However, during volunteer work in the church I got to visit a trailer park where people had plastic in front of broken windows. Marystown is as diverse as the US itself.

¹⁹ I perceive that by “liberal” my informants meant both politically and religiously. Politically as in Marystown being a liberal voting area and religiously in that they thought that there were “few conservative churches” there. I will mention later that they saw themselves as being the most conservative church in town.

Grace Baptist Church

Grace is a part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and affirms the Baptist Faith and Message which is the faith confession of the SBC. The SBC is a dominant denomination in the US with its 42 000 churches and 16 million members, and especially dominant in the south-east region (www.sbc.net, www.thearda.com). This denomination came about in 1845 after a split with the northern Baptists due to disagreements on the slavery in the south. In 2000, the SBC revised their confession of faith which led to controversies. The issues which were perceived as controversial from the secular point of view was the emphasis on gender roles in that wives should submit to their husbands' leadership²⁰, and that marriage is between one man and one woman which opposes same-sex marriage²¹. Accordingly, the SBC is a conservative denomination.

When Grace started in 1960 it was actually an intentional mission church from a larger Baptist church in the city centre and it was to serve this specific neighbourhood. However, after a while it grew strong and became an independent church. The first time I went to Grace Baptist Church I enter the parking lot and see a brown brick-building. On top of the left part of the building there is a spear reaching for the sky. I am in a neighbourhood outside of the city centre and there are private houses, both villas and one-storey-houses, right next door. In this avenue alone there are three churches situated. Outside there is a fairly big lawn which is well-kept with a couple of trees and benches. It is quite a big building, but as I find out, the church only has about 150 members.

I walk in to what looks like the main entrance and I see a stack of folders and read “do you have trouble believing?” and “are you a good person?” I continue on into a long hallway and see a smiling woman noticing me and asks me if I need any help. This is Anita, the ministry assistant, who is one of the three persons in addition to the pastor and the pastoral assistant who are hired to work there full time. I explain that I have an appointment with the

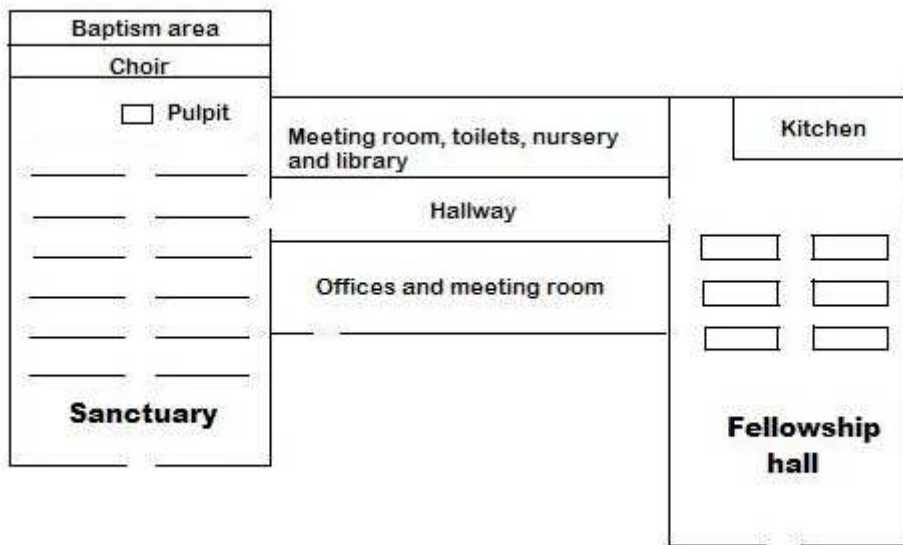
²⁰ Excerpt from Article XVIII: “The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation” (www.sbc.net).

²¹ Excerpt from Article XVIII: “Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race” (www.sbc.net).

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pastoral assistant, Matthias, and she takes me to the offices. Matthias, a polite and formally dressed man, welcomes me with great generosity and invites me back to church the day after for a meal and Bible study. The next day I am at my first event in church and Matthias gives me a tour. This overview (figure 1) gives an idea of how the rooms in the church are distributed:

Figure 1



The *Sanctuary* is their place of worship which is mainly used on Sundays. It can seat about 200 people, but the average turnout was about 160 people at the main worship on Sundays. The interior in the *Sanctuary* is not extravagant, as Catholic churches often are, which symbolises that this is “just a building”. The church is not the building in itself, but the people in it which is often referred to as “the body”. The pastor in Grace once said: “This church is not in this house...It is just a building and if it burns down we’ll meet somewhere else”. The walls are white and there are wooden benches with pillows that make them more comfortable. There is a classic piano at the left in front of an elevated area where the wooden pulpit is situated. Behind the pulpit there is another elevated area where the choir stands in front of a glass window during *Sunday Morning Worship*. There are no specific decorations or ornaments as one would find in a catholic church here, but on the wall behind the choir there are white wooden crosses all over the wall with the glass window in the middle. It has beautiful deep blue colours with a cross in the centre, and underneath it says “go therefore and

make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, ESV). This window can be drawn back and behind it there is a tub which is used for baptism.

Continuing on through the hallway there are meeting rooms, toilets, offices and a nursery. During every Bible study and worship the *Nursery* is available and people sign up to help. This way people can participate without being disturbed or worrying about their kids. The church also has its own library where one can find all kinds of theology books, Christian living-books, children’s books, books for women, fictional books and romance novels; all from a Christian point of view. At the end of the hallway one enters the *Fellowship Hall* which is the most important room in the building when it comes to establishing and maintaining social relations. The name of this room is in line with an expression often heard when there is a gathering; “to enjoy Christian fellowship”. The *Fellowship Hall* is a big area where one can adjust the room for the occasion with partitions separating the room into smaller rooms if needed, as is the case with the *Sunday School* classes. The *Fellowship Hall* is used for Bible studies, joint meals, baby showers, lunches or any other social event. There are always tables placed in the room and in between the kitchen and the *Fellowship Hall* there is an opening with a counter which is ideal for serving food.

There are people of all kinds of income in Grace, but I will generally classify it as a middle class church. You will find doctors, teachers, academics or people working in the IT-business. It is predominantly a white church, and I only know of one black member. The church is funded only through donations from the members and people attending. It does not receive any funding support from the state because the US was established as a secular state and is neither supporting nor opposing any religion. Four times a year there is a church conference in Grace where the economy is discussed and new members get approved. One of my informants told me that every member is given an estimate of expected contributions throughout a year. On average, there was collected about \$ 6400 every Sunday, which is about \$ 40 per attendant.

The church’s structure is a hierarchical system where the pastor and the pastoral assistant does most of the teaching and therefore is in charge of most of what is being taught. There are also four deacons²² who are elected for two years at a time. They have a council with the pastor

²² The deacons’ tasks according to Grace are: •Supporting and assisting the pastor in all matters relating to the ministry of the church •Leading and supporting the members in Christian discipleship, spiritual growth, and personal evangelism. •Serving members through prayer, encouragement, visitation and assistance. •Overseeing membership matters, including new member visitation and recommendation. •Serving the Lord’s Supper, taking and counting the offering.

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where they discuss propositions for changes and these will eventually be presented for the church conference and voted upon. At the church conference, held every quarter, new members also need to be affirmed by the other members, although this is mainly a formality. To become a member one has to attend church for quite some time and get to know the pastor. Then after a while of attending one “comes forward” at the end of *Sunday Morning Worship* and gets introduced to the congregation by the pastor. It is not until the next church conference that one is formally approved as a member. This affirmation happens by that the pastor reads up the new names and the members clap to affirm. This way the church functions as a democracy. However, the pastor uttered at one of the worships that the church is *not* a democracy, but a theocracy run by Jesus Christ and through congregational processes. This was uttered when he was going through “The Baptist Faith and Message” where there was only one thing he did not agree with. The confession of faith stated that “the congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes” and he found it necessary to emphasise that the church is not a democracy, but a theocracy.

Next, I want to give a description of the events taking place during a week in Grace Baptist Church and describe the most important days for the congregation to enjoy Christian *fellowship*.

The week starts at Sunday

Sunday- the Lord's Day

The week in the US calendar does not start with Monday, but with Sunday. Sunday is called the Lord's Day and this is the busiest day in church. Sundays in church usually start with *Sunday School* at 9:30 AM, except for every third Sunday in the month when there is “donut and bagel-fellowship”. This means that people show up at 9:00 AM and there are fresh donuts, bagels and coffee available in the *Fellowship Hall*. During “donut and bagel-fellowship” there is a regular speaker who does announcements, and everyone who has their birthday that month goes (more or less voluntarily as they are usually exposed with joy by others) up to the speaker and everyone sings “Happy Birthday” with “God bless you” in the middle of the song in stead of their name. On Sundays many of the men are wearing suits, but

if not they are more dressed up than usual, and the ladies are wearing skirts, dresses or a nice top. Everyone has made an effort to dress up. The atmosphere seems very positive and friendly as people greet each other smilingly with “how are you”, the women giving each other a hug and the men shaking hands.

After the announcements, people hang out in the *Fellowship Hall* and chat over coffee, new babies are being adored and people tell each other about the week gone by. There are greeters by every entrance welcoming people to church and the church van is arriving with people who have been picked up because they have difficulties getting there themselves. After a while, the *Fellowship Hall* gets transformed with partitions into *Sunday School* mode and people slowly go to their *Sunday School* class. The kids have a class of their own and the same goes for the college students, but in the following I will focus on the adults’ *Sunday School*. The adults can choose between three classes which change every quarter. People take turns of teaching, but it is mostly the staff or the deacons who teach the classes of 10-15 people. The classes consist of reading a specific book of the Bible by discussing and interpreting scriptures, or going through a topic like church history. In *Sunday School* everyone brings their Bible and listens attentively. There is room for discussion, and the conversations often revolve around what is *biblical* and not when one is in a given situation as a Christian. People share their weaknesses and give each other advice. Every time there is a gathering of people as in *Sunday School* or Bible study a person always opens and closes the occasion with prayer. This is usually the person who leads if he does not ask someone to do it. This kind of opening is generally to ask God if He will bless their time together and make it fruitful and instructive, and that it will lead to His *glorification*. At the end of the occasion a person will close in prayer and ask that this moment may be educational and that people may use what they have learnt and the person might pray for the pastor who is soon about to lead the worship.

The *Morning Worship* at Sundays starts at 10:45 AM and people start moving from their *Sunday School* classes through the hallway to the *Sanctuary*. Along the way people greet newcomers, as there are people who only come for worship, and the atmosphere seems cheerful and very friendly. The regular piano player plays hymns as people chat and find their places and after a while the pastor stands in front of the first rows and starts by welcoming the congregation and does the *Opening Prayer*²³. He is wearing a suit and if you saw him in a crowd you could not tell that he is the pastor. After the *Opening Prayer* two hymns are sung

²³ The functions of the different types of prayers during *Morning Worship* will be elaborated in chapter four.

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before the *Morning Prayer*. The congregation is not shy of singing no matter how their voices are; this is part of worshipping God. What follows next is the *Morning Prayer* which is a longer prayer where the pastor also does prayers that have been requested to him beforehand, which is for instance “lifting up” specific named people who might be for instance ill, going on a journey or expecting a child. The congregation bows their heads while the pastor prays and there is complete silence before the congregation answers amen to his amen. Throughout the worship people are very focused on what the pastor is saying and might nod and whisper amen when there is something they truly agree with. Some might raise their hand a little while singing, but physically people are very calm. There is no apparent expression of physical participation such as raising hands, only mental and spiritual participation. Another hymn is sung before the *Offertory* which the deacons go around and collect. One of the deacons always does a “prayer of thanksgiving” after collecting money and prays that the *Offertory* will lead to spreading the Gospel both around the world through missionaries and locally here in Marystown.

A hymn is sung afterwards and it is time for *The Word*. A section of the scriptures is read aloud by the pastor before the *Message*, which is the pastor’s preaching upon that section. In the preaching, the pastor is tying this Bible sequence up to other parts of the Bible which might be relevant. He is preaching on what he believe is the true meaning of the passages, word for word. He often slips in stories from the news or even from his own life to illustrate examples and even asks the congregation questions to challenge them to think. But ultimately he tries to show that his words cannot even express how grateful they should be for what Christ has done for them, how *sinful* and *undeserving* they are of His love and how they should always strive to *serve* and *glorify* Him. Every first Sunday in the month it is the *Lord’s Supper* before the *Message*. The deacons pass around a silver platter with holes where the little cups of wine are steady as they are passed through the congregation who is staying in their seats through the whole communion. The wine is a symbol of the blood that Jesus shed for *sinners*. Afterwards another silver platter with little wafers is served by the deacons and this symbolises that Jesus’ body was broken. The deacons pass it around to the congregation first and to the pastor at the end. There is a solemn atmosphere in church when this is carried out and it is followed by silent prayer where one can hear a needle drop.

A “hymn of commitment” is sung after the *Message*, but first the pastor says that if anyone wants to come forward and declare that Jesus is Lord and seek baptism, or maybe one is already baptised but wants to seek membership, the doors of the church are open. About every other Sunday someone “came forward” and walked down the aisle and stood next to the

pastor during this last hymn. The prospective member(s) could be a baptised Christian who wants to seek membership or a new believer who is seeking baptism by “coming forward”. He then introduces the newcomers by telling a little bit about them and asks the congregation if they affirm the decision made by this person/family and commit themselves to be praying for this person/family. The members in the congregation raise their left hand to symbolise their affirmation and commitment. The congregation lines up afterwards to welcome the new member/s to the church with great joy if someone has “come forward”. Afterwards, people hang around for a while to chat after the approximately 80 minutes long worship.

Every first Sunday of the month the *First Sunday Lunch* takes place in the *Fellowship Hall* after worship. People are encouraged to bring a dish to the buffet and the result is a long table full of salads, pasta, fried chicken and casseroles and a table of sweets waiting for afterwards. Food is very important in Grace and I was told: “We’re good Baptists, we eat!” followed by laughter. A lady once told me that it was typical for Baptists to gather over a meal and she thought that it might be because earlier people had a long way to church and needed a meal when they arrived. During lunch, the pastor walks in between the tables and greets and chats with people, and introduces himself to newcomers.

When people leave church, around 12:30 PM after worship or around 1.30 PM after lunch, they often eat out later or go to dinner at each other’s houses. At 4 PM there is a youth meeting in church, and at 6 PM the *Evening Worship* starts in the *Sanctuary*. About 50 people show up for this worship. The attendants at the *Evening Worship* are the core of the church. The core is people who attend every event, including the *Morning Worship* earlier in the day, and participate actively in the church. The worship takes place in the *Sanctuary*, but people only sit at the right side where the pastor is standing on the floor in front of the congregation and not at the pulpit. The atmosphere is much more casual than at the *Morning Worship*. People might be dressed in sweatpants arriving with a “coffee to go”, and the pastor has changed out of the suit. People often have a regular seat at this worship, and the deacons’ families often sit at the front rows and the pastor’s family always sits at the left front at the third row.

This worship takes shape as a lecture where a topic is presented by the pastor. The deacons take turn of leading the prayer in this hour long worship before the pastor takes over. They start by singing three hymns at a row and afterwards the children goes to the *Nursery*. The deacon then asks if there are any prayer requests. Someone might mention someone in the family who is ill or someone they know who have been in an accident that they need to

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pray for. A prayer request can be about someone taking an exam, Christians around the world who are persecuted, missionaries, families who have lost someone or that God may work in people's hearts. There are also "praises" which is something they want to thank God for which they have prayed about. This prayer during *Evening Worship* is special because the floor is open for anyone to pray. Sometimes people are shy, and sometimes maybe seven at a row prays aloud. They pray for the things requested and maybe things that they want to pray about themselves. When the silence lasts for a certain amount of time, the deacon finishes by praying the requests that might be left on the list and prays that God might work through the pastor now that he is going to do his lecture and that the congregation will have "the ears to hear"²⁴.

The pastor might lecture on for instance baptism, how to pray, how to worship or go through the Southern Baptist faith confession topic by topic. The pastor's way of lecturing is very passionate and with great knowledge of the Bible, but he does not use grand gestures or move around a lot. He gesticulates and raises or lowers his voice. When he preaches at the *Morning Worship* he is more intense and might raise his voice into shouting if he wants to make a point. He can also get emotional when talking about Jesus and what he has done for Christians. During the *Morning Worship* on Palm Sunday he uttered with a breaking voice: "How can you as a Christian not be moved by this? When you read about the sufferings he had?" But when he is lecturing during *Evening Worship* he has a more laidback style of speaking and maybe even cracking some jokes, but still in a very involved way. At the end he opens up for questions and there is room for discussion and asking him for his point of view on matters.

After worship; the kids get picked up from the *Nursery* and people stay and chat in the *Sanctuary* for a while. Some of the families who I consider to be the core group have a tradition of going to "Wendy's"²⁵ to eat after the worship.

Wednesday –food for body and soul

At 5:15 PM cars are pulling in at the parking lot. The event in church is *Body Life*, where there is served a meal, which people sign up to cook, continued by a Bible study. *Body Life* takes place in the *Fellowship Hall* and there is always about 50-60 people who attend which is

²⁴ This is a reference to Matthew 11:15, ESV.

²⁵ "Wendy's" is an American fast-food chain specialising in hamburgers.

part of their weekly routine. In a trailer park in Marystown the church has their own trailer, the Sunflower House, where kids from the neighbourhood come every Friday to learn Bible stories. They come from families with less resources, and every Wednesday they get picked up by the church van and are brought to church for a meal and a lesson.

The meal is only \$3, but if you are a guest the first meal is for free. This is a very socialising event where people sit and eat and chat for 45 minutes by the tables in the *Fellowship Hall* before the study starts. Some people have regular seats, but mostly people circulate. Issues talked about are mainly the week gone by, work, kids, family members who are ill and Christian topics. Those topics can be everything from discussing other churches, talking about certain Bible topics or events related to the church. After they have eaten, the kids from the Sunflower House run out with the kids from church to play on the church's playground. Adults sit and chat and have "seconds" and dessert, until the pastor rings a bell which means the Bible study starts. The kids come in and as the crowd silences the pastor asks if there are any prayer requests. People raise their hand one after another: A church needs to be prayed for because they are looking for a new pastor, someone in church is having their wisdom tooth removed and someone's grandmother fell and hurt her hip. The pastor starts to pray by thanking Jesus for what he has done for them and how *undeserving* they are of everything they have. He goes through the prayer requests and asks that God will bless this time of study. After the "amen" the children go down in the basement to have their own Bible-lesson and play afterwards while the adults are upstairs. Everyone has brought their Bible; some even have it on their cell-phone or laptop. The pastor, who stands through the whole study, is very committed while he is speaking, but has a more casual way of speaking with some humorous points mixed in between. The undertone, however, is always serious.

The topics at the Wednesday night Bible study ranges from going through the five points of Calvinism and what the Bible teaches about church government, to going through the Book of Revelation²⁶. At the end of the pastor's lecture he answers questions from the crowd and then he or one of the deacons closes the occasion in prayer. An example of a prayer would be that he would start off with "dear heavenly father, we thank you for Christ, we thank you for the cross". Then he would ask that they will use this knowledge they have gained to *glorify* God and ask for the blessing of this church and its people and that everyone will be safe on their way home tonight. A prayer often ends with "in Christ name I pray", and everyone says "amen".

²⁶ The Book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible which is difficult to interpret and heavily discussed because it is an "eschatology"; a doctrine of last things.

Saturday- sisters and brothers in Christ

The time is only eight o'clock on a Saturday morning and a couple of women are gathering in the *Fellowship Hall* preparing for the *Women's Bible Study*. When I enter the side door next to the kitchen, I see snacks and coffee placed on the counter. The women give me a big smile and a hug and after chatting we gather around one of the tables in a corner of the *Fellowship Hall*. Everyone brags to the person who has made the food and a couple of latecomers join as the Bible study starts. There is usually from 6-12 women at this study. The gathering is a mix of 20 year olds to grandmothers. Age does not matter because they see each other as "sisters in Christ". A book is passed around for writing prayer requests which will be prayed for at the end, but they open up with prayer to bless this study. The group is seen as a place to share and the women can get personal on themselves and their families. This study is based on being Christian seen from a woman's perspective, and there is a general policy that what is said in the room stays in the room²⁷.

The women choose specific Christian books with study-guides and they go through one chapter each time. The first book we went through during my time there was "A Woman's Walk with God". This contained lessons and advice for how to as a woman "grow in the fruits of the spirit". These are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and self-control, and we discussed one fruit each Saturday. The women talk a lot about how to become better, and they often talk about their flaws and that they are never good enough. They are "always sinners". They share their weaknesses and encourage each other that through Christ one can *grow* and keep one's thoughts purer, become better human beings and better wives. The women would sometimes get emotional and they let their guard down on these intimate times of *fellowship*. Down the hall, the *Men's Bible Study* also gathers on Saturdays in a meeting room. They drop in to the *Fellowship Hall* to have some coffee or breakfast, but they are careful not to come in if the women are not finished yet. The women would also be aware if one of their husbands has come into the room to wait for his wife if the men had finished first. This Bible study is an hour greatly appreciated by the women and afterwards they rush back to their busy lives in the outside World.

The week in Grace is very habitual in that the week follows a specific pattern which is repeated every week. Furthermore, only the topics change during worships and Bible studies,

²⁷ The women knew that I was doing research and I have their permission to use what they have said in this thesis, as long as it is according to scripture and speaks God's word. Accordingly, I will try to administer their words the best way I possibly can.

but the structures and routines are generally the same.

Dogwood Presbyterian Church

Dogwood is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) and is significantly smaller than the SBC with its 1400 churches and 350 000 members. The PCA arose in 1974 after they separated from the Presbyterian Church USA “in opposition to the long-developing theological liberalism which denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture” (www.pcanet.org). Another reason for separating was that the Presbyterian Church USA ordained women, but the PCA held to the traditional role with women only working in the church offices. The PCA’s confession of faith also regards marriage as being between one man and one woman, but they have a section on divorce that the SBC does not. The PCA allows divorce if one of the parties commits adultery. Then the aggrieved party can seek divorce and remarry as if the other party was dead. This is more liberal than the SBC, and this way the PCA is conservative on the theological side by not ordaining women, but more liberal when it comes to marriage.

Dogwood is a big church both visually and by membership. They have about 1200 members, but during the school year there are about 1800 attendants because of the many students from the university who attend. This church is especially affiliated with the university as they have a Christian study centre on campus, and many of the professors and academics from the university are members. The church wants to be a church for mainly the university’s faculty and staff, and through them reaching the students also. This is very different from Grace which has a more “us versus them” relation to the university. During a Bible study in Grace, Pastor John asked where one could find opposition to God in this town. No one answered right away and he started to answer: “Elitism... intellectualism...” and another person followed up by saying relativism and postmodernism. The answers can easily be affiliated with the university and it seems as if they were hinting at that. During my time there I understood them as being critical of the secular and postmodern atmosphere at the university.

On the inside the church building is almost a labyrinth, if one is unfamiliar, with many rooms and hallways. There are 27 people in the staff and five pastors altogether. Compared to Grace, everything is bigger in Dogwood. The worship area is a huge wide room with chairs

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set out for about 500 people. The enormous windows behind the choir let the light in and the beams in between the windows take the shape of a wooden cross.

At Sundays there are two main worships and the first one at 8:45 AM always includes communion (*Lord's Supper*). Afterwards there is an education hour for both adults and children, and at 10:45 the second worship starts. This way people can choose when they want to take communion. The worship in Dogwood differs somewhat from Grace in that they have more liturgy. This means that the pastor reads a phrase and the congregation answers according to what is printed in the brochure. The worship is at a whole more “contemporary” because the lyrics of the hymns are shown by power point up on the wall and hymns are distinctively more contemporary adjusted to the full band accompanying. The way people worship is slightly more physically expressive. When standing in the back one can spot a couple of hands in the air during hymns and sometimes if the hymn is up-tempo there is a tendency to clap. However, the clapping never really spreads through the crowd, so it does not resemble a charismatic form of worshipping.

It is quite a different experience to go to worship in Dogwood than in Grace. There is a more personal atmosphere in Grace and you always bump into someone you know and one has a general overview over who is there and not. When attending worship in Dogwood one can come and go and not talk to anyone, because of its size and crowd. It would be very hard to keep track of who is present and not.

A week in Dogwood is also habitual, but structured differently than in Grace. Dogwood does not have an evening worship on Sundays, but instead they have a *Prayer Service* on Wednesday evenings where people can come to pray out loud in the small crowd that gathers in the worship area. At Wednesdays they also have a women's Bible study at 9:15 in the morning. This consists of a one hour lecture which the women take turns of doing and afterwards they divide into circle groups of about 10 women. This is a much more personal and informal hour where the women share experiences from their lives, pray for each other and have snacks.

Evangelical but not similar

Although in different denominations, both Grace and Dogwood are evangelical churches. They both focus on the Bible's authority being the true word of God (*sola scriptura*),

evangelism and having a personal relationship with Jesus through faith alone is what saves you, not going to church every Sunday. They are both Calvinistic churches which implies that they are in the reformed tradition and holds to Calvinism.

They can both be seen as intellectual churches in the sense that the preaching goes in depth of the Bible and they have lectures and discussions. Grace has a lot of teaching and focus on the scriptures in itself. When the pastor is preaching he is not just picking a subject from the Bible and then preaches freely using anecdotes and stories relating to the topic which is easy for people to listen to. He is not there to entertain, but goes through the scriptures word for word and uses cross-references. One of my informants once characterised it as “a very intellectual church” and said that maybe it would scare off people who are not that educated and willing to go in depth. Dogwood has many academics and students who attend the church and many on staff has attended the local university. The preaching in Dogwood is also very substantial, but the way of preaching is calmer than in Grace in the way that there is less variation in pitch and volume of sound in the preacher’s voice.

The most distinctive difference between the two churches is baptism. The baptism is a very important step in Grace, which also lies in their denomination’s name. The disagreement lies both in the time and manner of the baptism where Presbyterians baptise infants by sprinkling and Baptists baptise by full immersion when the person chooses to do so him/herself. In Grace, baptism is a requirement for membership, either you have to be baptised beforehand in a different church or be baptised in Grace if you are a new believer. Baptism is a formal way of coming forward and accepting Jesus Christ as your saviour and it is more of an outward symbol of what has happened on the inside. However, the church is clear on the point that baptism does not save and that salvation comes through faith alone and by the grace of God.

The pastors

Pastor John in Grace Baptist Church grew up in a Christian home in the US south as a “pastor’s kid”. His father was a pastor as well as his grandfather, so he is now the third generation Baptist pastor. He was always very much “exposed to the faith” and at the age of seven he had an experience of having knowledge of his *sin*, *repenting* and believing in Christ. Around this time he got baptized. He started college wanting to become a lawyer, but as the

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university progressed he could not see himself working in “the secular world” and went to seminary. He worked for a couple of years in Eastern Europe teaching at a Baptist seminary and felt a call for pastoral ministry. He was told that his gifts were in teaching and preaching and decided to become a pastor after talking to his wife and “praying about it”. He *served* in a little church for five years before coming to Grace where he has been a pastor for eleven years. Being a pastor involves the whole family as they are seen as role models in church. Pastor John and his wife have five children who are always there during church events. His wife homeschools their children and one child plays the piano during *Evening Worship*. To Pastor John, being a pastor is not just something that pays the bills; it is a “call for serving” and it is absorbing. He sees his main tasks as teaching, preaching and praying, but he is also a *shepherd* for the members, a *discipler* for new believers and a “guardian of the church’s orthodoxy”. Once he commented on the different approach Grace and Dogwood have towards the outside world. He said that “they will embrace the culture and we will be more fundamentalist”. He continued with an example to show the difference between them. In Dogwood they would show a movie in church and then discuss the theological aspects of it, while they in Grace would abstain from watching it.

Dogwood has five pastors, but the senior pastor does most of the services. My informant among the pastors in Dogwood is the pastor for mission, David, who once taught the younger senior pastor in Dogwood in seminary. David became a Christian when he was 15 years old. He said that he first wanted to become an artist to communicate Christian values through art “because he loved culture”. But after a while he decided to help people in stead, become a veterinarian and worked as a veterinary missionary in Asia for a couple of years. During that stay he found it very fascinating to talk to Hindus and Buddhists and considered becoming a pastor. However, he did not really want to because he felt that the word “pastor” had negative connotations and he did not want to be connected to the church. But finally he came to the conclusion that he could do it differently and enter the church with his attitudes. He worked for twelve years in Europe before settling down in Marystown and Dogwood where he has been a pastor for two years after the senior pastor called him and wanted him there to carry out their vision. David describes himself as “theologically conservative, but culturally liberal”. He says he is “very friendly towards culture” and that “it is something we create and it’s the most wonderful thing we do”. The first time I met him he told me that as a church they wanted to move away from a certain way of being Christian which could be perceived as being excluding. In stead of showing what they are against like Colorado

Springs²⁸, they want to show people what they are *for*. I see this as withdrawal from a more vocal presence in the World which for example Jerry Falwell had by going out and morally condemning homosexuals, feminism, porn and abortion. David teaches the college students in church to meet the World by being comfortable and even enjoying diversity without “making the mistake philosophically of being relativistic”. This way, he thinks that you are able to be with people who completely disagree with you without going “we’re both a little bit right”.

This latter statement shows a different attitude towards being in the world than among my informants in Grace in that David is faithful to his conservative theology, but still enjoys the diversity and is comfortable in the World. Pastor John in Grace sees certain elements of *Culture* as dangerous which Christians need to separate from. This symbolic line between the two churches and the World outside will be thoroughly discussed in chapter five. In the next chapter I want to introduce two of my main informants in Grace and see how their Christian worldview influences their way of being in the world.

²⁸ By Colorado Springs he is referring to where James Dobson founded his evangelical non-profit organization “Focus on the Family”. See also footnote number 8 in the introduction.

3

FROM CONVERTING TO GROWING

After having described the routines and the social arenas in the two churches I want to shift to an individual level and focus on two informants in Grace Baptist Church. In this chapter I want to give insight into two of my main informants' lives and how they structure their life around the Church. I want to show how their worldview, priorities and decisions are always coloured by their belief in Christ. May has only been a Christian for about a year and is constantly meeting new challenges in her everyday life after she is "born again". She sees the World through a different filter now, and the World does not look the same any more. Matthias has been a Christian since he was a teenager and he is now a family-man in his mid twenties. He is now *servicing* God by working as a pastoral assistant and his new challenge is to raise his child in a Christian way, shielding her from what is *sinful* and pray that she is one of "God's elect" and becomes a Christian. Unlike May, Matthias has found his way of being Christian in the World and he is confident of his worldview. It is paramount for him to constantly renew and maintain his faith and to *grow* in wisdom of Christ. Additionally, in meeting the World outside the Church it is essential for him to know how to defend his faith and I want to give examples of what he teaches in Church with regards to that.

My argument in this chapter is that even though the conversion process and adopting a new worldview can be seen as "rites of passage" from the outside when the new believer is baptised, there is also an inner larger process where the Christian is in a condition that has liminal characteristics. What I mean by "inner process" is an inner dialogue that arises when a Christian is constantly moving between the Church and the World outside of it; the religious and the secular. I will be using Arnold Van Gennep's "rites of passage" and focus with Victor Turner on "the liminal phase". I will not go deep into theories of conversion and speculate in

why my informants convert, but rather explore the conversion process and discuss a conversion theory by Susan Harding, which I find plausible. My argument is that the transformation to being *holy* will not happen in “this life”. The transformation is for them only confirmed and complete if the prospective “afterlife” comes because their goal is eternal life after death in “the Kingdom of God”.

May: “You gotta walk the walk, not just talk the talk”

The first time I saw May’s name was when I received a “prayer partner”-card during my first week in the field. To have a prayer partner means that you shall keep this person especially in your prayers and pray about things which might be difficult for her. This was an arrangement between the women in the church. They had gotten the idea to put all the names in a bowl and have a draw. This way “God’s wisdom” decided the couples and they were all very pleased with His results. Pairing up with May was for me a good coincidence, but my informants would have called it *providence*. When we met I said that I could not fulfil the prayer partner-duty, and she was very sympathetic about that. We were close in age and we ended up hanging out in church and also met up outside of the church. She is cheerful and friendly, and she was always very helpful to me in every way with my fieldwork. She was both my informant and friend. Once she said that she did not think of me being there as a researcher and forgot about it, even though she was fully aware of it.

May did not grow up in a very religious home, but her grandfather and mother took her to church sometimes when she was little. She grew up an hour away from Marystown with her brother and mother whom she is very close to, but May feels a spiritual distance to them. About her mother she says that “she claims to be a Christian”, but May is not sure that she is a *true believer*. It concerns her very much that no one in her family now are *true believers* and she prays a lot for them, also aloud in Church. She came to Marystown to go to the university and during her first year she found herself in a rough period relating to school and the boy she was dating at the time. However, she went back to Marystown for summer-school and got to know two college-guys from Grace Baptist Church. She went along with them for a couple of Bible studies and felt that she started to think about God, she says. May started joining even more studies because she felt that what her two friends had told her “they had to have heard from someplace good”. As the year went by she “opened up” more and more to God. She says she knew at this point that she would surrender to God and be ready

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for Him, but she was still not ready. After a while she called Pastor John and asked him about the Wednesday night Bible study. She started to attend regularly and after one and a half year she got baptised and now has many of her best friends in Grace. When she told me her *testimony*²⁹ she had been baptised for about four months and she said that she was doing very good now and seemed immensely grateful for her conversion. After becoming a Christian, May needed to “redefine herself” and she looked at the World in a brand new way. Her number one priority now is to *glorify* God in her actions and live life according to the scriptures. She is concerned with that if one is a *true believer* one wants to live by the scriptures because Jesus died on the Cross for *sinner*s. She says that one may call it morals and ethics, but for her it’s just following the scriptures. One has to follow through; one cannot state that one is a Christian and not “walk the walk”, as she described it. Today, she is still learning how to be a Christian and about the Bible and she is eager for knowledge and brings her notebook to Church. In this next section I want to describe how she has restructured her life around her belief in Christ by altering her worldview and the practices in her everyday life.

Restructuring life

May has gone through a big transformation the last year and has a new way of being in the World after converting. Every morning she gets up around 6.30 and does her daily routines and “devotions”. She starts her day with “devotions” which is praying and reading the scriptures for about 10 minutes, but sometimes it can last up to an hour. May is in her early twenties and she is working on her college undergraduate degree at the university where she is also engaged in sports. But being a student now is different than it was a year ago and now she feels different than her co-students. She said that she could only find one in each class that she could talk about Christianity for real with. In her first year at the university she partied and even drank alcohol, but now she does not touch alcohol. Her reason for that is that it says in the scriptures than one shall be sober and she believes that one cannot drink and be sober at the same time. Now if her friends are drinking she says that she cannot join them. She says it is a new way of being in the world now, and it is a long process to figure out how to deal with

²⁹ A “testimony” is a Christian’s story of conversion. To “witness” is also a word interchangeably used with “testimony”, and both words means telling a person who is unfamiliar with Christ about one’s experience of Christ to give Him *glory*. This is also a way of spreading the gospel.

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things when you see it through a new light. In the beginning she talked a lot about God and what He says about things to her friends, but she says that she has calmed down about that. She now takes a more diplomatic role and tries to explain things rather than to come on too strong which she might have done earlier.

It is also difficult to see the university through new eyes, she says. Now she sees all the competition about getting the best grades and she feels cynical about the “it’s all about me-attitude” in the very secular university environment. But she admits that this is something that she needs to work on, and blames it on her own pride which is a *sin* described in several passages in the scriptures. To discuss God with non-Christians is also something that she is in the process of figuring out how to handle. In the worldview-class in *Sunday School*, taught by pastoral assistant Matthias, they were discussing different ways of apologetics³⁰. They were talking about referring to the scriptures as authoritative as an argument. Then May uttered: ““What if someone says that they do not believe in the authority of scriptures? Do you just walk away?” She does not want to judge people, but at the same time she wants to tell them about “the truth”. She says that she would rather lead by example and show others what Christ has done for her by being patient and kind to others even if they are not being this way towards her. But if the situation arises she thinks that it’s important to be vocal. If someone takes the Lord’s name in vain she will confront them and ask them why they said it. Although she says she knows that she will get an indifferent answer she still thinks that it is important to be vocal about it.

With regards to movies, TV and music she is more critical now than she used to be. When we were driving around in her car we often listened to a Christian radio channel which played Christian music. She could also like more alternative rock, but she does not like very dark music with words like “death” or swearwords. She watches other movies than before, she says, and does not really watch much TV. Dress is also something which is of more concern than before and she recently invested in a more modest wardrobe. Her rule is that if she can’t wear it in church, it’s not appropriate. She is interested in clothes and likes to dress nice, but preferably the skirts shall reach knee-length and tops shall not have a low-cut neckline and be too revealing. A girl in church and May discussed tops with spaghetti-strings and May said that she thought it was practical when hot, but inappropriate. May told me that she had thrown away all her old bikinis because they were inappropriate and covered too little. Matthias’ wife, Rachel, lent her a book where it said that women should not wear a

³⁰ Apologetics is defence of one’s faith and how to argue in favour of this.

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bikini at all and May considered buying a two-piece which was more covering. If there were only girls around it did not matter that much, but if there were boys around she would feel uncomfortable being uncovered. When it comes to boys she says that she has raised her standards a lot in finding a potential husband and he has to be Christian. Furthermore, she says that she would rather never find anyone and to have lived a *godly* life, than to rush into something.

Although she is an outgoing person, she says that she has become quieter the last year. I learned in church that every word uttered should be to *glorify* God and one should choose ones words carefully and listen to others in stead of talking too much about oneself. Grace means very much to her and she calls the members her “church-family”. She thinks that it is very important to have Christian *fellowship* to *grow* in where one can watch out for each other so one does not go down “the wrong path”, and be *shepherded* by the pastor. She attends every event in church and the summer I was there she did an internship at the Sunflower House teaching the children Bible lessons. I consider May to be in the core group of the church because she participates on all events and seems to have a good relationship to everyone.

She seems very content with her life at the moment. She has discovered something that she sees as beautiful and perfect. Throughout the day she prays, which is a continual conversion with God, about big and small things. She says that He is always with her and that He does not let bad things happen because He wants to, but because he has to. Or else He would not be a just God; because “he is like a father”. To be in the World for May is now very different. One Sunday evening when we were at “Wendy’s” after church May had just returned from spring break which she spent in Texas doing volunteer work in stead of partying like many of her fellow students did. She was the only Christian among the other students there. Pastor John asked her: “Did you notice how your worldview had changed?” May answered: “Yes...there were things that they were saying that I could probably say a year ago which I wouldn’t say now”.

Matthias:

“In reality no one’s neutral”

Matthias became a believer when he was a teenager. In an interview he described his process from unbeliever to believer like this:

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“I mean, I didn't believe this stuff. I was very much in your shoes so many years ago. I thought evolution was right on, and that we were all just sort of out there and that we all just sort of developed. I didn't believe this at all...and God changed my heart”

He went to seminary after college and has worked as a pastoral assistant in Grace for a year. His tasks as a pastoral assistant is planning church events, teaching at *Sunday School*, worships or Bible studies and help members with spiritual problems. The latter means that he visits people in the church and talks to them about their relationship to God if they are struggling or need to talk. In the long run he might see himself as a pastor, but now in his mid-twenties he feels that he lacks the life experience and wants to have more children first. He is married to Rachel and after they had a child she quit her job as a teacher and became a “staying at home-mom”. Rachel and Matthias have clear gender roles and he describes the man's role like this: “If God shows up at your doorstep the man is supposed to answer for everything that goes on in that household; the spiritual, the physical and the financial”. Thus, the man is responsible for maintaining the spirituality, protecting the family physically and providing for them financially. He says that this is not to demean women, but that the genders are equal in essence, but different in function.

Matthias was my first contact person in Church and he welcomed me graciously. Throughout my fieldwork I attended a lot of his classes, interviewed both him and Rachel and went to their house for dinner. Although me and Matthias are the same age it somehow feels as if I am talking to someone who is older than me. Maybe it's because of his somewhat serious but friendly behaviour, his business-casual way of dressing and calmness. During a *Sunday School* class about communication in the family a man uttered that it was not natural for him by nature to talk very much, but through this course he had realised that he should try to talk more with his wife when he got home from work. Matthias thought that it was wrong to blame these things on nature, because this is something that one can work on. He said that he used to think of himself as introverted, but has now realised that it is just something that he needs to push himself on and is no excuse for not speaking up about God's word or evangelising.

“Everything I do refers to the Bible”, he once said. He believes that everything requires spiritual discernment; how you spend your time, your money and how you evaluate the media. His relationship to God is one of immense gratitude. This is clear in an uttering he made during a lecture he gave about “humility” at *Evening Worship*. He talked about how

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grateful they all should be to be living in America, but that they have not deserved any of it: “You deserve hell. That is the only thing that you deserve. Everything else is given to you by God’s mercy”. He appears to be a God-fearing man which I saw a strong glimpse of during his teaching about the subject “forgiveness”. He read a passage from one of Jonathan Edwards’ sermons³¹ which describes God’s wrath over sinners as ten thousand times as abominable in God’s eyes as a venomous serpent is in ours. A few sentences into the section Matthias’ voice started to break and he needed to make pauses in between the sentences. Pastor John responded in between the words with a kind of meditating “mmm” as if to say how right on, strong and true this is. When Matthias had finished he needed to take a moment to gather himself together and wipe his cheek: “Just a minute”, he said and looked at the congregation with a smile. This section about God’s wrath was so strong for Matthias that it put him to tears. As I could only see people’s backs I could not observe their faces, although I am sure I heard sniffles.

Matthias says it is very important to renew ones covenant with God every day. He shared during an *Evening Worship* that the first fifteen minutes of each day he is at his most *sinful*. He described it as “Satan is pounding on me in those minutes” because he is thinking a lot of negative thoughts. He says that one needs to be constantly renewed because one is being bombarded with other views everyday. In his view it is the *sin* of pride to pray little because then you think that you do not need God. Neither should you stop reading God’s scripture because then you’re saying that you don’t need God’s knowledge, that you want to submit to reason and “what the culture wants you to do”. Matthias reads about a book a week of Christian literature in addition to the Bible to constantly renew himself. People in church see him as a man with great knowledge of the Bible and a role-model.

During a *Sunday School* class which Matthias taught called “Developing a Christian Worldview” I learned a lot about his worldview. He taught us that a worldview consists of five things; God, epistemology, creation, ethics and anthropology (man)³². In an interview

³¹ The section Matthias read is an excerpt from theologian Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” from 1741: “The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much in the same way as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in His sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours”.

³² These categories were Matthias’ presentation of what a worldview is: What is your view on God? How do we know things? How was the world created? What is the basis for ethics? What is your view on man?

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with him he explained: “My worldview is basically that God created the world to glorify himself in Christ and that we all must respond to the person of Christ in a certain way and there are eternal consequences for responding to Christ in a certain way”. He believes that no one has a neutral worldview; either you are a follower of Christ or you are not. He taught us about apologetics and how to react to people who criticise and question their faith. On apologetics, he said that he preferred the way of “presuppositionalism” in stead of “evidentialism”. “Presuppositionalism” was “showing people’s preconceived notions” and making their arguments invalid. “Evidentialism” was arguing by referring to evidence that “proved that God is the truth” which according to Matthias was difficult to show people. He found it more useful to expose people’s presuppositions if he had a discussion with unbelievers. He said that he liked this style of argument better because it is easier to turn their argument upside down by using “laws of logic” which he felt was more *biblical* than “evidentialism”. We had been given hand-outs for the class and on it there were listed examples of some “secular responses on religion” which Matthias gave advice about how to reply to. I want to include some of them to give an insight into Matthias’ worldview. One of them was: “Each religion sees part of spiritual truth, not the whole truth”. Matthias’ response to this would be that “you would have to be coming from the perspective of knowing the truth to say that, and you’re also saying that there is a truth”. Another secular example was: “It’s arrogant to insist that your religion is right and to convert others to it”. Matthias’ response was: “*You* are imposing your belief on *me*”. He followed this up by saying that “in the heart of hearts they know that they are guilty”, that there is a God and that they are trying to run away so they are getting defensive. Another thing he said could be useful was to ask people for their basis in an uttering. If an unbeliever said that “a sunset is beautiful” or that “an infant should not be tortured” they have “no basis to say why”. A believer could answer that “a sunset is beautiful because it’s the creation of God”, and that an infant should not be tortured “because God is the ultimate standard of morality”.

Matthias is in another stage of life than May is. While she is meeting challenges as a new believer in the college-environment, Matthias’ new challenge is bringing up a child *biblically* in “a world tainted with sin”. In an interview I did with his wife, Rachel, she told me: “Our whole duty as parents is to teach her [the daughter] the word of God and to hope that she will become a Christian one day and that she will choose Christ for herself”. This involves shielding her as best they can from things that according to them are not *glorifying* to God in addition to teaching her about Christ. Rachel’s family is according to her not *true believers* and she gets protective of her daughter when they are visiting her family because

they “talk too much about sex and crude stuff”. Rachel and Matthias have agreed that if they are going out of town they will rather leave her with someone in church before they leave her with anyone from either Rachel or Matthias’ family. Decisions about shielding their daughter must be made all the time and they have already decided that she will be homeschooled when she gets older to teach her a Christian worldview.

The listener becomes a speaker

By giving a description of May’s and Matthias’ life I have shown on an individual level how their Christian worldview is shaped to *glorify* God after conversion. Buckser and Glazier write that “to change one’s religion is to change one’s world; to voluntarily shift the basic presuppositions upon which both self and others are understood” (xi: 2003). May sees both herself and others in a new light. As described she is in the process of figuring out how to discuss with non-believers and how to be a Christian in a secular university environment. She has distanced herself from friends she had earlier, changed the way she dresses, altered criteria for what she looks for in a possible husband and even become quieter as a person. This is a change of self which also Matthias has described when he said that one cannot blame something on one’s personality, but one can work on it. I agree with Diane Austin –Broos who writes that to convert is “to reidentify, to learn, reorder and reorient” (2003:2). I want to use the word “filter”³³ for this new way of thinking. This is a way of seeing the world with a different filter which contains different presuppositions. These presuppositions gives foundation for how one interprets the world; how the world is created, how one knows things (epistemology), what is the basis for ethics and one’s view on human beings. These are the categories of a Christian worldview which Matthias lectured on. Even though it is an emic way of seeing the Christian worldview I find these categories also useful analytically. The consequences of these presuppositions and this filter will be shown throughout this thesis.

Conversion has often been understood within the “Western tradition” as a dramatic and solitary process like St. Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus ³⁴ (Glazier 2003). However, as Rambo (2003) argues, most human beings change incrementally over a period of time and even after a long process the change is less than a complete transformation. In May’s

³³ One of my informants, Nick, mentioned once that the worldview of Christians’ was like having a different filter on and seeing the world through that.

³⁴ This can be found in the 22. Book of Acts in the Bible and describes a sudden miraculous conversion.

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narrative her conversion was not a sudden dramatic experience, but a process which took her about a year and a half. Although she describes her baptism as a wonderful moment she says that it was not something emotional that found place within her then and there, but it was more of an outer symbol of the inner process which had already taken place. With regards to May's narrative I agree with Austin-Broos who describes conversion as involving

interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course. Not mere syncretism, neither can conversion involve a simple and absolute break with a previous social life. Learning anew proceeds over time and requires a process of integrating knowledge and practices (2003:3)

I argue with Austin-Broos that May does not have an absolute break from a previous social life, nor is she compromising her faith. Although she has withdrawn herself from some previous friendships, she still have friends who are unbelievers and may drink alcohol. But when this occurs, she says she cannot join them and this way she is not compromising. At the same time she has got a whole new social network in Grace whom she considers as brothers and sisters in Christ. May has integrated new practices in her life, such as spending time in the morning for devotions and praying throughout the day, spending at least three days a week in church and even spending a summer on internship. Along with these new practices she is reading the Bible and Christian literature to gain more knowledge. This is moreover seen as a never-ending process where one can never be fully educated.

May told me that the way she started her conversion process was when she met her Christian friends and she started to listen to what they were saying. As described above, she thought to herself that this had to come from some place good and noticed that she started to think about God. One evening I was at home in my apartment, and in practice out of the field, my room-mate Peter came home from work. He told me that during his lunch break he was one step away from being hit by a speeding car and it had hit his colleague's hand. He talked about it as a near death-experience and automatically thoughts like this struck me; "that's how quick your life can be taken away" and "you do not necessarily have much time to be saved". Thoughts like this reoccurred in different situations throughout my fieldwork and I started to some extent see things through my informants' worldview. When Susan Harding did her fieldwork among born-again Christians she had the same kind of experience. After an interview with a pastor she came very close to being in a car accident and a split second after she had stopped short she asked herself: "What is God trying to tell me?" (1987:169). I agree with Harding as she writes that "this is my voice, but not my language". The language that I

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had been listening to was working in my unconsciousness. Harding suggests that if we conceive of conversion as a process of acquiring a specific religious language, she had been initiated into fundamental Baptist conversion as she sat in her car “awash in apprehension and relief” (1987:169). According to Harding the process starts when

an unregenerate listener begins to appropriate in his or her inner speech the regenerate speaker’s language and its attendant view of the world. The speaker’s language, now in the listener’s voice, converts the listener’s mind into a contested terrain, a divided self. At the moment of salvation, which may come quickly and easily, or much later after great inward turmoil, the listener becomes a speaker (1987:169)

As I find it very difficult to speculate in that this is what happened to May, hearing how she described her conversion process and including my own experiences I find accordance between her process and Harding’s theory. There is a certain language which is used in church that needs to be learned, for instance how to pray or to give a summary of the Gospel³⁵. Certain phrases with roots in the Bible are repeatedly used in preaching or in conversations. Acquiring this Christian language is a way of internalising and embodying the transformation that has taken place through conversion. Another example of embodiment is when May says that “you have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk”. Where baptism is an early step in becoming a Christian, this phrase reveals a transformation where her faith becomes reality also through a bodily approach. For her it is about physically following through and not only claiming that you are a Christian and “talk the talk”. This embodiment is on a deeper level than baptism where her faith is so internalised that she might take her perception of the world for granted.

Turning from and to?

Austin-Broos (2003) argues that conversion is a form of passage and a “turning from and to”³⁶ which is constituted and reconstituted through social practice. I agree that conversion is a passage and it is tempting to use Arnold Van Gennep’s three stages of “rites de passage”. Van Gennep argues that the incompatibility between the profane and sacred is so great that a man

³⁵ To give a summary of the Gospel in a certain language was also something I suddenly found myself being able to do after a while in the field. This became evident to me after Pastor John asked me what the Gospel was. See excerpt from interview on page 11.

³⁶ “Turning from and to” is a phrase which she credits Lewis Rambo (1993), but states that she renders it in a different way.

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cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage (1960:1). He presents a ceremonial pattern in rituals called “rites of passage” subdivided into rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation (1960:11). These three stages represent a transition from one status to another. When May started to go to Bible study with her college friends she was entering the church as an outsider, separated from her familiar surroundings. As she started to attend more regularly she entered into a transition, also called the liminal period. In this passage she was searching and left some of her earlier thoughts behind and was curious for new ones. When she felt ready and had accepted Jesus as “her saviour” she got baptised by immersion in a white cloth and uttered the words “Jesus is Lord”³⁷. Thus, she is now incorporated into the church and she is officially a believer. Although baptism is seen in church as the major step of becoming a Christian I also identify other stages in this process such as “coming forward” during *Morning Worship* and thereby stepping into the phase of liminality as a “novice”, in Turner’s vocabulary (1987). Another stage is being formally affirmed as a member on the quarterly constitution meeting as described in chapter two. Moreover, with Van Gennep’s passages, conversion can be seen as a change of status where the person is changing from non-believer to believer. Susan Harding also refers to conversion as a rite of passage where in the liminal phase the inner speech of “convicted sinners “is cast into a limbo and they begin to hear a new voice (1987:170).

However, I want to discuss if conversion as seen through the three stages of “rites de passage” may be an outer transformation. What I mean by “outer transformation” is that the new believer has presented him-/herself through baptism as a Christian and s/he is probably also perceived as a Christian by the spectators. This new Christian identity is something visible through the ceremony and the person is probably also identified as a Christian by unbelievers whom the person has relations to outside of the church. I want to discuss the possibility that within the believer there is still a process of inner dialogue which places the believer in a *constant* liminal phase because s/he is in continual negotiation with him/herself in trying to be more *holy* and less *sinful*. In this perspective, the third passage of the transformation will come when the prospective afterlife comes with its final judgement concerning heaven versus hell. It's at that final passage the believer will hypothetically find

³⁷ Baptism in Grace takes place behind the glass window which is drawn back for the occasion. This way the congregation can see both the new believer and the pastor from the waist up who are standing in a large tub which is not visible to the congregation. They are both wearing white and the pastor wears high boots in order to stay dry. I was told by a woman that if it is a girl who is being baptised “they make sure that the white she is wearing does not become see-through”. The “novice”, in Turner’s vocabulary (1987), then reads his/her “confession” which is the story on how s/he has converted. The “novice” then says “Jesus is Lord!” whereby the pastor then immerses “the novice” completely in water.

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out if s/he is a *true believer* or not and is entering into a new status.

What I am referring to as the liminal phase is that the believer is constantly moving between the Church and the World; the *holy* and the *sinful* and that the transformation is never complete. As Matthias says, he needs to *constantly renew himself* because out in the World he is being bombarded with other worldviews. Although he has changed his worldview and the filter of seeing the world after conversion, I argue that this process of moving between the Church and the World has got liminal characteristics. As Christians, their goal is to “be in the world, but not of it” and this needs to be negotiated everyday in the choices they make. When they are in church, or pray or read the Bible they reproduce and strengthen their faith in God. Although as Calvinists they believe in “the perseverance of the saints”³⁸, they often stated how important it was with Christian *fellowship*, to be *shepherded* and to keep an eye on each other so that “they don't get lost”. My analysis of this quote is that there is still a risk of going down the wrong path and the World outside the Church and its *Culture* is here a threat³⁹.

Victor Turner used Van Gennep's rites of passage to focus especially on the liminal phase. Turner argues that the attributes of liminal persons are ambiguous, “betwixt and between” and they are “threshold people” (1987:95). Turner also argues that being in liminality is like passing through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. As argued above, seen in an outer dimension the new believers are transformed by entering a new world, namely the church, and are made visible as Christians through “coming forward”, baptism and being affirmed at the constitution meeting. But my main argument is that in a larger overall process Christians are still “betwixt and between” the Church and the World by having a continual process of inner dialogue even though others may see them as transformed through baptism. In this larger overall process of rites of passage my informants are first separated from the World and adopt new ways of thinking and acting in going from non-believer to believer. In the second stage which Van Gennep calls “transition rites” they are constantly trying to transform into being a better Christian by having an inner dialogue that becomes constant in “this mortal life”. It is not until the last rite, namely the incorporation rite, that they are transformed and incorporated into the Kingdom of Heaven “with all true believers of the world when Christ returns”. This is the final stage of the continual inner transformation and the confirmation that the believer has “made it” and is a

³⁸ One of the five points of Calvinism which states that *the elect* cannot slip out of God's hand when they are *saved*, also known as “eternal security”.

³⁹ The perception of *Culture* as a threat will be discussed in chapter five.

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true believer. To illustrate, one of the older ladies once said that now she is quicker to be thankful afterwards when bad things occur in her life. She continued: “Maybe it’s because I’m getting old and because I know I’m closer to the goal. But I’m thankful He’s keeping me here too”.

What I perceive as liminality on the emic level are these negotiations and choices between the *holy* and the *sinful* in my informants’ everyday lives. There is also a physical movement between the space of the religious and the space of the secular. Although, as mentioned in chapter two, as Protestants they do not think that the church is *holy* in itself, it is in Church they come together to worship and become more *holy*. An example of the inner dialogue of tension between the *holy* and the *sinful* came up after one of the *Sunday School* classes called “War of Words” that Matthias gave. I asked him what he meant by war. He explained that when you are converted you are drawn away from *sin* to *life*, but *sin* operates in us all and there is a constant inner war going on. He said that this war can be with words too, but it is mainly an inner war and not against others. “That is a pretty strong language”, I said. He answered: “Yes, but it’s a lot at stake. Your soul is at stake”.

Turner identifies some liminal characteristics such as having no status, being equal, possessing nothing and no secular clothing indicating rank or role (1987:95). In Grace it was often stated that all believers are equal under God. It did not matter if you are a pastor or student, rich or poor; you were still *saved* if you accept Jesus as your *saviour* and live accordingly. Assets which might give you advances and status out in the World, did not count when it came to *salvation*. As mentioned above, May wanted to invest in a more modest wardrobe. She wanted to move away from her old wardrobe which she thought was too revealing. It is not possible for her to avoid secular and “American” clothing, but she wanted to distance herself from clothes that might give wrong signals with regards to sexuality in church, clothes that would not have been noticed outside of the church. Generally, the clothing in Grace is modest and as I noted in chapter two, one cannot point out the pastor in the crowd on Sundays as many of the men are wearing suits. Matthias said to his class at *Sunday School* that as he looked around the room he saw a lot of “American clothing” and he seemed critical about it. He continued by saying that “it’s ok, but America is struggling with materialism and that the culture is shaping values”. This indicates that he thinks that one should be careful about being too concerned about dress because “it’s just a material thing which is important in the secular world”. They believe that material things and possessions do not get you to *salvation* and this way everyone is equal. Another attribute which Turner argues that liminality is frequently likened to is death. As I will show in the next chapter, my

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informants in Grace have a strong awareness of the possibility that their death can come at any time. I see this focus on one's mortality as a mechanism in order to be ready for *judgement* and the final stage in the desired transformation.

Moreover, Turner writes: "Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized" (1987:95). This is also clear in Grace and I will now discuss "communitas". Turner argues that there are "two major 'models' for human interrelatedness" (1987:96). The first one is of society as structured, differentiated and often hierarchical. The second model which he argues is "unstructured" he terms "communitas":

The second, which emerges in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (1987:96)

As described in chapter two, there is great community in Grace and they often described this as *fellowship*. Every time they gather in Grace they stress that they are "having Christian fellowship" and I find "community" to be an appropriate term to use for *fellowship*. In classical Latin the noun "communio" means "sharing, shared ownership, common characteristics and sometimes community" (Lacoste 2004:322). The ritual *Lord's Supper* is also interchangeably used with *communion*. *Fellowship* also has a scriptural basis as it is mentioned in 10 verses in the New Testament⁴⁰. They find joy, support and strength in each other as they feel different from unbelievers in the secular World. In Church they can come together to worship and be *shepherded* by the pastor, who in this case becomes the ritual leader. Turner finds these characteristics of lowliness and sacredness, and homogeneity and comradeship interesting about liminal phenomena and has termed these characteristics "communitas"⁴¹ (1987:96). Additionally, Morris writes that "the values of communitas are strikingly expressed, according to Turner, by what is often referred to as the counterculture" (Morris 1987:256). Turner's example here is hippies who place themselves outside the social structure by different dress and life-style. As I will show in chapter five, my informants in

⁴⁰ An example is in 1 John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (ESV).

⁴¹ The term "communitas" is a debated term and even Turner himself admitted that the concept is difficult to define and "hard to pin down" (Brian Morris 1987:254). Morris criticises Turner for assuming that all structured relationships are unequal and that Turner ignores structural relationships that do not involve hierarchy. These are "the informal, egalitarian and interpersonal relationships that are a part of everyday life which" which Morris refers to as "community" (1987:258).

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Grace identify themselves as *countercultural* and I analyse that they are morally placing themselves outside of the *Culture*.

Turner refers to a case on Bemba girls' puberty rites⁴² where they speak of "growing a girl into a woman" when they are speaking of initiating her. Turner argues that this shows how the initiation is to have a transforming effect (1967:102). It was often talked about in Grace how important it is to *grow*. They wanted to *grow* as better Christians and *grow* in wisdom of Christ. "To grow" indicates that there is still a transformation going on and that their status is not yet complete. They are not static as Christians, but can change for the better if they *grow*. Pastor John once said during *Evening Worship* that "we live with this tension of being in the world, but not being of it". When they are constantly re-entering both the World and the Church they are crossing a boundary of tension and dilemmas. They may get into this situation as May sometimes does when she hears someone take the Lord's name in vain and wants to confront them and ask why they did so. Matthias was often talking about how important it is with renewal in the class where he taught us apologetics. To learn to defend one's faith prepares the believer for meeting the World and non-Christians who might question God's existence. Paul Hiebert was a Christian missionary who earned a Ph.D. in anthropology and for him the nature of conversion was not just an academic question (Rambo 2003:214).

Hiebert recognized from the outset that in actual experience, no conversion is total, complete and perfect. Given the complexities, messiness, and diversity of individual human experience, complete conversion is a goal to work toward, not a "finished" product (Rambo 2003:214)

This conclusion from Hiebert strengthens my argument about Protestants, especially Calvinists, having liminal characteristics because they are never a "finished" product. Another example of this I find in Dogwood as a contrast to Grace. I never heard anyone mention that they had doubts about their faith in Grace. However, some of my informants in Dogwood gave me indications of this. I got to know a married couple who graciously took me on day-trips to show me their country and had me over for dinner. The reason we met was that they heard I was Norwegian, and this created something in common for us. The husband; Nick, had been an exchange student in Norway and went back as a missionary later. Nick told me that he probably was not a Christian as strong in his heart as he thought Pastor David was, but that it was something that he had chosen to believe. He admitted that he probably should

⁴² Turner takes this case from A. I Richards (1956:121).

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have read the Bible more often, but that it was not always a priority of his. He said he sometimes had his doubts and questions, but when that arose he thought back on a special incident. When he went to Norway to be a missionary he had a contact person who lived nearby. It turned out that this contact lived right across a lady who Nick knew from before. Nick thought that this was too amazing to be just a coincidence, but had to be God's *providence*. He uses this story to lean on. This shows that Nick as a Christian is not always certain that God exists, so his transformation is not yet complete.

Nick's wife described believing as an intellectual process, and not just something that happens. Additionally, at the women's Bible study group in Dogwood where we were divided in smaller circles one of the ladies once said that she had been a little schizophrenic in her belief lately. She explained that when sat in the "chair of unbelief" it seemed impossible to sit in the "chair of belief" and vice versa. She felt abnormal when she was "jumping between chairs like this". None of the women seemed to react to this and one answered that she also felt like this sometimes; so then she was "abnormal" too. People's reactions indicated that this was completely normal. Even Pastor David in Dogwood gave me indications that he is not always sure of everything. We were talking about the fact that I was going to write my thesis from a secular point of view and he agreed that it could not be otherwise. However, he wanted to point out that my story is not over and that I might still become a Christian. This quote shows that his story is not yet over either, although he has converted and is a pastor.

And the story is not yet over (laughs). You just think it is. But it's true for me as well. I wrestle with whether life has any meaning at all, much more than anybody knows because I wake up and there is such great evidence that this is all bullshit. And that it's just an invention, that has great social effects... a couple of negative ones. That's not what I have come to the conclusion and given my life to. But I can see why someone would say that and so yeah...and my story is not yet over either...I might become a "worldling"...⁴³

Peter G. Stromberg argues that people often change their behaviour after conversions, "but that change does not occur once and for all but must be constantly re-created" (1990:43). The Christian identity is like every identity not static. I argue that the real goal is not to convert and be a member of the church but to enter the "eternal age to come" and only then will the transformation be complete. This idea is summed up in Matthias' words: "This [life] is just the

⁴³The term "worldling" was something that I had asked him about earlier in the interview because I had heard it used in a serious way in Grace. It was a word which Pastor David did not feel comfortable in using himself, but brought it up again as an inside joke.

preparation”.

Turner lists a series of binary oppositions to show the opposition between liminality and status⁴⁴; socially structured and hierarchic relationships versus socially unstructured and equal relationships. Further he argues that many of the properties of liminality constitute what we think of as characteristics of the religious life in the Christian tradition (1987:107). I agree with Turner when he writes that the Christian is a stranger to the world with no place to rest his head and that “*transition has here become a permanent state*” (1987:107, my italics). As an example he points to the characteristics of being in a monastery which among others are: community, self-discipline, work and restraint in conversation. These are all characteristics that I show above and later in the thesis that applies to being a Christian. One can argue that it is not possible to be in a *permanent* liminal phase, when the liminal phase is a temporary phase on the way to a new status. However, I argue that this permanent liminal phase is part of a larger process of rites of passage, which also includes “the afterlife”. I think that regarding Christians as being in a constant liminal phase is a useful tool in understanding this tension of moving across the boundary between the Church and the World and never be fully complete. But how do my informants deal with this tension and how is it dealt with in church? This question will be explored in chapter four.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown on an individual level with two of my informants how one’s worldview changes after conversion, what challenges that occur by being Christian in a secular world and how one needs to restructure one’s life. However, as I have shown with theories on transition rites and liminality this transformation is never complete in “this mortal life”, but something that needs constant renewal and reproduction. In moving between the Church and the World outside of it challenges arise and one needs to be taught how to deal with such tensions by learning apologetics. Accordingly, I have discussed whether Christians have characteristics of being in a constant liminal phase and concluded with Turner that this is a good way to see it. My informants are negotiating with themselves in trying to be more *holy* and less *sinful*, and sometimes even to believe that there is a God. But the goal of a total transformation is not reached in “this life” because among my informants a Christian is never

⁴⁴ Examples are homogeneity/heterogeneity, humility/pride, unselfishness/selfishness, sacredness/secularity, silence/speech (1969:106).

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seen as good enough. The desired transformation is only complete in reaching the prospective “afterlife”.

In the next chapter I want to show how the social and religious life in Grace plays out in different social arenas. Further, the arenas give the conditions to standards of conduct and also manifest itself in a social core and a social hierarchy in church. I also want to show how there is an overall goal in church which is the members’ shared comprehension of their attendance in Grace, and that there are mechanisms both collectively and individually to reproduce the faith and to face the everyday dilemmas of being a Christian.

4

MECHANISMS OF *GLORIFYING* GOD IN THE COLLECTIVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

In the previous chapter I argued that Christians show characteristics of being in a liminal phase as they are constantly moving across the boundary of tension between the World and the Church. In this chapter I want to explore how this constant battle of always *glorifying* God is maintained and dealt with both as a collective and as individuals. Starting with an introduction of theories, this chapter is divided in two sections. The first section will concern the collective level where I will show in Erving Goffman's terminology (1990) how the members in Grace as a team are performing not just for each other, but also to recruit new members. I want to explore the mechanisms of reproducing and maintaining the general attitudes in church, which are their Christian worldview, moralities and cultural constructions. These attitudes may be seen as the shared comprehension of their goal of always *glorifying* God, being *true believers* and reaching the "afterlife", which I will refer to as their overall goal. This can also be seen as their life long project which is a shared understanding that this is an individual project that needs to be maintained every day, but it is also dependent on being maintained in *fellowship*. I will give a great deal of attention to the pastor because I see him as a representative of the church's doctrines and the general attitudes in church. The pastor has such a major impact on these general attitudes because he is communicating these attitudes through his preaching. He is selecting what to preach on and is thereby shaping what is being communicated. Additionally, he is also seen as a role model and a trusted "guardian of the church's orthodoxy" among the congregation which I think gives him both power and a high position in the church's social hierarchy. Pastor John once said in a response to the claim

that preaching was too hierarchic:” You need someone to discern. If you went to the hospital you would want someone to tell you what’s wrong”.

The different rooms and events in Church create arenas that give certain conditions for standards of conduct and I want to discuss how the arenas affect what is being emphasized and performed. These arenas might lead to a social hierarchy and a social core in the church, even though it might not be intended. This results in borders in time and space which cannot be crossed by everyone; one needs to have a special social position and be part of the core of the Church in order to cross them.

In the second section I want to explore if there are individual mechanisms in trying to maintain a definition of the Christian self, which is a constant dialectic process between the individual and the collective. I want to use the term “selving”, which was introduced by Allahyari (2000), to discuss these mechanisms as a way of shaping the moral and spiritual self and how this is a product of internalising the general attitudes in Grace.

The collective and the self

The “self” as a theoretical and analytical concept was little discussed in the social science literature in the twentieth century, and “personality” was the term employed where “self” would be used today. However, there is little agreement across the disciplines as to what should be meant by the terms (Erchak 1992:8). Jenkins (2004) writes that a theme which runs through much of the literature of “the self” is the distinction of “self” and “person”. A long-standing understanding of these notions distinguishes the private, internal self from the public, external person. Jenkins continues: “The self is the individual’s private experience of herself and himself; the person is what appears publicly in and to the outside world” (2004:28). I want to explore mechanisms of staying in the faith both through the collective and through the individual. I define the collective as a group of persons who appear in public and to the outside world. Thus, what I mean by the collective in church is the gathering of persons who are attending an event and performing, in Goffman’s terminology (1990), in front of each other. I also want to explore these mechanisms on an individual level where the self as an internal and private dimension is in focus. The self and the collective will have a dialectic

relationship and influence each other. G. H. Mead sees the self as the relationship between the external person, “me” and the internal person as the “I” (1967). He argues that a person takes in the attitudes of the “generalised other” (in this context the members in Church) which constitutes the organized “me”, and then the person reacts toward that as an “I” (1967:175). However, the self is not only a reflection of the social structure, Mead argues, but has an element of impulse and action in the “I”. I want to call the mechanisms of trying to keep oneself in the faith “selving”; a way of shaping one’s self. This term was introduced by Allahyari (2000).

Erving Goffman (1990) distinguishes between communication that one gives off and that which one gives, and by giving off he means non-verbal and sometimes non-intentional, theatrical and contextual communication (1990:16). He sees social life as dramaturgically organised where the individuals are actors and play off of each other, but also sometimes act in teams. The individual plays a part where he implicitly requests that those who observe him believe and take seriously the impression he is giving them in his performance (1990:8), and “when the individual appears before others his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they come to have” (1990:17). Every individual is trying to control the impression that others receive of him, and Goffman argues that all human interaction is acquired and learned. This does not mean that individuals are “fake”, but he argues that there is no such thing as a natural behaviour because it is always acquired in a certain cultural context. I want to explore Goffman’s theory of teams as a way of seeing the social life in Grace. Goffman’s terms “frontstage” and “backstage” will be used to explain the different audiences from one event to another. In addition to the theories mentioned above, I want to use Turner (1967 & 1987) and Geertz (1975) for analyzing rituals and symbols.

Arenas and their audience

As described in chapter two, the different rooms in Grace are adjusted to and used for specific events. In this section I want to show how the rooms and events create arenas which give conditions for formality or informality and affect who the audience is. The *Fellowship Hall* functions as an arena where people socialise through informal conversations during meals and in between Bible studies which are also held there. As mentioned in chapter two the *Fellowship Hall* is also used for other social occasions, such as baby showers. During events

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here, it is mainly the core of the church and the ones who are members who attend. There may also be attendants who are debating on whether to seek membership. In other words, this is usually not an arena where new people are being recruited unless they are there with someone they know from church. The Bible study on Wednesday is an informal event where people are casually dressed and people come for dinner to finish up their day in *fellowship* with other believers. People in church pretty much knows everyone else there, and if there is a new face in the crowd s/he is always noticed by the others. The shared comprehension of the overall goal is to be in church to *glorify* God, to learn and to *grow* spiritually; but there are obviously social motivations for coming to church as there are also friendships here to be maintained. The scene is an informal one, but yet serious when the Bible study starts and God's word is read. People are among friends and church-family and they seem relaxed and comfortable, as this is the place where they spend most of their time apart from at home and at work. I find Goffman's term "teams" useful to analyse these events. A team may be defined as "a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of a situation is to be maintained" (1990:108). Goffman also argues that "teams" has something of the character of a secret society. By secret society he refers to that "if a performance is to be effective it will be likely that the extent and character of the cooperation that makes this possible will be concealed and kept secret" (1990:108). Grace can be seen analytically as a "secret society" in that the members are maintaining a performance to the World outside, to other members and also to potential members who they want to include in this "secret society".

In a way, the *Fellowship Hall* can be seen as "backstage" where there is no external audience to perform for and convince⁴⁵. The *Fellowship Hall* is a much more stripped down room than the *Sanctuary* and everyone is at the same level; there is no stage and no pulpit. However, in another way the people in church are themselves an audience to each other as they probably want to give off an impression that they are *true believers*. The form of the Bible studies is a teacher-listener form where the listeners become the audience and the pastor becomes the teacher. In addition, there is an always present audience to the congregation in God. They will always want their performance to be perceived as good in front of Him. To sum up, the *Fellowship Hall* does have some backstage characteristics, but they have each other as individuals as audience, the pastor has an audience in his "students" and the

⁴⁵ When it comes to me as being an outsider or an insider I refer back to chapter one where I explain how I was socially to some extent an insider, but spiritually an outsider. When it comes to this section I am an insider because I was a familiar face and a regular attendant at all the events.

congregation has an ever present audience in God.

The *Sanctuary* however, is more of a “frontstage”-arena where the church presents itself and its doctrines for a new audience who are outsiders and potential believers. There is a much more formal atmosphere and the pastor has a different way of preaching. He shows more emotions and has a more dramatic way of preaching as he lowers and raises his voice during the “performance” which is backed up by the members. Visiting worships on Sundays are a way for Christians to “test” new churches. If they move to a new town, it is important for them to find a “good church”. A way of doing this is to visit different worships on Sundays and see if they agree with the doctrines and what the pastor is preaching. It is therefore important on Sundays to present the church and welcome people in. At the end of every *Morning Worship* Pastor John goes through the week’s program in order to welcome new people in. As described earlier in chapter two, newcomers have to attend for a while and get to know the pastor before they “come forward” during worship and declare themselves Christian, and may be admitted membership at the next constitution meeting. I think that the reason that one needs to attend before becoming a member may be not just that the newcomer might see if this is fitting for him/her, but whether the newcomer is fitting for the church. I argue that this is a mechanism of selection and an illustration of this selection was given to me by Pastor John. He told me about a man who had never been in a church all his life, until one Sunday he attended *Morning Worship* in Grace. He was the father of three children with different mothers and he was living with a woman. The pastor continued: “Slowly though, we loved him. We didn’t compromise on what we thought was right; we told him once we got into the situation that living with someone was wrong.” The end result was that both him and the woman professed faith in Christ, got baptized, became members and got married in Grace. This illustration is in accordance with Goffman’s argument about the importance of selecting team-mates who can be trusted to perform and maintain the line that the team is concerned with (1990:95). However, there is room for disagreement and discussion. As Matthias once said during *Evening Worship*: “It’s alright to disagree on third- level issues”. He had a clear idea of doctrinal disagreements and put them in three categories. First-level issues are outside of the boundaries of Christianity and second-level issues are differences that usually lead to separate denominations, for instance baptism. Lastly, third-level issues are differences that can exist within local congregations⁴⁶. I find his three categories plausible and fruitful also for my analysis because there were many of the members who had been part of different

⁴⁶ According to Matthias, the issue of creation can be both a first-level issue and a third-level issue. On the first level it is the question whether creation took place at all, and on the third level it is *how* it took place.

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denominations earlier where baptism and doctrinal disagreements were often part of the reasons for changing churches. I argue that there is possible to have small disagreements, thereby third-level issues. To illustrate, one of the woman said that that they did not all agree on everything. She pointed at the Bible and used a metaphor for the disagreements: “*This*, we all agree on, but Lorraine might like this flavour of ice-cream and I might like this flavour”.

Now that I have shown how the different arenas reflect who the audience is, I want to show how these arenas affect the social life in Grace. My argument in this next section is that there is a social hierarchy which creates borders relating to the different events that are not allowed for everyone to cross.

Arenas and their effects

The word “pastor” derives from Latin and means “shepherd”. As explained in chapter two, Pastor John has a role of *shepherding* the people in church and *guiding* them spiritually. According to Goffman, “when one examines a team-performance, one often finds that someone is given the right to direct and control the progress of the dramatic action” (1990:101). At Sundays and Bible studies, Pastor John is directing and leading the studies and worships, but as Goffman also says: even though one person is in front; a definition of a situation is always in cooperation with others. The choir sings, the deacons collect money during the *Offertory* and pass around the wafers and the wine. However, in a routine which “requires a team of several performers for its presentation, we sometimes find that one member of the team is made the star, lead, or centre of attention (1990:103)”. All eyes are on Pastor John when he opens his mouth and they trust him to guide them

As described in chapter two, the atmosphere during *Evening Worship* in the *Sanctuary* on Sundays is much more informal than the *Morning Worship*. Again, it is the core members of the church who are present and there might be even less attendants than during Bible study on Wednesdays. Even though the event is in the *Sanctuary* there are “backstage” characteristics. The pastor is not preaching from the pulpit, but he is standing on the floor and both he and the congregation are casually dressed. The scene is set for a more internal and informal atmosphere where people pray aloud and there is room for asking the pastor questions at the end of his lecture. Here, I also identify a social hierarchy because it is mostly the “core-persons” who pray aloud and ask questions. The social code that sets in after

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worship on a Sunday evening is that people chat and hang out for 10-15 minutes until someone starts blinking the lights. The ones who are left now is the core of the church and they go out to eat at “Wendy’s”. This can usually include the pastor’s and the deacon’s families plus some additional faithful attendants. The first time I heard of the visits to “Wendy’s” was one of my first days in Church during a conversation with one of the women. I asked her if people hang out when they are outside of the Church. She told me that there were certain places people went to eat, but that she did not go very often. She said that the ones who went out to eat just assumed that everyone knew about it, and that she was actually kind of shy. But she asked Lorraine⁴⁷, if she could make sure that I was invited next Sunday and she answered “sure” in a positive way. That I was, and during my stay I went two more times with May who invited me. The arena at “Wendy’s” has a very laidback atmosphere and people sit and chat about their kids, jobs or whatever comes up, while laughing and joking as good friends do. However, the Christian topics are never far away and it is intertwined in the conversations as they might discuss for instance how easily one can come across cussing on the radio or “immoral things” on TV⁴⁸.

At the *Women’s Bible Study* on Saturday mornings we are sitting in one of the corners of the *Fellowship Hall*. The communication is informal and honest. The women are sharing what is going on in their lives and they are being very honest about what their challenges as Christians are. This might be the most self-examining event I experienced where I get a direct access to Church member’s personal struggles, which I will come back to later in this chapter. But the overall goal is also very apparent here; they are here to *grow* spiritually and to *glorify* God. This honest arena might lead to this disagreement that I will give a description of now.

The group is talking about a woman in church who does not seem to have many friends and they agree upon asking her if she wants to join them on occasions. It is said that they themselves has such a good sisterhood and that it is important to spend time together, and sit down and talk to each other. Then someone says that they need to invite people loud and clear on Sunday evenings when people were going to “Wendy’s”. Lorraine answers that they really did do that and that it was obvious that they went. Then the woman who told me that she never went says several times: “No, it’s not”. It seems that Lorraine has difficulty believing this, but then says: “We don’t want to be a clique... It’s just that there are such strong friendships here”.

What I have tried to show in this section is that although the members have some characteristics of being in a “*communitas*” by perceiving themselves as “equal under God”, as

⁴⁷ Lorraine is the wife of one of the deacons; Pete.

⁴⁸ The programmes they referred to as immoral were “Big Brother” and “The Bachelor”.

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discussed in the previous chapter, there are still some social boundaries between those who are at the core of the church and those who feel they are not. The members are acting as a “team” during church-events when they are “front-stage” where the audience is each other, God and possible newcomers, but there are some social patterns which might lead to hierarchy within the church “backstage”. These social boundaries illustrate a hierarchy and there are obviously borders in both time and space regulating who are present at various occasions. In time, there are borders between *Morning Worship* and *Evening Worship*. In space, there are borders between the different arenas within the church premises and between the Church and the World outside of it, as regards “Wendy’s”.

To illustrate these borders of being an insider and an outsider I want to include a man who I hereby call Harry. I met him during *Evening Worship* and he identified himself as an evangelical and a “freelancer”. By “freelancer” he meant that he did not like big organisations and that he is against the Church as an institution. A reason for his dislike of churches, he said, was that in his previous church the leader had “stolen too much glory to himself” and that he was “full of pride”. After Harry had started asking too many questions there, he had been shunned from that church. He did not belong to a church now, but visited several. One Sunday he told me that he had been to three different ones that day, including his earlier church where he had sat on the back row only to listen. Members in Grace said to me that Harry had “been in a cult” and I was warned against spending too much time with him, especially alone. Pastor John always emphasized how important it was to belong to a church and have *fellowship* with other believers. Although Harry was welcome at church events, he was fundamentally disagreeing with Grace’s doctrines by not agreeing to that belonging to a church was necessary and *biblical*. Harry represents someone who I do not think would have been allowed to cross the borders into Grace and be selected as a “team-mate” if he did not change his views of the church as an organisation. He is someone who ignores the borders of being an insider and outsider and is not interested in being at the “core” of Grace. I think that their concern about him was that he was spreading false doctrine and that he was being too critical of their view of the importance of maintaining the overall goal by belonging to a church. My argument is that Church members are all there to work towards their overall goal of *growing* into “the next life”, but how do they maintain this shared comprehension of their goal?

Reproductive mechanisms in the collective: Sanctions, rituals, parables and time

Sanctions

The goal of being *true believers* and reaching the “afterlife” results in being in a liminal phase that creates dilemmas that need to be dealt with. So what are people doing in order to stay in this liminality as a believer and maintain their overall goal?

Bourdieu’s “doxa” (1994) might be a useful concept to analyse the maintenance of the overall goal of Grace. Doxa denotes something taken for granted and so internalised that it is not even reflected on; in this case that they are all there to *glorify* God and to *grow* spiritually, and this understanding “goes without saying” (Bourdieu 1994:163). However, as mentioned in chapter three, they struggle with the tension of moving across the boundary between the Church and the World and there might be individual mechanisms to deal with this which I will discuss later in this chapter. Now, I want to focus on the collective mechanisms of maintaining their overall goal starting with an example of an incident where the definition of the situation was challenged, although probably unintended, and was sanctioned.

It is a Wednesday night, which means Bible study, and we are gathered in the *Fellowship Hall*. We have had the usual meal and the subsequent Bible study is about to wrap up. Today’s topic is “irresistible grace”⁴⁹ and as always Pastor John opens up for questions at the end. One of the deacons, Pete, says that in one of the passages it says that a people were believers for a while, but then drifted away. His question was how this was possible if grace is irresistible? Pastor John’s answer was that they could not have been true believers. Pete looked it up one more time and confirmed that the word used was believer. Pastor John seemed a little surprised by this and said: “Does it say believer?” This was confirmed yet again and Pastor John concluded that he thought it had to be false doctrine and that they could not have been true believers. Then Pete uttered in a joking manner: “Maybe Jesus used the wrong word, I don’t know...” as he smiled and shrugged his shoulders. The others laughed a little, but his wife Lorraine sitting across him laid her hands over her ears, shook her head and said “no no no” rather embarrassed. Their teenage son sitting next to them laughed at his parents, and a woman sitting at the table behind Lorraine laid her hand on her and said in an ensuring and somewhat comforting manner: “That’s ok.” Lorraine took her hand and said with a little laugh: “I’m going home with you tonight!”

⁴⁹This is the fourth point in the five points of Calvinism which interprets the moral rebirth that make someone able to choose God as God’s will. This means that the believer is not able to choose God for him/herself because a human being’s will is corrupted by *sin*. This transformation of will before faith cannot be resisted by anyone if one is among God’s *elect*, hence “irresistible grace”.

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As written in chapter two, the Bible study on Wednesdays is attended mostly by regulars; the core members of the church. People know each other well and the atmosphere is less formal than it would be during worship in the *Sanctuary*, especially the *Morning Worship*. Goffman argues that there is more room for making jokes in an informal context, but when there are outsiders present formality is more important (1990:85). This is not a joke that would be made in the *Sanctuary* where there would be a stronger focus on giving a presentation of the church's doctrines and reaching out to unbelievers and newcomers. In this arena in the *Fellowship Hall* people know Pete, who is a deacon, and perceive him as a believer which gives him room to make this joke. However, it does not go by without sanctions. The joke's content is that Jesus might have been wrong, but Jesus' *truth* is what their whole Christian belief is based on. They see Jesus as truth and live by his word, and the goal is to *glorify* him in everything they do because he has done everything for them who are *undeserving*. The sanction comes from his wife who is closest to him and may be the only one who can sanction him in this kind of situation since the others know that he is joking, and gives him the room to do it in order to avoid confrontation. Goffman states that an open disagreement in front of the audience creates a false note and is avoided in order to sustain the definition of the situation (1990:92). This might be why the others laughed it off. This also fits with Goffman's argument that when performers make a slip the others might tactfully "not see" the slip (1990:225). His wife too knows that Pete did not mean anything negative by his joke, but she is not afraid of confrontation and she is embarrassed that he can even say something like this that would go against Jesus. Spontaneously, she puts her hands over her ears because she does not want to hear it. Goffman has also focused on embarrassment as having fundamental social and moral significance. Schudson writes that Goffman argues that human beings are creatures that are so completely dependent on how others view them that they avoid at all cost the "dashing of social expectations" (1984:634). Now, if events occur that contradict the definition of the situation the interaction may come to a confused and embarrassing stop (Goffman 1990). Pete's wife therefore sanctions him, although it is a mild sanction, and puts the situation of the definition back into place. This sanction is revealing a norm: it is wrong to indicate that Jesus has flaws and the basic value in this is that one should always *glorify* God because he is "the perfect one" and the humans are "the flawed ones".

Above I have argued that a mechanism in the form of a sanction reproduced a desired value in the church, and the shared comprehension of their overall goal. To speak "negatively" about Jesus is something that they see an unbeliever and a secular person may do, but not a Christian. In this case it was perceived as happening within the Church and it was therefore

sanctioned. The next collective mechanism which I will give an analysis of is rituals.

Rituals

Being Protestants, they say that the only mediator between them and God is Christ, and one of the core disagreements with Catholicism is over *idolatry* and sacraments. Catholics are “bowing to man” (the pope) and using ritual objects as part of worship such as lighting candles, having sacred images and the wearing of vestments by the priests. Ritual objects and the Catholicism’s seven sacraments⁵⁰ are seen by my informants as focusing on *works*, which are human actions, in stead of faith alone. An argument I heard for this was that «the sacraments start out as biblical, but after a while it morphs into something that you have to do and they forget why and then infuse it with meaning». On the other hand, Grace itself is very habitual and is characterised by routines during a week and I want to discuss if these routines can be seen as rituals.

Turner defines a ritual as a “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” and he holds the symbol to be the smallest unit of ritual which contains the specific properties of ritual behaviour (1967:19). Symbols then, are multivocal and represent many things at the same time (Turner 1987:52) or in Geertz’ words they are used for any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception, where conception is the symbol’s “meaning” (1975:91). In Grace, they might not see themselves as having rituals, but for instance every time they are gathered as a collective they always “open up in prayer”. They pray that God will “bless this time together” and that it will be *fruitful* and specific prayer requests are included. They also “close in prayer” when the event is over and usually pray that everyone gets home safe. I want to suggest that this can be seen as a ritual in Turner’s sense as it is prescribed formal behaviour for an occasion and it has references to belief in a supernatural power. As mentioned above, Protestants refrain from using a lot of objects in their worship. Nonetheless, there are visible symbols in the *Sanctuary* that are used during *Sunday Worship*: for instance the blue window with the cross and Bible quote, the pulpit, Bibles, the silver platter used for the Lord’s Supper etc. However, many of the symbols are

⁵⁰ The seven sacraments in Catholicism is Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist (Lord’s Supper), Penance (confession), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders (the sacrament that integrates someone into the Holy Order which consists of Bishop, Priest or Deacon) and Matrimony.

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spoken ones which are words that have several connotations and trigger chains of meaning. These symbols are metonymies which are symbols representing an entirety and will trigger this entirety when interpreted. In relation to this, a prayer which is said during an opening or closing of an occasion will include the word Christ. The symbol for Christ is the cross which can be said to be a core symbol. The cross is both a metaphor symbolising Jesus on the cross, but it is also a metonymy which trigger the whole gospel. In using Turner's terminology, the cross can be seen as a "dominant symbol" which he explains this way:

...dominant symbols are regarded not merely as means to the fulfilment of the avowed purposes of a given ritual, but also and more importantly refer to values that are regarded as ends in themselves, that is, to axiomatic values (1967:20)

The cross can be seen as a dominant symbol both as a mean to fulfilment of the ritual which can be seen as entering God's kingdom and be with Christ, and also referring to the essential values that Christ represents. Geertz talks about the Cross as a symbol because it is "talked about, visualized, shaped worriedly in the air or fondly fingered at the neck" (1975:91).

Now that I have established how a specific prayer can be seen as a ritual containing certain symbols, I want to focus on the *Morning Worship*. Seeing the church through Goffman's dramaturgy; the *Morning Worship* is the most orchestrated event in church and where the audience is the largest. It is also at this event that it is most fruitful to discuss potential ritual activity in Grace because at this particular event the characteristics of a ritual are more identifiable. The *Morning Worship* on Sundays is the most prescribed and formal occasion in Grace, to use Turner's words. As described in chapter two, the layout is pretty much the same every time and the *Lord's Supper* takes place once a month. This is a formal arena and there are more codes as to how to behave: one stands up when asked, one sings during the hymns, one does not sit and look out the window, but listen attentively to the pastor. When there is prayer one bows the head and there is room for nodding or saying amen when something perceived great is being said. The prayers during *Morning Worship* have different functions. In the *Opening Prayer* the pastor is preparing the congregation for worship and may ask that they will "open their heart up truly and honestly", be "hungry for His word", "exalt Him" and not "put on a religious show". In the *Morning Prayer*, the pastor is *humbling* the audience before God and saying that they are "undeserving sinners" and ask that they examine themselves and improve. He is repeating the core of the gospel by such statements and he is also maintaining the shared comprehension of their overall goal of being

true believers. The pastor also prays for individuals who might be ill or out travelling, but if there are prayer requests one does not say them out loud in this arena. They shall be given to the pastor beforehand. During the *Lord's Supper*, everyone (who wants) participates actively in eating the wafer and drinking the wine. These objects are very dominant symbols for Jesus' body and blood and this ceremony has a certain solemn atmosphere. The *Lord's Supper* has clear characteristics of being a ritual as it is highly prescribed and very formal. It also embodies the faith in a literal way by consuming Christ's body and drinking his blood. After pointing out the clear characteristics of a ritual; the question is what effect do they have?

We see here that throughout the whole worship there are standards of conduct and a proper order as to what comes next during the worship. The congregation is participating by adapting to the definition of the situation which is mainly set by the pastor. They are being a part of Goffman's "team" and thereby supporting the pastor's performance. I believe that as a collective the morning worship creates community and a feeling of belonging as people sing and pray together. The pastor refers to them as *the body* which insinuates that they are one and that they are what make this church function as a team. Throughout the whole service the basics of Christianity are being repeated. This being that they are *sinner*s, how Jesus paid their *sins*, that He *resurrected* and *reigns* in Heaven and that individually people must live their life as *holy* as they can in order to "enter God's Kingdom and have eternal life". One can argue that with these repetitions, the understanding of the liminal situation is being reproduced and the faith is being revived. However, the repetitions do not only reproduce the current situation as the structural functionalists would say a ritual does⁵¹, but the *Morning Worship* contributes to *growth*. During the worship the congregation does not only revive the gospel, but they will learn something new from the pastor's preaching. He might give new insight to a verse in the Bible or present a particular book of the Bible in a new light which they have not thought of before. Learning is a part of *growing* as a Christian and this way the worship is also contributing to the individual's transformation and orchestrating which can be called "selving", which I will come back to later in this chapter. Geertz also states that no matter how apparently automatic or conventional a ritual is; it shapes the spiritual consciousness of people (1975:113). This revival and *growth* might arise out of the experience of being present during worship in church. Geertz thinks that a ritual creates reality for people and sees rituals

⁵¹ A classic here is Gluckman's "Rituals of Rebellion" (1953) where ritualised rebellion towards authorities would return to status quo when the ritual was over. Gluckman's student, Turner, focused more on social process than mechanisms maintaining the system, but Turner has also been criticised by de Boeck & Devisch (1994) where they claim that Turner does not see a ritual as creating something new, only reproducing the society's values.

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as a way of generating one's religious belief as truth and "...clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality..." (1975:109)⁵². He states that it is by observing and by being present this happens no matter if there is divine intervention or not:

Whatever role divine intervention may or may not play in the creation of faith -and this is not the business of the scientist to pronounce upon such matters one way or the other - it is, primarily at least, out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance that religious conviction emerges on the human plane (1975:113)

To create this reality which Geertz is referring to, the ritual needs to be experienced and observed by the performers and communicated through symbols. An example of such a symbol is the wine which is a metonymy, because it triggers a system of other symbols. When a Christian drinks the wine which is a metaphor for Jesus' blood, this will trigger the belief that Jesus has paid the price for her with His blood; that she is a *sinner* and that she wants to *glorify* and worship Him to enter His kingdom. She is experiencing it by tasting the wine and at the same time she can observe everyone else doing it which creates a solemn atmosphere. This experience leads to a revival of the Gospel and might create a reality of faith for her.

Before finishing up this section I want to explore a question: Is there something that my informants can only show or experience through rituals? I think that it is possible for an individual to have a solemn spiritual atmosphere by him/herself. However, I think that through collective rituals in Church there is an experience of worshipping God together which leads to revival, but also functions in a *shepherding* way where the pastor sets the standard. I think that these effects are difficult to achieve on one's own and therefore it is important to participate in these rituals. Or as Pastor John would have said it; it is important to be in a *fellowship* with other believers and be *shepherded*. Additionally, when experiencing these rituals and events one also gains a great social effect. Although people might come to worship God, they also have motivations in meeting their friends and spending time with their own families. For instance, at the *Women's Bible Study*, participants value coming together to eat breakfast, experience solidarity and confide in each other.

I have argued that the events in church have ritual characteristics and that the effect of them is creating community, maintaining church members' overall goal of being *true*

⁵²This is the fourth point in Geertz' definition of religion which is: "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (1975:90).

Mechanisms of *Glorifying* God in the Collective and the Individual

believers, creating spiritual revival and *growth* and it is by performing the rituals that the symbols communicate and contribute to all of these effects. Grace is very habitual both when it comes to events, or the little details in the events and this obviously works for the church. Pastor John once said during *Evening Worship* in a laughing manner that “there are certain phrases that I use every Sunday that I’m being mocked for” and was referring to the last thing he says when finishing up the *Morning Worship*; namely “go in peace”. He soon became serious again: “But there’s a reason why I do this. I want people to find comfort here and that something never changes. Something will always be the same”. This can indicate that it feels safe for people to have familiar events take place and that this make them feel socially comfortable.

During worships and Bible studies the pastor often used metaphors and stories to communicate the faith. “Parables” are a specific genre of communication which I will discuss next.

Parables

During my fieldwork I heard many different stories and metaphors that would illustrate doctrine. These are categorised as a literary genre called “parables”⁵³. Parables were used regularly throughout the worships and Bible studies, but also between individuals to make a point. When this happens in the collective I see it as a way of reproducing doctrine and maintaining the comprehension of their overall goal. These can clarify and illustrate the faith, and become a tool for thinking *godly* according to their perception of God’s morality and stay away from *sin*. This way they can be seen as guiding mechanisms. A way to illustrate how grateful one shall be for Jesus paying for one’s *sin* is illustrated through this parable uttered by Pastor John during *Morning Worship*:

It’s as if someone has robbed and been condemned to death. And then in the last minute the person who has been robbed says: ‘I will take your place’.
That’s how Christians feel when they see Jesus on the Cross.

This parable also illustrates the symbolic power of the Cross and what it communicates, as

⁵³ “Parable” is applied to narratives that have as their explicit purpose to illustrate a doctrine or standard of conduct. Parables are found throughout the New Testament and may clarify something to an individual or group (www.britannica.com).

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discussed earlier. This next parable was also used during *Morning Worship* by Pastor John when he was preaching from Mark 8:34 where it says “let him deny himself” (ESV version). Pastor John continued by saying that this is not popular to speak of in our *Culture* because in our *Culture* it is about putting oneself first: “Our natural inclination is to do what we want when we want to do it”. He illustrated human’s basic *sin* of self-centredness through this parable by using a crying baby as a metaphor for human’s self-centredness.

A newborn would be humans at our best, right? Because the infant is not ruined by our culture? But what does he do when he’s hungry? He screams! He screams until he gets what he wants. He does not have the patience to wait for you while you go to the restroom. He screams until he gets fed. We have basic self-centred attitudes.

Parables can also be used to show that another interpretation of God is wrong. Oprah Winfrey, the television-hostess, had released a video on youtube.com called “The Church of Oprah Exposed”. This created a concern that people might be misled into false doctrine because she stated that there is not only one way to salvation. Pastor John addressed this during preaching and said:

One can only be saved through Jesus! Only Jesus! To say that you have different ways to salvation is like saying to a blind man on a cliff that whichever way you go, you’re safe.

Through this parable it is communicated that to choose anything else than Jesus is to gamble with your life and fall. The blind man might represent that people do not see what is right for them because they are *sinner*s and cannot morally choose God on their own and is therefore blind.

Parables can also be used to motivate and illustrate hope. One Sunday evening during worship the topic was evangelism, mission and education. At the end of the lecture Pastor John asked:” Does these things make a difference?” He wrapped up by telling a little story to illustrate that it does.

A man is walking down the beach throwing starfish into the sea. A man walks past him and asks: ‘Why throw them back in? There are thousands of starfish on this beach that stretches for miles. Does it make a difference? ‘The man picks up another starfish and throws it saying: ‘It sure made a big difference to that one!’

These parables communicate what the church’s doctrines are, but also a standard of conduct.

They are very clarifying and a way of making these points realistic, just like a ritual which generates people's belief and make it convincing. Another mechanism of maintaining the overall goal of *growing* and being a *true believer* is the member's reproduction of the awareness of their own death and thereby to use one's time wisely in order to be ready for *judgement*.

“There's no time for it”

Another mechanism for staying in liminality I want to discuss is my informants' perspective on time when it comes to awareness of own death. As I explained in the previous chapter, time is essential because it is important to constantly *grow* to become a better Christian before *judgement* and one might not have enough time; “perhaps you get hit by a truck tomorrow”. “Life on earth” is a temporary phase and with regards to this it is very important to use one's time wisely. This was evident during a Bible study with the women where Pastor John came to visit to tell them about a book they were going to use for the study. He also gave them general advice about reading: “Make sure what you read is good. Don't read any cotton candy⁵⁴ because there's no time for that”. This is an indication of how important it is to use one's time wisely and *grow* in faith because life is seen as very short. Pastor John also said during a Bible study that “this may be the last time Jesus knocks on your door; we may walk out of here and never come back”. Another example of this was during Easter Sunday when we had worship at 7 AM on a cemetery at sunrise. Pastor John emphasized how short human lives are by saying that we come and go and are quickly forgotten:” Not many people will be famous or remembered here on earth”. By communicating this perspective on life on a cemetery the message becomes even stronger and made realistic to the audience among all the tombstones, which is clearly a “performance technique” in Goffman's terms.

People in Grace seem to be very conscious about their mortality which according to them is different from the World outside. To illustrate, the topic of medicine and plastic surgery came up during a *Sunday School* class and Matthias uttered: “No one wants to die and no one wants to look at themselves in the mirror. People try to postpone death.” In his view non-Christians suppress their own death and try to postpone it by plastic surgery. A young woman added: “The devil wants you to believe that you have all the time in the world”.

⁵⁴ “Cotton candy “is spun sugar with a fluffy consistency and Pastor John is using this as a metaphor for simple literature without substance.

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People in Grace thus see themselves as conscious of the limitations of life and that in this way they are being *counter-cultural*⁵⁵. In their view, the values in the *Culture* are eternal youth and avoidance of mortality. The young woman is also implying that this is Satan's work; making people believe they have "all the time in the world" to get *saved*. This focus on and reproduction of the idea that their life might be short has the effect of being a mechanism in that one needs to be prepared for *judgement*. This again may result in actions of keeping oneself in the faith by reading, praying and worshipping.

My informants' consciousness of their own death is greater than their consciousness of Jesus' return. The reason for this might be that the idea of Jesus' second coming is much vaguer than their death in a much wider perspective of time, since "concerning that day and hour no one knows" (Matt 24:36, ESV). It does not seem as if they envision Jesus' return happening in their lifetime, and I only heard it spoken of one time compared to their own death which was often mentioned. This one time was at a lunch and one of the women glanced at the desserts table saying jokingly to me that she wanted to start with dessert. Then, Rachel came walking by and said: "That's what I do. You never know; maybe Jesus comes back before we get around to it. Dessert's the best part!". This was obviously said in a light manner to make a point about the dessert.

Even though people are self-conscious about their lives being short they seem to be more optimistic about time when it comes to becoming a believer. Let me illustrate this by a conversation between me and May towards the end of my fieldwork.

I told her how weird it is how 6 months of my life could have gone by so fast. She answered by saying that "life's a vapour" in a way as to make a point to me. A minute later in the conversation she asked me if I had changed my perspective on Christianity. I said that I had and now I knew what it really was. She looked at me smiling and seemed pleased: 'You know it now...' I knew that she was referring to that now that I knew it I would be held accountable if I rejected it. I said: 'Yes, and I'm accountable. But I would be anyway'.⁵⁶ She answered: 'Yes, you would, but now you really know it. And hopefully there is planted a big seed. I'll keep you in my prayers. We're still young... Everything can happen'

Here May is first saying that life is very short, but afterwards she is referring to the fact that we are still young. She is saying that there is still time for me to become a believer and showing optimism and hope about that, in stead of pointing out that I might not have time for it.

⁵⁵To be *counter-cultural* and different from the *Culture* in the society outside the church will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁶They believe that all people will be judged even if they have not heard of the Gospel.

I have now tried to show how the comprehension of the overall goal of being *true believers* and reaching “the afterlife” is being reproduced in the collective through sanctions, rituals, parables and time-perspective. These are mechanisms which not only reproduce the faith, but also lead to *growth* in becoming a better Christian and to stay in liminality ; waiting for the afterlife. Next, I want to look at the individual level and see what kind of inner mechanisms they have to keep themselves in the faith.

Selving and mechanisms of staying in the faith

The “I” and the “me”

As Goffman (1990) is focusing on; we make a presentation of ourselves to others in everyday life. I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that Mead (1967) divides the self into the private “I” and the social “me”. The “I” both calls out the “me” and responds to it and together they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience (1967:178). Morris writes about Mead (1967: xxiv) that the attitudes of the others is organised and taken over into one’s self and constitutes the “me”. But if this were all that was to the self there would be no place for creativity and the self would merely reflect the social structure. Mead’s complete self would therefore consist of both an “I” and a “me” where the “I” is the principle of action and of impulse (1967: xxv). The “I” can influence the definition of a situation by giving off a certain impression. The organized community which contributes to the individual’s unity of self Mead calls the “generalised other” and this is “an organization of the attitudes of those involved in the same process” (1967:154). This generalised other would here be represented by the collective in Grace. Mead writes that “the attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community” which seem to be in accordance with Grace with regards to the situation that when someone contradicts the overall goal of *glorifying* God it will be sanctioned. Further, the person must also take in the other’s attitudes toward the common social activities that the members of the social group are engaged in. This would be all the events that take place in the church, which I have shown to reproduce the comprehension of their overall goal. After having generalized these individual attitudes of the social group, the person must act towards these social projects and the larger phases of this general process which constitutes its life and of which these projects are specific manifestations (1967:155).

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As described in the previous chapter, the members of Grace structure their life around the church and are involved in events and activities. The person's understanding of the activities in this organized society is according to Mead "the essential basis and prerequisite of the fullest development of that individual's self" (1967:155). Thus, the self reaches its full development by organizing these individual attitudes of others and by becoming an individual reflection of the general systemic pattern of the social behaviour in which the others are involved (1967:158).

Mead's "generalised other" brings into balance and defines the individual (Jenkins 2004:41). In the previous chapter I wrote how May converted and changed her worldview. She went from spending a lot of time with her college-friends to entering a new environment, making new friends and restructuring her life. One can argue here that May's "generalised other" altered and influenced her development of self as she took in this new organization of attitudes. In Mead's terminology, one can say that the collective in Grace, her generalised other, has affected her "me" and therefore also her "I". However, as Mead points out, the "I" both calls out the "me" and responds to it and they are in other words affecting each other. The "I" therefore is a private realm which both affects and is shaped by the social "me". Maybe one can even say in this context that the "I" might be the *sinner* while the "me" is the overall goal in church which is the attitudes of the generalised others? This is an emic way of seeing the self as my informants are talking of themselves as divided in a sinful/impulsive self and a controlling self. Even though a Christian always wants to be as *holy* as possible, which are the generalised attitudes in church; they still see themselves as *sinner*s on the inside and constantly try to *grow* as persons. To follow this chain of thought, one can say that one is constantly trying to shape one's self because there will always be an "I" who is acting on impulse where the "me" is reflecting the general social pattern. This way, the self is never finished, but can change over time if one regards the "I" as representing the *sinner* who can act on impulse and disrupt the desired attitudes. This perspective fits with my previous arguments that Christians show liminal characteristics and as Turner states: "Transition has here become a permanent state" (1987:107).

As discussed previously in this chapter there are certain mechanisms for maintaining the overall goal of being *true believers* and keeping oneself in the faith. On the individual level, I would like to call these mechanisms "selving"; as a way of trying to shape the self to be as non-*sinful* as possible. The term "selving" was introduced by Rebecca Anne Allahyari (2000) who did fieldwork among volunteer workers in Christian organisations in Sacramento (CA, USA). She explores the volunteer's pursuit of self-betterment through an examination of

what she calls “moral selving”. She defines “selving” as “the work of creating oneself as a more virtuous, and often more spiritual person” (2000:4). She writes that the term involves a concern for transforming the experience of an underlying moral self, in contrast to a situated identity which she defines as social status or structural position within society (2000:4-5). Her definition of “selving” accords with the mechanisms which I want to present, because it is a constant attempt for my informants to shape their moral self to stay in their faith. They are not trying to change their identity as Christians, but rather to nourish and maintain this identity. One of the women at the *Women’s Bible Study* illustrated this shaping of moral self when she said that they are facing dilemmas and choices every single day. She followed up by saying that these dilemmas are mainly between “convenience and comfort which led to personal happiness; and commitment and compassion which led to sacrifice and giving”. The second one is obviously the Christian alternative, but this dilemma illustrates that they believe that there will always be a *sinner* on the inside “trying to steal glory for itself” in stead of making the desired choice of “giving glory to God” by sacrificing oneself for others.

Self-control is one of the “fruits of the spirit” and was heard frequently among my informants. Literally, “self-control” means to have control over one’s self which is what selving is about; trying to gain control of the self and make it better. Even Pastor John once admitted that he had issues that he needed to work on. This was during the time he visited the *Women’s Bible Study* and he had previously lent a book about how to deal with Satan to one of the women. While he had read the book he had underlined sentences and he said to the women:” Now you’ve seen what I’ve underlined and what hit me; what I need to work on. She’s seen that I’m a sinner saved by grace...” The last part he said with an ironic laugh as if this was of course evident. However, he still needed to make a comment about it as if he felt a little uncomfortable that she had seen his weaknesses. He is after all their *shepherd*.

In the next sections I want to identify mechanisms of selving and how they contribute to making oneself a better Christian. I will analyse these mechanisms through five sections: Incorporation of difficulties, the persuasion of parables, signs from God, avoiding one’s weaknesses and prayer.

Incorporation of difficulties

As mentioned in the previous chapter I never heard anyone in Grace approach the topic of doubt, as I did in Dogwood. Although I take my informants to be very strong believers, I am

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sure that human as they are; they also must have challenges in always trusting in God if they come across difficulties. At the *Women's Bible Study* they mentioned every now and then that it was not always easy to turn to God when they are upset or worried, but that they try. With regards to this, there are specific mechanisms which incorporate these challenges into the faith which I want to illustrate.

At the *Women's Bible Study* there was, as mentioned, an informal and self-examining atmosphere. June, an elderly lady, had a husband who had recently been ill. She said that it had been a real test for the family, but she emphasised how grateful she was for the feelings and thoughts it had brought up. She thought that it was a meaning to it all and that it had brought forth hints inside of her that she needed to reach out more to God. This comment implies that although her husband's illness may have tested her faith, she focused on how her faith had become stronger. She thus incorporated the difficulties into *growing* in the faith instead of focusing on a possible doubt. It was frequent that the women at the Bible study expressed gratitude for the difficult times in their lives in this way, because now they saw the meaning of it and they said it had made them stronger. They attribute the difficult situations in their lives to "God's plan" and that there is "meaning in everything He does".

During another Saturday morning, the topic of conversation was Satan. One of the younger women asked what the difference was between "sin coming from the flesh and sin coming from Satan". An older woman, Karen, said that when Satan was operating it felt different and she shared a story with us to illustrate:

Let me give you an example. I was waking up one morning and I was getting ready to do something. I think it was here in church. But suddenly all these awful cuss words were going through my head! It was awful and I thought: Where is this coming from? These are not my thoughts. And I immediately went to the scriptures to defeat it, and it went away and it never came back. And I realized it was Satan because these were not my thoughts. So I think that those thoughts are more foreign to you.

However, the other women thought that one could not tell the difference, but they all agreed that the way of defeating all *sin* was the same, and that that was the most important. During another Bible study they were discussing TV, movies and the internet as traps which Satan set for them. These were discussed as traps because the women saw it as very easy to get carried away and suddenly spend several hours on it, and there was danger of coming across "sexual innuendo", bad language and pornography through these mediums. Karen told us that one time she was looking for a dress on "e-bay" she suddenly realised that she had been sitting

there for three hours straight. She said she felt bad because she could have spent this time on something useful, like reading scripture or praying. One of the other women concluded: “anything that takes your time away from God [can be a trap]”.

What I want to show with these examples is how the women are attributing these particular *sinning*-episodes to Satan. In the first episode, Karen experiences cursing words in her head as “Satan’s work”. In stead of ascribing it to herself she ascribes it to Satan operating within her and that they are not her own thoughts. She is objectifying these thoughts as Satan. Returning to Mead, one can say that the “I” is the impulsive and acting element of the self, while the “me” is what the “I” was a second ago (1967:174). In other words, the “me” is the self who is reflecting over what the “I” has done as in Karen’s statement: “It was awful and I thought: where is this coming from? These are not my thoughts”. To be able to reflect at all, one needs to have cultural frames, and here these frames are the attitudes of the generalised other which she has taken in which shapes her self. She reflects over her own thoughts within Christian frames and the selving-mechanism here works to objectify these thoughts as Satan. This way she is incorporating these thoughts into Christianity and she is reassuring her Christian faith because Satan is interpreted as being God’s creation. Theologically, Satan is under God’s control and God uses Satan in “His plan”. Her incorporation of her thoughts into Christian frames becomes selving as she is shaping her Christian moral self. This selving manifests physically in that she instantly starts to pray and after a while she feels that the thoughts are gone and the situation is restored. The same kind of selving is valid in the second example as they are ascribing their use of these mass media as Satan’s traps to “lure them in”. Pastor John also mentioned something similar to the women when he said that “Satan sneaks in thoughts in peoples’ heads and whispers that if you have these kinds of thoughts you can’t be saved”.

The persuasion of parables

I want to include parables on the individual level because I think that they can function as a mechanism not only in the collective, but also within the individual. By the collective, I mean that parables are being used as rhetoric in the pastor’s preaching during worships to illustrate a point and thereby reproducing the Gospel. Within the individual I believe that parables in the two illustrations below can function as persuasion to avoid what they perceive as *sin* and to motivate; thereby shaping the moral self. This does not mean that I see all parables as

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individual mechanisms of selving, but I argue that the two parables I will illustrate below have selving-effects as they become an image of their inner struggle.

Parables have an effect in clarifying and persuading oneself of the right choice in a moral dilemma. I want to follow up the conversation mentioned above, where the women saw TV as one of Satan's traps. One of the women commented on how such a TV-series as "Friends"⁵⁷ could make a person slowly adapt to sexual innuendo and bad language. Karen told a parable to illustrate how this could be dangerous:

If you put a frog in boiling water it will jump out of the pot. But if you put it in cold water and heat the water slowly so that the frog gets used to it, you can boil it alive.

What she wanted to show with this parable was that when you slowly adapt to "immoral things", you eventually start to accept them. This way the parable is used as an argument to why one should not watch these TV-series and thereby persuade oneself to avoid them. The selving mechanism here is using this parable as an image of the inner struggle and illustrating what is the "right" choice in the dilemma of watching TV or not. This parable persuades the person to avoid what she perceives as *sin* and thereby shaping the moral self. This next parable was told among the women to illustrate motivation:

A farmer told a young boy to take a dirty bucket and go to the river and fetch some water. When the boy came back he noticed that the bucket was full of holes and all the water had leaked out. The farmer sent the boy several more times, but after a while the boy told the farmer that there was no point in doing this. Then, the farmer pointed into the bucket and said that now the bucket was clean.

Karen said that this story showed that even though she forgot the Bible quotes she memorised, and even though she constantly needed to go back to the scriptures to be reminded of God's word, she felt cleansed after doing it. Even though she sometimes may feel inadequate, she trusts that she has become *clean* and thereby a better Christian. Thus, she is objectifying her feeling of inadequacy as cleansing through this parable. Thereby she has turned her frustration into motivation which I see as a mechanism of selving.

⁵⁷ Popular American sit-com.

Signs from God

Motivation was also observed in that people interpreted events as a sign from God. These signs felt to them as proof of His existence, and a frequent example here is rainbows. At the *Women's Bible Study* the women were talking about what their favourite quote in the Bible was and a young woman in the group told us that hers was one containing "God is always with you". There was a time when she was going through some difficulties and she was on her way home from work. It had not rained for a long time, and suddenly she saw a rainbow. She started to cry because she felt that God was with her. Anita added to this saying that when she was taking over the Sunflower house⁵⁸, she saw three rainbows that week and interpreted this as a sign. Lorraine also felt their enthusiasm for rainbows, and told us that every time she saw a rainbow she stopped whatever she was doing and enjoyed God's *creation*.

As I also mentioned in the previous chapter, Nick in Dogwood had an experience when he returned to Norway to be a missionary and found out he was living next door to someone he knew from the past. Whenever he had doubts about his faith, he thought of this story and it told him that this could not have been a coincidence, but that it had to be God's *providence*. These sign-episodes are selving-mechanisms where the women and Nick interpret these events as a proof of God's existence which I see as a way of confirming their faith.

Avoiding one's weaknesses

Pastor John told the women at the Bible study that the best way to fight Satan was to stay away from areas where one is weak: "If a man has problems with lust, maybe he should stay off the internet so he doesn't go to look up pornography. If a woman has problems with shopping, maybe she should stay away from the mall". What Pastor John here is describing is what I see as selving-mechanisms in avoiding what is one's weakness. June, an elderly lady, pondered once about "why do we even sin when we know that it is wrong". This utterance indicates the inner battle between *sinning* and not *sinning*. She continued: "Why don't we just say no? Why do we go into the thought process? Should I do this or not? This tells me that I need to learn more." A few minutes later in the conversation June added: "I stay away from

⁵⁸ As mentioned in chapter two, the Sunflower House is the church's trailer in a local trailer park where children are invited to Bible lessons.

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some things, which I know are my weaknesses. It may be wimpy, but it is to protect myself'. This tells me how aware she is of living with dilemmas, which I have referred to as the tensions of liminality, but she has her own tricks to deal with the dilemmas, one of which is to avoid situations of temptation.

Prayer

Prayer is probably the most frequent selving-mechanism and the women at the Bible study often talked about how it was efficient when dealing with difficult people. What was often brought up as a challenge in this regard was being at work, because there might be people who were hard to cooperate with and they often felt alone as Christians. Lorraine told us that she regularly prayed on her way to work to not get annoyed with people, or she would pray at work if something upset her. She said that this was a way for her to overcome irritation and have self-control. Work-problems also came up during *Sunday School* and the class concluded that no matter what the struggle is one should try to keep it inside and answer people with love and show them who the Christian is. Another advice that I heard, was to listen to Christian music to overcome anger and hardships. These are all advice that they exchanged between each other as mechanisms for overcoming difficult dilemmas in everyday life. This is a way of controlling one's self, thereby selving, in order to transform the moral and spiritual self⁵⁹.

Above I have identified five different mechanisms of selving. They are mechanisms of selving because they are ways of reflecting over one's "me" in order to shape the moral and spiritual self. In essence, the goal is to "tame" the *sinner*, the impulsive "I", so that the "me" and "I" accords and creates a *holy*, moral and spiritual self. Goffman writes that when a performer guides his private activity in accordance with incorporated moral standards, he may associate these standards with a reference group of some kind, thus creating a non-present

⁵⁹I have much data on ideas of how to improve and better oneself as a Christian, but unfortunately I cannot include them all. However, I would like to mention five points which Matthias gave during a Bible study on the Lukewarm church who was more concerned with their wealth than their love for Christ (ESV, Revelation 3:16). These were related to the point that "the internal struggle is the worst because we are falling asleep in our devotion to Christ".

1. Be on guard against wealth and comfort.
2. Look for evidences of grace in your life.
3. Am I growing as a Christian? Pray that you will.
4. Ask other for feedback for spiritual growth. In the lukewarm church they were blind for this, you can also be blind.
5. Rest in Christ. The Lukewarm church is not growing in their affection to Him.

audience for his activity (1990:87). What Goffman writes here, I think applies to the impact the generalised other have on the individuals in Grace. Even though they want to guide their activity towards God constantly, there is an effect in belonging to the collective in Grace, thus creating a non-present audience which motivates. As mentioned before, the “I” and the “me” of the self have a dialectic relationship and as I have argued; my informants’ self becomes a product of both the collective in Grace and the impulsive element in the individual. An opportune question here might be: How can I observe selves and make assumptions about them? Here, I will draw on Erchak who states that although neither the inner self nor the personality can be directly seen, behaviour in a social context can be observed by others (1992:15). However, behaviour does not directly mirror the personality or the self, but this is what a behavioural scientist has to work with (1992:15).

Conclusion

In this chapter my goal was to show how my informants in Grace have mechanisms for both dealing with and staying within liminality. First, I gave a description of how the social and religious life in Grace plays out in different arenas and thereby laying the foundation for standards of conduct which in the end results in social and hierarchic borders in time and space which are not open for everyone to cross. I have also explained that the overall goal in church is people’s shared comprehension of attending Grace, namely to have *fellowship*, *grow* and prepare for “the next life”. This overall goal is reproduced and understood in the collective through rituals, parables and comprehension of time. I have also explored reproductive mechanisms on the individual level, where I have employed the term “selving”. By using this term, I wanted to show how there are methods of keeping oneself in the faith and thereby also shaping one’s moral and spiritual self for the better. Now that I have dealt with the mechanisms of staying in liminality, I want to explore the tension between the church and the world outside of it.

5

APPROACHING “THE WORLD”

In this last chapter I want to return to using the term “Evangelicals”. Although my informants mostly use the term “Christian” about themselves, this chapter is showing the different approaches Evangelicals in the US have to the World around them, what they call the *Culture*. When my informants talk about *Culture* it is very intricate and maybe they do not always know what they mean by the term. However, I will analyse the term in five different categories, namely i) their idea and use of the term, ii) how people try to place themselves within the *Culture*, iii) the boundary between the Church and the *Culture*, iv) how people try to protect themselves from *Culture* and lastly v) how my informants want to change *Culture*.

In the previous chapter I showed how aspects of the faith are reproduced within the Church and how there are different mechanisms of reproduction at work. The focus was on the internal life in Grace. In this chapter I want to shift focus and explore how the churches meet and approach the World outside. I will also have a broader ethnographical perspective by comparing three churches and I will connect them to the wider evangelical spectrum in the US, including their approach to politics.

Theory and “the culture”

Van Gennep writes that the only clearly marked social division remaining in modern society is that which distinguishes between the secular and the religious worlds – between the secular and the profane (1960:1). Earlier in this thesis, I have distinguished between the Church and the World, and my general theme has been how people try to be “in the world but not of it”.

What I mean is that the World outside the Church has both physical and non-physical aspects

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By the physical, I mean the physical space which is outside of the church’s premises, but also all the physical and material things that are never seen as spiritually beneficial among Protestants. By non-physical I mean the worldviews, ideas and discourses outside of church which are perceived to be secular and non-Christian. This non-physical element is referred to as the *Culture* by my informants, but before I give a description of their use of the term I want to elaborate on the anthropological debate on the term.

There is no agreement on a single definition of the term “culture” in anthropology⁶⁰. However, the earlier use of the term was a reifying description of “culture” as a static self-contained whole which is self-produced regardless of economic and political change. This way of seeing and using “culture” is widely used also today; for instance among the media, politicians and minority leaders (Baumann 1999). Today, anthropologists generally see “culture” as non-static, processual and ever-changing. As Baumann puts it; the two main discourses about “culture” are either “having it” where culture is comprehended as a finished product and a thing one has or “making it” where “culture” is seen as a process one shapes (1999:83). Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) is critical towards the term itself within anthropology, because she is concerned that it has lost its academic meaning. According to her, this is due to media’s use of the term in not considering that humans are conscious agents and that cultures are constantly changing (Abu Lughod 1991). A “culture” is not a “thing” which can act in itself, but it is constantly shaped by human agency.

As mentioned, I want to explore my informants in Grace and Dogwood’s approach to *Culture*, but in order to understand how their approaches fit into the scenery of American Evangelicals I also want to use data from a third church. In the introduction, I described Jerry Falwell’s role in the history of American Evangelicals, and it is in Thomas Road Baptist Church (TBRC) Jerry Falwell had his ministry and where Susan Harding (2000) did her fieldwork. After Jerry Falwell’s death, his son Jonathan Falwell took over as the senior pastor and he is following his father’s legacy about being vocal on moral issues. I want to contrast TBRC with Dogwood and Grace, because TBRC has been a very visible church and it is seen by my informants as being “typical Evangelicals”.

In this chapter I will mainly be using Fredrik Barth’s theory of ethnic boundaries. The reason for choosing this theory is to identify the (non-)existence of a boundary between Evangelicals and their idea of the term “culture” and the World around them. These boundaries arise and are maintained in the meeting between secular and Christian persons,

⁶⁰ In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn found 164 definitions of what anthropologists meant by culture (Wright 1998:7).

ideas and discourses. These meetings are mainly a meeting between the perceived ideas of “the others”, and I do not have much data on social meetings and disagreements between seculars and Christians. I will also use some comparative literature in my discussion, but first, I want to give an insight in my informants’ view on the term “culture”.

My informants’ idea and use of the term “culture”

Looking back on chapter two, I gave a brief introduction to the pastors in Dogwood and Grace’s approach to what they see as *Culture* and how they defined it. Now, I want to elaborate on this and I want to start by exploring Grace’s use of the term. Pastor John defines *Culture* as human relationships, but divides it into two elements: As Christians they want to affirm what is good, but separate from what is evil and unhealthy in the *Culture*. Further, he says that there has to be a critique of *Culture* and that there cannot be an uncritical acceptance of it. He says that this evil element is an element tainted by *sin* and that there is a tendency in *Culture* to deny God and reveal truths from God. *Culture* was often referred to as in “engaging in culture”, “separating from culture” and “that’s in culture”. When I asked individuals in Grace what they meant by the term “culture” I received different answers. However, the use of the term in Church and among informants is easier to identify. In general, I perceived the term to be used in a pejorative way and often the meaning infused in it was *worldliness* and decay of morals. Sometimes, “the secular world” was used interchangeably with “culture”, and so I perceive that by the term “culture” they mean secular morals and values which are norms of the World and not of God. When I asked May what she meant when using the word “culture” she explained it as “things of the world, and not of God”, which sums up their idea of *Culture*. Matthias thought that the term was very difficult to define, but agreed that they generally used it to refer to morals and values. Next; I want to give examples of this moral idea of *Culture* and what they think are the effects of a “culture in decline”.

It was often mentioned how in today’s *Culture* it was “not a good thing to be nice” and that the “cultural ideal was to put oneself first”. During one *Sunday Morning Worship*, Pastor John was preaching from the passage in the Bible where Jesus healed a servant’s ear which Jesus’ disciple Peter cut off (Luke 22:49-51, ESV). Pastor John illustrated his idea of the secular view in contrast to this; raising his voice more and more for each line:

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In the secular world it is ‘if you hit me, I hit you’; ‘if you hurt me, I hurt you back’; ‘if you punch me, I will punch you even harder!’

There was also an impression in Church that the morals and values in *Culture* are getting worse and worse⁶¹. An example of this is an utterance from one of the women: “People are more egocentric today than in the 40’s and 50’s. People don’t go out of their way to help people. I think it’s a cultural thing”. Another way of seeing the *Culture* as representing morals is how they think that the *Culture* is influencing their discernment. An example here was given by a young woman during *Sunday School*. She told us about a church where the pastor was a woman who lived openly as a lesbian. This pastor got confronted by the church council, but the council decided that as long as she was living in a steady relationship it was ok. As the young woman told the story it was clear how she felt about it as she seemed both discouraged and appalled by it. She obviously thought it to be improper and *unbiblical*, and said that this showed how the *Culture* was affecting the discernment of Christians and churches.

The “gay-rights”-issue was often mentioned in relation to what they call “postmodernism”, which they see as a competing discourse in *Culture* with Christianity. They perceive postmodernism to be that everyone in society are equal and that no one is wrong. On several occasions there was uttered frustration and negative attitudes towards this relativistic secularism. A problem mentioned several times was that people would not disagree with them, but not believe either. A college student once said that he didn’t know what to answer when everybody’s just so tolerant and not judgemental. As May once said: “I’d like to see them not so lukewarm, but to be hot or cold. Like, don’t just say ‘oh to each his own’ or ‘whatever you think’...” It was frustrating to her that people thought that Jesus did not concern them when she believed that there will come a time when everyone will be judged. This is also an issue of morals, because postmodernism is denying that there is one truth which is the basis of Christianity. People in Grace believe that the postmodern discourse in *Culture* influences the institution of marriage, because when everyone is equal and not morally condemned it means that homosexuals can be accepted and allowed to get married which is a *sin* in God’s word. A consequence they saw of postmodernism was that when there is no ultimate standard of truth, all religions become juxtaposed and accepted which will mislead people into false beliefs.

⁶¹ The view of *Culture* as getting worse and worse is a common view among a-millennials and pre-millennials. Although I have briefly mentioned this topic before in this thesis, I will choose not to elaborate on this because most does not seem to have a conscious relation to if they are a-mills, post-mills or pre-mills. However, the people I asked about this in Grace identified as a-mills. Matthias told me that most Evangelicals were pre-mills because that was most common, but many of them did not have a conscious relationship to why.

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The greatest concern about the tolerance and relativism in the secular society was the lack of a universal standard of morality. When there is no ultimate standard of morality and morality is a product of a society, they thought that there cannot be right and wrong because there is no standard in relativism. They think that morality should be governed by an authority and not by people. Hitler and Nazi-Germany was frequently brought up as evidence of what this secular relativism could result in if a society itself should regulate morality. In relation to this, reasoning was also mentioned as being flawed. Matthias said during *Sunday School* that “reason is not the primary way to knowledge” and that “reason only answers the why-questions, not the how-questions”. They perceived that science and reason is seen as “the truth” in *Culture* without room for supernatural belief, as illustrated here by Matthias:

I think there’s an influence from our culture that we are only to believe what we can see and touch. There is no belief in the supernatural and only what you see in a microscope is truth

God’s Creation is also a biblical element which they see defied by the *Culture* and society. Creation is the first part of the Old Testament where God created the world in seven days and made man “in the image of God”⁶². This latter quote from the Bible was often mentioned in Grace to argue how humans had a special role in Creation and was to use both animals and the earth for their benefit. However, they emphasized that humans were also given the task to be “good stewards of the earth”. During a *Sunday School* class where Darwinism was the topic, there was an atmosphere of sarcasm and disbelief. Matthias said that people saw Darwinism as truth now, but he predicted that in a couple of hundred years “we will all say that it is bogus”. About Darwin, they all agreed that he had proposed a “theory of a design without a designer”. It was uttered that they could agree to that the species would adapt, but it was another thing when evolutionism went from micro- to macro level. Hence, that humans are descended from apes was to them outrageous and wrong. The Creation-aspect also includes the issue of abortion, which I will return to below, because aborting a child is seen as destroying God’s Creation⁶³. Matthias said that he saw it as *biblical* to have children and preferably many. During *Sunday School*, he was concerned by the fact that people had fewer children now than earlier. It was often referred to Europe as a bad example where in some countries there were now more people dying than were being born. In their own country, Pittsburgh was used as an example where death had surpassed births. Matthias used France to

⁶² Creation is found in Genesis 1:1-2:3 in the Bible.

⁶³ In the US, abortion was legalised after the United States Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

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exemplify the dangers of this. As a result of fewer people, he said, France needed to bring in labour, which again led to “more immigration and cultural problems”. Another concern he shared with me was that Islam would grow in Europe which he connected to the issues of fewer children and cultural relativism:

See, we're in this cultural relativism now, that every culture is equal, and I think that's just bogus to say that. People really need to take a long hard look at Islam and their true desire to implant Sharia law (...). Honestly, I think Europe will be a good test case for that. America will be about 30 years behind where Europe is. So in France, I think within a generation, maybe in 2050, 50 % of the population will be Muslim in France. London right now is running into that. So as Europeans' birth-rate is declining all these immigrants are coming into the country and they're having more children. So really what Islam was unable to do in the middle ages, conquering Europe with the sword, they are now doing by in a sense breeding the Europeans out.

In relation to Creation, the idea of global warming was also a contested issue which was seen as being in opposition to Creation. Pastor John said that human beings have a special place and role in Creation and that his view of Creation was that the earth was there to be well-managed, but also to serve the need for human beings because “the Lord made this world for us to inhabit”. Pastor John told me that he was not worried, but rather suspicious of global warming and he called it “a secular prophesy of a cataclysmic ending to the world”. He thought it shows “human hubris”⁶⁴ in that “we think we have a lot more power over the earth than we do”. I once asked a young couple about global warming and the woman answered:” I think there’s a lot of misunderstanding about global warming. Scientists are not sure about it and I believe in God’s Creation”.

To sum up, the term “culture” is generally used by my informants in Grace to refer to secular morals and values in the American society, and especially the decay of these. Their greatest concerns about morals in decay is how the secular society values individualism, Postmodernism and Darwinism which they think leads to people putting themselves first, no absolute truth, no standard of morality and abortion. I am sure that these topics are concerns also among some in the congregation in Dogwood, although it was never as outspoken. An exception here is abortion which I know was a great concern also in this church, but the approach to this issue was different as I will elaborate on later.

The ideas and definition of the term “culture” in Dogwood was of a somewhat different character than in Grace. Actually, the term “culture” was not used as much as in

⁶⁴ “Hubris” is a Greek word which means “arrogance due to excessive pride” (<http://www.highbeam.com>).

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Grace. Pastor David uttered that most Evangelicals have a way of looking at *Culture* as consisting only of morals. He, however, does not only judge a *Culture* by its morals but also by whether they create “human flourishing” which was his translation of the Greek word “eudaimonia”, which means happiness and well-being (www.highbeam.com). He says that he is friendlier towards *Culture* than most Evangelicals, and that “culture is something that we create and it is the most wonderful thing that we do”. As written in chapter two, Pastor David defines *Culture* as “a human set of answers to the unavoidable questions in life”. He believes that people develop different sets of answering these questions and it is when they encounter another group of people that they realize that there are other ways of answering those questions. Further, he said that his view made a lot of Christians nervous because they would think that this was “an open door to relativity”; that all *Cultures* would be equal and that there will be no moral categories. However, he emphasized that he does think that there is a right and wrong to *Culture* and he used gratitude as an example. When he was in Nepal he found it odd that they did not have a word for “thank you”, until he realized that Nepalis said thank “you” with their eyes. His point is that there is a right and a wrong to *Culture*, and a *Culture* with no gratitude would be a less moral *Culture* than a *Culture* that expressed gratitude. He said that the reason that he could say that there is a right and a wrong to *Culture* is not because of our set of morals, but because a *Culture* with gratitude would “be nearer to the character and the wishes of the creator”. He says that he expects a “good culture” not only to be moral, but also to be something that was good for people which he referred to as “human flourishing”. To illustrate, he says that he does not see the US as a flourishing *Culture*. He argues this point of view by referring to the amount of prescriptions of anxiety and anti-depressive drugs. He said that even though Americans are very affluent, many Americans are lonely, dysfunctional, unhappy and self-destructive. Another example of his focus on *flourishing* and not only morality was that he saw it as just as bad to watch a dumb movie as to watch an “immoral movie”. Pastor David’s assistant, Jane, thought that Dogwood saw *Culture* as being a background consisting of meaning, worldview and institutions. She saw *Culture* as less about morals itself, but how one articulate the discussion and how you can talk about morality. Additionally, she saw *Culture* as being good, but it is *fallen*.

Dogwood thus seems to have a more holistic view of “culture” and does not only refer to morals and values if they use the term. In Grace, they are using *Culture* as an image of decay and things “of the world” although they acknowledge that there are also good things in *Culture*. The different ways of defining “culture” by the two churches also has an influence on how to approach and deal with what they see as *Culture* which I will show later. First,

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however, I want to discuss their use of the term and see this use through an anthropological lens.

Returning to the debate about “culture” within anthropology above, there are roughly two ways of using the term. In Grace they are talking about “the American culture” as an entity consisting of morals. They are talking about how the *Culture* can influence them and how the *Culture* is *worldly* and opposing God. This is a way of reifying and essentialising “the American culture” and there is a conceived static notion in Grace of what *Culture* is. The *Culture* becomes a fixed thing seen in opposition to God and makes it easier for them to criticise and differentiate themselves from it. They are presenting the image that the *Culture* is a thing which can act in itself and this deprives it of its complexity as consisting of more than morals. This way, *Culture* is not presented as consisting of totally different people with different motivations who are agents of change. In stead, there is painted a picture of *Culture* as a mass of people where *Culture* is the active agent imposing motivations and choices on the people. When presenting “culture” as an entity in this way it is much easier to distinguish oneself from it, which can be an effective tool in for instance minority groups who are fighting for keeping their rights and identity. In Grace, it seems as if they are both saying that they are part of “the American culture” by using “we”, but also differentiating themselves from it by criticising it and identifying themselves as being *countercultural*. An example of this can be seen above when Pastor John is talking about global warming. He is saying that “we think we have a lot more power over the earth than we do” and thereby including himself in “the American culture”, while at the same time criticising it and showing his distance to it. This was a general pattern in Grace; hence they are both placing themselves within “the American culture” by what they have in common with other Americans, and outside by how they are differing themselves morally from other Americans. They came across to me as being very patriotic and proud of their country, which they emphasized several times. However, it is the secularism in the *Culture* they do not identify with, and Europe was often used as an example of being even more secular and *fallen*, and presented as worse than the USA in those regards.

Another example of the way they are placing themselves outside of “the American culture” is this utterance by Matthias when he was talking about *cultural* influences on their spiritual discernment: “We’re about 20 years behind culture and Southern Baptists take it last”. Here he is reflecting on the conservatism of their denomination and how they differentiate themselves as being outside and behind *Culture*. Matthias also illustrated an example of how “culture” is used in a reifying way during one of the *Sunday School* classes.

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He gave his “students” a task at the end of the worldview-class which was to write down their own worldview. He started by reading his, and at the end he had written that “there will be a judgement” and that “all unbelievers will be sentenced to eternal life in hell”. After reading it aloud, he said that when he sat at home writing it he felt that the last lines were a bit harsh. He continued:”...but that just shows how the culture can creep up on you”. He was sure that what he wrote was the truth, but the fact that he felt harsh when he wrote it told him that he was influenced by the *Culture* to feel that way. This shows how the *Culture* is ascribed agency and he is presenting it as an entity consisting of secular and *worldly* morals. Here, Matthias is objectifying *Culture* into an evil power which comes creeping upon him. This is also the same language which is used in Church to describe Satan and how he operates when looking back on the previous chapter where Satan is referred to as “sneaking” and “whispering thoughts into people’s head”. One way of seeing this objectification of *Culture* is that *Culture* is taking the place of Satan in their image of *evil* and another one is that Satan is working through *Culture* by placing “immoral thoughts” into people’s head.

Placing oneself within the “*Culture*” and the evangelical spectrum

By placing themselves, I mean how the churches are reflecting around their position towards *Culture* which gives indications to where they place themselves in the evangelical spectrum. Do they see themselves as culturally conservative or liberal? This placement influences their way of talking about culture and it shows how diverse Evangelicals are in relating to the World around them.

In relation to the *Culture*, Grace sees itself as being a conservative church both theologically and culturally and during an interview Pastor John said that he thinks that they are moving in a fundamentalist direction when it comes to *Culture*. He described this direction as a “separatist direction” and a “direction of withdrawal; to be in the world but not of it”. He elaborated further:

We’re not a fundamentalist church, a classical fundamentalist church...but I think we’re probably trending more in the fundamentalist direction and that is just separating more from the culture and just being more critical of the culture’s influence on us and trying to be distinctive and stand apart from the culture

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Matthias also spoke of Grace as a conservative church both theologically and *culturally*. He said that this direction was a result of the adoption of the 2000 version of The Baptist Faith and Message which included biblical roles of manhood and womanhood. Pastor John said that they are drawing families that are culturally conservative, and May even called Grace the most conservative church in Marystown. During one of the Bible studies on Wednesdays, Pastor John uttered that faith is always conservative and preservative and that they are to preserve and hold on to conservative things.

In Dogwood, on the other hand, preserving is not seen as the answer for improvement of the morals in the *Culture*. This is Pastor David’s thoughts about preserving the *Culture* which he shared with me during an interview:

Helping the culture being righteous is what I would be shooting for, because preserving...The problem with that is that it would give the impression that we've been a wonderful nation, but then has fallen. Now, that would be true in some areas by my opinion, but in other areas I think Evangelicals need to be critical of the previous as well. The easy example would be: Am I opposed to homosexual marriage? Yes...but I would want to talk about it a long time. But I wouldn't want to say that the 50s were a great decade because they weren't great if you were black.

Pastor David here has a more complex portrayal of the *Culture* where he is saying that everything does not get morally worse. He is also being critical of America’s history, and not only critical to the social conservative issues of today. I perceived that there was more room for criticising the USA on a more general level in Dogwood, including foreign policy, lack of social welfare and environmentalism; not only the moral issues such as abortion or marriage-laws. On the environmental issue, Dogwood arranged a forum where they discussed global warming where it turned out that there was a generational gap because the older generation rejected the idea of global warming and the younger generation saw it as reality.

Opposed to Grace’ identification as conservative both theologically and *culturally*, Dogwood identifies as being “theologically conservative but culturally liberal”. This has an impact on the boundaries between the *Worldly* and the *Godly*, which I will discuss later. Pastor David does not believe that it is right to only focus on the moral in *Culture* and separate from that, which he states that some Evangelicals do:

And so I suppose that when they [Evangelicals] are trying to stay away from culture they're usually trying to stay away from things that they see as immoral. Whereas, I think that it's just as dangerous...I'll overstate it: I think a stupid movie is just as bad for a human to watch as an immoral movie, right? And the Evangelicals don't seem...and that's where the difference

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between flourishing and morality, and I think that Evangelicals tend to think that insipid, unthoughtful things, in terms of entertainment or ideas or that kind of thing, aren't dangerous, it's only immoral things. Whereas I would go, no, so much of American culture that seems moral I think is bad for us. It's stupid... (laughs).

Also here, he is being more critical of the American society in general and not only focusing on the immorality of it. He has an open and friendly attitude to the *Culture*, although he is also very critical of its flaws.

At this point I want to contrast Grace and Dogwood to Jontahan Falwell's TBRC. This church is situated further south in the US than Marystown and it was described by several in both Dogwood and Grace as being a "typical evangelical church". While Grace is identifying itself as a conservative church which is trending in a fundamentalist direction and Dogwood as a theologically conservative and culturally liberal church in the evangelical spectrum TBRC is representing an American evangelical stereotype and is seen as the core of Evangelicals. Referring back to the evangelical history in the introduction, TBRC was with Jerry Falwell the head of the "culture-war" with the aim of taking the morality in America back. In an interview I did with his son, Jonathan Falwell he explained his father's goal like this:

Dad started the Moral Majority in the late 1970s because at that time evangelical Christians were literally sitting on the sidelines (...). And so he started the Moral Majority at that time to raise an army of Christians, and I don't use that term "army" in meaning combative, but rather a large group of Christians around the country who would stand up for what they believe in, and would go out and vote and would go out there to try to make a difference which of course, you know, eventually led to be a big part of Ronald Reagan being elected in 1980 and 1984, and has been a big part of President Bush, Senior and Junior, being elected to office. And the point of what the Moral Majority is, the purpose of Moral Majority in the first place was that Dad wanted to raise up thousands of groups like that who would continue to stand up for social issues and moral issues.

I was told several times that in TBRC I would find "typical Evangelicals". I believe that people said this because they are Evangelicals who have been very visible and vocal in the media, and one of the reasons why people might perceive Evangelicals as very conservative and standing up for morals in the American society⁶⁵. This kind of "typical" Evangelicals was

⁶⁵In an article about Evangelicals today in the New York Times, a pastor uttered that there are certain connotations and lots of baggage that comes with words like "Christian" and "evangelical". He thought that you certainly cannot say the word "evangelical" without it now raising connotations and a certain cringe factor in people. "Because people think, 'Oh no, what is going to come next is homosexual bashing, or pro-war rhetoric, or complaining about 'activist judges.'" (www.nytimes.com).

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something that Jane, David’s pastoral assistant, said one would find further south and especially in TBRC. She added that in Dogwood they were not typical Evangelicals because they tried to have “a more liberal cultural view”. Earlier, she had a view of the “typical Evangelicals” way of being Christian as “one of the worst things about Christians in the US”⁶⁶. She described this “typical way” as being conservative Evangelicals, like Jerry Falwell, who wants to build a wall between themselves and the *Culture*. She saw this as a way of fortifying and putting up a defence and she believed their focus to be “to take back the power in our country”. She disagreed with this focus and saw it as *unbiblical* because: “Jesus was not one who seized power, but he gave it up”. Bolce & Maio (1999) confirms a general antipathy in the US toward Evangelicals and Christian fundamentalists. They explain this antipathy as a result of the “culture wars”-image that symbolises the clash between progressivist and traditionalist perspective on moral issues such as abortion, homosexuality, school prayer and gender roles (1999:44).

Although, Grace and TBRC may be seen as having a lot in common since they are both conservative Baptist churches, there were critical voices of TBRC in Grace. May and I went for a Sunday worship in TBRC. The sanctuary could seat 6000, the choir must have been a couple of hundred people and there were lead singers with a huge band accompanying it all. There was far less preaching and focus on the scriptures than in Grace and Dogwood. I felt as if I was attending a huge concert with spectacular music where the pastor and musicians were the stars of the show. When we came out I told May that it seems to be more about the people on stage than about God. May responded:” Yes, I agree! And it’s about the big production, but it was better than I expected. At least he was preaching the gospel; I didn’t even think that he would open the Bible”. She also described it as “emotionalism” and that she had to suppress a laugh when everyone was getting up from their seat when the music hit the climax. When I asked Pastor John about Jonathan Falwell he was clearly critical and said he thought of them as “liberals”, which was clearly pejorative and he was aiming at TBRC’ theology: “Here’s my prediction. Liberty University⁶⁷ will be a liberal school in about 75 years. It will not be a conservative school. I’m not sure I’d even call it that now”. When I asked him why he was calling Jonathan Falwell a liberal he said: “He’s more interested in changing the culture than

⁶⁶ However, now that she had moved from the north to the south and was situated closer, she had a softer view of these “typical Evangelicals”. Now, she always tried to think that she had more in common with Christians who were closer to her theologically, than she had in common with, for instance, non-believing friends who were closer to her culturally.

⁶⁷Liberty University is a Christian Evangelical university. On their webpage they describe themselves as: “Founded in 1971 by the late Dr. Jerry Falwell Sr., Liberty started with his vision to train young Champions for Christ” (www.liberty.org).

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in preaching the gospel”. I believe that Pastor John sees engaging in *Culture* as compromising on the theology and this view is reflected in Grace’ fundamentalist direction.

Just as Pastor John did, Falwell himself also focused on being a preservative element in the American *Culture*⁶⁸, as he says here:

(...) our role is to proclaim the light that comes from Jesus Christ, the gospel of Christ, but also to be that preservative, to be that element in the culture that tries to preserve what our nation...what we came from, where we're headed, what the biblical admonition for a culture might be and try to do what we can to preserve that.

Where TBRC and Grace differ, is that Grace claims that they are not very concerned with politics and changing the *Culture*, but rather to change themselves to be better within the church. Jerry Falwell, however, had another goal, and once said:” But the fact is, you cannot separate the sacred and the secular” (Harding 2000:127). As mentioned, Jerry Falwell mobilised Evangelicals in order to elect Christian presidents. According to the IRS⁶⁹, churches are not allowed to participate in political campaigns, but as long as a pastor emphasises that he expresses his personal view he can endorse and utter opinions of candidates⁷⁰. Pastor John said that he did not even endorse personally, but said that there are some Baptist churches who will distribute little voter guides during elections without losing their tax exempt status. In February 2008, TBRC had Mike Huckabee⁷¹ visiting during Sunday worship which gave media coverage⁷². When I asked Jontahan Falwell about this, it seemed to be very important to him to be very clear that he did not endorse anyone and that Huckabee was there as a friend of his, and not to talk politics. However, he did say that he informed people in church about where the different candidates stood on social conservative issues. He elaborated further: “I don’t tell them who to vote for; I just simply say that here are the facts and now you vote for that person you feel is the best person that most closely resembles what you believe”. This indicates far more engagement in politics than Pastor John and Grace have, and an effort to

⁶⁸ His father, Jerry Falwell also stated that “born-again believers were America’s salt of the earth, its preservative” and he reckoned that “there were some 40-50 million grains of salt in these United States” (Harding 2000:125).

⁶⁹ The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) under the United States Department of Treasury.

⁷⁰ The Federal Law in the US says that “organizations, including churches and religious organizations, are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office” (www.irs.gov).

⁷¹ Governor Mike Huckabee was a candidate in the presidential primary elections 2008, representing the Republican Party.

change *Culture* with politics as a mean.

Jerry Falwell’s vision was to enter the *Culture* as Christians, mobilize God’s people and turn the country around (Harding 2000:127). Dogwood’s vision is also to enter the *Culture* as Christians, but in a less confrontational manner and they do not only focus on the morality. One Sunday I attended Dogwood’s service, the senior pastor preached on how they wanted their “Christian public presence” to be. First, he addressed the confrontational approach and said that for those who are in “the culture-warrior world; Jesus is not baptising your political views”. He continued by saying that “we live in an ugly political and Christian culture, sometimes, where all we do is call each other names like conservative and liberal”. He called this practice *sin* and not Christian public presence and concluded that “we’re not trying to win, we’re trying to love.” He also addressed the other side; “those who despise cultural warriors”. Although, he understood their frustration, he said that they are in danger of understanding Christian presence as merely being kind. His message was to meet the World with an edge without confrontation which he described like this:” Meeting with the World, not believing the lies, moving in, pushing against the falseness in the interest of love that people may be made new and join the risen Jesus”. Although he distanced Dogwood from the “culture-war”, he still wanted to meet the World in an engaging way by “moving in” and wanting to contribute. In fact, “moving in “ is drawing a line to Falwell’s way of using militant language, but Dogwood still distanced themselves from TBRC by saying they are less confrontational.

To sum up, I wanted to show in this section where these three churches place themselves in the evangelical spectrum when it comes to their idea of the *Culture*. Evangelicals have great diversity and every church will have differences. There seem to be great distance between these three churches in their idea of *Culture* and next I want to explore how this idea of *Culture* plays out in social boundaries, with emphasis on Grace and Dogwood.

The boundary between “us” and “them”; Christians and non-Christians

This chapter is about the churches’ ideas and approaches to “culture” and now I want to explore how this idea of “culture” is playing out in boundaries between the *worldly* and the

⁷² See for example www.newsadvance.com.

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godly. In this section I want to use Fredrik Barth's theory of boundaries (1994) which in 1969 was a new and processual way of looking at ethnicity. Although, there is clearly a difference between ethnic groups and religious groups, I want to use Barth's way of seeing ethnicity in how people identify with a group and how boundaries arise when meeting other groups. The maintenance of these boundaries is what is interesting with regards to the boundary between the Church and the World, which I have discussed in previous chapters. This boundary can be identified through the way my informants speak of and relate to the *Culture*. Barth emphasizes that ascription and self-ascription is the critical feature of ethnic groups. He writes that when a group is defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group the nature of continuity of ethnic units "depends on the maintenance of a boundary" (1994:14). However, the cultural features that signal the boundary might change, and even the members and the organizational form of the group may change. Still, the fact that there is continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the continuity and the changing cultural form and content (1994:14). To exemplify, Pastor John told me during an interview about how he saw churches' cultural relation as a continuing issue:

It's not something new, you know. The churches are always determining how to relate to the world. You go back to Augustine; Rome is crumbling and he's writing the City of God. Saying that there's a city of man and there's a city of God, you know what I mean?

We see the dichotomization in this quote in "city of God" and "city of man", and thereof the boundary between the *godly* and the *worldly*. This dichotomy of the sacred and the profane and the dilemma between *sinning* and not *sinning*, are just as relevant today as it was 100 years ago even though the content of the dilemma have changed. Barth sees the cultural contents of ethnic dichotomies in two analytical orders. The first one he calls "overt signals and signs" which he describes as "the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form or a general style of life" (1994:14). The relevant features for Evangelicals here is a Christian style of life which includes modest dress, an acquired way of talking about God and self-controlled behaviour. However, I want to emphasize that one of course cannot see that someone is a Christian, but the ideal is that it shall be visible and clear through interaction. The other analytical order Barth refers to as "basic value orientations", which imply the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged (1994:14). In relation to Evangelicals, these basic value orientations are very decisive for their identification as Christians and are what they

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think separate them from the secular ideals in *Culture*.

According to Barth (1994) it is the interaction with other groups which creates boundaries, and in this case it is the meeting with the World which creates a boundary between the sacred and profane. Groups will choose to emphasize certain ascribed and self-ascribed features which will be over-communicated while others will be under-communicated (1994). This way one can distinguish oneself from other groups and focus on the differences. In this context it is not necessarily social meetings, but meetings between a secular discourse and a Christian one. As discussed above, it is easier for members of Grace to distinguish themselves from the *Culture* if it is spoken of as an entity containing morals. This essentialising of culture makes it easier to differentiate oneself from the *culture*. Hence, in Grace they are over-communicating the decay of morals in the secular society and under-communicating and disagreeing with what secularists see as positive in a secular society. An example I want to show here is when the topic once was “the challenges of discernment” at *Sunday School*. On our handout it said “discernment produces division”, and Matthias explained:

Many [Christians] will rather provide peace over truth and rather get along; that's what the secular world wants. You do your thing and I do my thing. But the world is in open rebellion to God and we are just presenting that to people. We must risk division for being discerning.

Here, Matthias is criticising the relativism in the *Culture* and presenting the secular World as an entity who all wants the same thing. We can see the boundary here between the secular and Matthias as a Christian. He is over-communicating that the secular world only wants to get along and that everything is allowed. He is also emphasising that it is their task as Christians to present what they see as truth in the secular world. He is under-communicating what many see as positive, namely tolerance of other people. Jane, in *Dogwood*, had a different view on secular Humanism. Once, when we discussed President George W Bush she said that a Christian president was not necessarily a good president and that “she would rather have had an atheist who would have fought for real secular Humanism which could have helped people”. Once again, we see a critical voice in *Dogwood*, but what I want to show with her quote is how she values the positive sides of secularism, even though she would prefer Christian values. Hence, the boundary between Jane in *Dogwood* and the secular values is not as clear as in Matthias' case.

Returning to the latter quote from Matthias, he says that “we must risk division for

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being discerning”. He is saying that in order to be true to God one must risk division with the non-believers and the secular world. He is over-communicating “us “and “them” as incompatible where the goal is to differentiate “us” from “them “as much as possible. It seems as if he has a clear understanding of how “they” are looking at “us”. This is something I heard several times in Grace; ideas of how other people perceived them. A frequent word mentioned was “cult”. One Sunday evening at “Wendy’s”, May said that her mother was a little sceptical of Grace and May being a member. Then Pastor John uttered in a laughing manner: “We’re a cult!” He seemed unaffected by the mother’s scepticism and that people might see them this way. This was something that Pastor John also joked about another time when the college-students had lunch at his house. They were talking about how it was like to be a Christian at the university and May said that “things are very different now than before” and Pastor John threw in: “After she joined the cult”, and everyone laughed. Another time when we were on our way from a Sunday lunch in the church-van May checked her phone and saw that she had received several voicemails: “What’s up with all these voicemails?” she said to herself. A young woman said with irony:” Are you saying that you have friends outside the church?” May replied in the same irony: “Yes, I do have friends outside the cult”.

All of these “cult”-examples are my informants idea of how “they”, the secular world, perceives “us”. They do not identify themselves as a cult, but ascribes other to do it and hereby creating a boundary. The boundary is maintained by a desire to be different from “them” where it is a goal that “they” see “us” as “crazy”. We can see this line of thought here uttered by several people in *Sunday School* in relation to a Christian marriage versus a non-Christian one:

- There should be a clear distinction between a godly marriage and a secular marriage.
- If someone looks at you like crazy that’s a good thing.
- Other people should be able to see that you have a Christian marriage.

These points of view in discussing marriage indicates how there is a desire for maintaining the boundary between the Christian and the secular. This boundary puts them morally “outside” of the society and helps keeping them in a liminal state, by being in the World, but not of it. An incident which illustrates this was during a yearly horse race which took place in Marystown. This event attracted lots of students and young people and was known for alcohol and partying. Some of the college-students had decided to do a prayer in relation to the horse-race because “a lot of people got drunk, people could get hurt and even get into fights”, as a young woman told me. She had offered me to come along, and we drove up to campus where

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we met five other students where we sat down on the grass in a park. One of the boys read a Bible-verse which he thought was appropriate for today’s event⁷³, and for 45 minutes they sat with their heads bent forward and took turns of praying for themselves, the community and the specific event. By doing this, they are placing themselves outside of what many of their peers are doing that weekend. They are also taking a moral standpoint to this event at the same time as they are praying for those involved and that “their hearts may be opened”. They are over-communicating what they see as morally wrong about this horse-race, such as drunkenness and under-communicating that some might go there without drinking at all. This way they are maintaining the boundary between them as Christians and the horse-race as representing the “decay of morals” in their own community.

Sociologist David Martin also describes a symbolic line between Church and World. He writes that both church and sect draw lines in symbolic space and these lines indicate that in the Christians’ view

the perfect has not yet come and men still see through a glass darkly. At the same time they point to God because they distinguish the perfect from the ruined. One side of the demarcation stands for hope and the other side for resistance (Martin 1980:37)

Additionally, Stephen Hunt also sees boundary maintenance as an essential element in the link between ethnicity and religion as he argues that religion increases internal solidarity and brings forth the contours of the culture of a community (2002:163). Hunt writes about West African Pentecostals who have migrated to Great Britain and I see similarities in their approach to the British society and my informants in Grace’ approach to the American society. Hunt argues that there is an existence of “purity boundaries” in that his informants have a fear of moral incursion by the outside influence of the British society. While other “western virtues” such as the free market, competition and success are welcomed among his informants, breakdown of the family and sexual promiscuity were separated out as undesirable aspects of the British society. This focus on moral aspects in society is clearly in accordance with Grace, and just as my informants in Grace would say about the US, Hunt’s informants also says about Britain: “In societies like Britain morals are getting worse and worse – we will provide an example to people” (2002:164).

⁷³ The verse he read was 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who

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In order to be able “to be in the world, but not of it”, the border between the secular and the Christian needs to be maintained in order to ascribe oneself to one or the other side. Still, in order to be in this world one has to live in the *Culture* and deal with it. How is the dilemma of engaging in the *Culture* or not dealt with practically?

Protection from the *Culture*

‘Some people believe that being a Christian is so easy and nice. Like being on top of a rollercoaster or running through a meadow, or just having a cosy time in front of the fireplace’. Pastor John said this with a light tone in his voice as if to exemplify this image as dreamy and naïve. The others listening to him at the Bible study laughed and looked at each other. His voice went darker: ‘No. Being a Christian is hard. You have to separate yourself from the world and worldly ways’

As I have shown above, Grace has a conservative and more separatist approach to *Culture* than Dogwood. Now, I want to discuss what the practical consequences of this are. How does one separate from the *worldly* ways and from *cultural* influences? In the previous chapter I discussed selving-mechanisms which are an internal private way of staying in the faith. But there are also other ways of protecting oneself from the *Culture*. One way of doing this is homeschooling in stead of sending one’s children to a public school. In Grace, many are former public school-pupils and many of the children are attending public schools. However, more and more seem to homeschool their children and there is a general view of public schools being in moral decay and even being hostile towards Christianity. Arguments I heard for homeschooling was that children achieved better results by being homeschooled, public schools had become too politically correct, public schools do not teach the “flaws about evolution” and children pick up “immoral things” from other children. A father told me that one of the reasons he had taken his daughter out of public school was that some children were allowed to see movies that were PG 13⁷⁴ and had “immoral content” which created difficulty when the children started telling each other about this. Pastor John’s wife homeschooled their

practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (ESV).

⁷⁴ “A PG-13 rating is a sterner warning by the Rating Board to parents to determine whether their children under age 13 should view the motion picture, as some material might not be suited for them. A PG-13 motion picture may go beyond the PG rating in theme, violence, nudity, sensuality, language, adult activities or other elements, but does not reach the restricted R category” (www.mpa.org).

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children and Matthias was clear that he wanted to have his children homeschooled. There were often stories in circulation about public school’s “anti-religious attitudes” and “secular influence”.

During *Sunday School*, Matthias told us about a school in Massachusetts where the children had been given a diversity-bag to take home, containing a book with a fairy tale. However, the fairy tale was about a boy falling in love with a prince in stead of a princess, and the school stated that the thought behind it was that they wanted the children “to adapt to the culture”. “They are trying to normalise these things”, Matthias commented and he clearly disagreed and showed his disfavour of it. Comments around the table were that “this would only get worse” and “would spread out”. Another story picked up in the news, was told by Pastor John during *Evening Worship*. He told about a boy who had included a biblical reference in an art-class drawing, but got told by the school that it was illegal because in the school’s constitution it said that one could not have religious references. The student had tore up the constitution and was graded zero on the assignment. The congregation shook their heads and laughed about the tearing up of the constitution and Pastor John continued:

We have to think about this, church. This isn’t the 1950s anymore. If you send your kids to Caesar, don’t be surprised if they come back as Romans (...). We can be more critical to public schools. We could homeschool our children.

Pastor John is telling the congregation that the secular influence from a public school can be crucial to their faith. It seems as if the children needs protection from “false worldviews” and the influence from the *Culture* in order to not to end up “being of the world”. This boundary towards *Culture* is very clear in the latter quote and homeschooling indicates not only a moral aspect of the boundary, but also an organisational aspect. By being homeschooled, the children spend most of their time together with other believers in their own home which results in that the children are being socially kept apart from society. When talking to Jane in Dogwood I met another perspective. Although we were primarily talking about colleges, she said that she would rather have schools with both Christians and seculars because Christian schools had a tendency to become alienated. She thought that this might result in Christians being portrayed with fear and become separate from society. She would rather have Christians among seculars because God wants no fear, she said. Again, we see that there is a different approach in Dogwood to the World outside and the organisational aspect of separation is not desired. The boundary between the *worldly* and the *godly* is not as clear as in Grace. In

Dogwood, they do not over-communicate the differences between secular and Christians, but are rather under-communicating them and over-communicating the similarities. In Grace they use more “we” and “they” in their language, and Pastor John once said that “if we weren’t to engage with worldlings, we would have to leave this world”. Here, he is referring to non-believers as “worldlings”, but use “we” about believers. Pastor David however, said that he did not use this term because he identified himself as a worldling too. He did not differentiate between believer and non-believers.

The boundary towards *Culture* can also exist within families, which in some cases might require protection. As mentioned in chapter three, Rachel gave me an example of how she and Matthias trust the people in church more than they trust their own family. She said that if they were going out of town they would leave their child with someone in church, rather than with their own families. By using Barth (1994), this indicates how identification and ascription to a group arises in the meeting with another group. In this case, it does not matter how culturally similar Rachel might be with her own family, when it is the morals she is choosing to emphasise. Hence, she is focusing on the moral differences between them and their families and thereby dichotomising “them” and “us”. If moral protection from the *culture* is needed, which tools are preferred in order to try and change the *culture*?

How to change *Culture*?

In the previous sections in this chapter I have tried to give an insight into how Grace and Dogwood approach and reflect around their idea of “culture”, and contrasted it with a third church; Falwell’s TBRC. They all have opinions on how to change *Culture* and how to morally improve it; may it be through evangelism or politics. My fieldwork was carried out during the presidential primary elections 2008 which gave me data on how they related to politics.

In Grace, there was never much talk about politics, although they had strong opinions on topics that are highly political such as abortion, global warming and same-sex marriage. However, they were not portrayed as political issues, but as decay of morals. For instance, during *Morning Worship*, there was a spokesman for a local pregnancy centre on the pulpit who spoke about dangers of abortion. There is no doubt that this is a hot political issue, but even though it was in a time of primary elections I did not perceive this as politically

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motivated. Rather, it was a standing up for “God’s truth”; that life starts at conception. The pastor never had any political remarks during the worships which in my view deliberately tried to sway people. As in his own words:

My job is not to teach my people politics; my job is to teach my people the gospel. And then politics will take care of itself. If they become committed Christians and their conscience is informed biblically I don't need....that's not my business, it'll take care of itself

There are obviously different levels of interest in politics among members in Grace, but there did not seem to be a strong focus on politics in church. I think the reason for this might be that people in Grace do not see politics as a solution to solve any problems, for example social injustice. I think that they are more concerned with preparing for the after-life and the evangelism which comes with this preparation. Pastor John uttered several times how the best way to help people was to help them spiritually and present the gospel, in stead of helping them physically. There were also several utterances on how social welfare should be the churches’ task, hence on the grassroots-level. There was a general scepticism towards government taking care of social justice, here illustrated by Pastor John: ““We change the world one person at a time. Jesus doesn’t come with a social programme or governmental programme”. This scepticism is noted by Elisha who writes that in the 1980s the government started to cut in federal welfare spending, and by the 1990s conservative Evangelicals were “outspoken in asserting the supremacy of Christian charity and models of caregiving over governmental secular practices” (2005:105-106). I took note of an attitude in Grace that welfare should be taken care of by the churches, and not by the government. However, there was more focus on charity-work in Dogwood than in Grace which might also have to do with the fact that Dogwood is a wealthier church. A woman in Grace once told me that she thought that they were not doing enough in Grace with helping the poor and that they needed to improve.

The view in Grace of improving the state of the World is by evangelism, and not by being vocal about morals as in TBRC and being concerned with politics, indicated here by Pastor John: “We cannot put our trust in the government. To change culture we have to do it one on one”. They always pray for the leadership of their country; may it be Barack Obama or George W Bush, but say “we won’t put our hopes in any of those people”. They see Congress as “just another human institution”. Their loyalty lies elsewhere and “this worldly life” is only a temporary phase, here illustrated by Pastor John: “My kingdom is not of this world. As

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Christians we have dual citizenship. I have a commitment to a kingdom that stands above this country. My loyalty lies there.” They do not see politics as a way of changing the World and its morals, but they see their presence in *Culture* as important for preserving morals, as this utterance by Pastor John indicates: “What our church is doing is important. If we take out of our culture people who know the scriptures, we would get a culture which ours is rapidly becoming”.

To sum up, members in Grace do not see politics as a tool for changing the *Culture*, but they see their presence and commitment to evangelism as a preservative tool to both preserve conservative morals and values and to spread the Gospel. However, even though they are not too concerned with politics in Grace, they still vote because “Christians are good citizens”. That was Pastor John’s argument, but I am sure that there are different motivations among members in Grace for voting. The voting pattern however, is easy to identify. All my informants were convinced that Grace was an all over Republican voting-group and Pastor John confirmed this too. He told me that he did not care much for either party, but says there are only two to choose from and when one of them is pro-life it does not give them much choice. One evening I was over for dinner at Matthias and Rachel’s we discussed the voting pattern in Grace. It was clear that Obama would be the Democrat’s presidential candidate and Matthias said that I probably would not find anyone in Grace supporting Obama, and if they did; they would not say anything about it. When I asked them why, they said that it was because most people in Grace voted Republican and therefore it was not normal to talk Democratic when one knew that everyone else disagreed. Abortion seemed to be the decisive issue which led to Republican votes. Matthias said that abortion along with marriage was the most clear-cut issues in scripture and were not open to interpretation.

This line of thought can be identified when we see abortion as a metonymy. The effect of symbols and how they can trigger chains of meaning was also explored in the previous chapter. “Abortion” is infused with strong emotions because it is a word which has connotations to “murder” and violation of God’s creation. When one says “abortion”, it might trigger these other elements:

Abortion, Sin, Unbiblical, Violation of God’s creation, “man made in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26-27), God’s word: life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:5); Murder (violation of the Ten Commandments).

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When having this view on abortion; voting for a pro-life party is highly probable. Even though politics was not seen as the answer in Grace, they were more concerned with politics in Dogwood. They were interested in the way that they wanted to contribute through politics as Christians: however, they would not do it through the churches as they accused Jonathan Falwell of doing. In Dogwood there is more room for both voting for and discussing Democratic issues, even though they assumed that there was a Republican majority. Pastor David, for instance said he was a “pro-life Democrat”. I think Dogwood’s approach to politics is a result of their approach to *Culture* which is not only based on morality and not only what is morally correct in order to prepare for “the afterlife”, but also on what will cause *flourishing* here and now. This is compatible with Pastor David saying that the human soul is not all that matters, this *worldly* life is important too.

A theme in Dogwood was “love your neighbour”, which was their motto at the time I did my fieldwork. When I asked Jane who she would vote for she said that she would vote for what was good for her neighbour. If she was to vote for what would be best for her neighbour economically; it would be the Democrats. But maybe an unborn baby was her neighbour, she said; then she would have to vote Republican. She admitted that in this regard it was difficult being a Christian in the public sphere because she felt caught in the middle. The abortion issue is also dividing the Catholic votes in the US, and many face the dilemma between helping the poor or helping the unborn (www.nytimes.com). I have spoken to people in Dogwood who are pro-life, but think that it is more important to end the wars abroad where people are being killed than to save unborn children at home. Some even say that they do not believe that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned anyway.

As one can see, my informants perceive that there are different voting patterns in Grace and Dogwood which I see as generally reflecting their different approach to *Culture*. As mentioned above, members in Grace see evangelism and not politics as a tool for improving the morals in *Culture*, while in Dogwood they see politics as a way to bring about social justice and not only focusing on the moral aspects of *Culture*. Also in evangelism, one can identify the boundary between Grace and the *Culture*. When it comes to reaching out to unbelievers in the *Culture*, does not that social boundary have to break? Matthias said that the tension lay in “how can we engage in a world which is sinful and participate in sinful things, in a way that effectively communicates God's love to them without staining ourselves?” His answer to this was that one should stay away from one’s weaknesses: “You engage, but you have to be careful and see your heart and know your heart whether or not you're gonna be tempted by this certain thing that you're involving yourself in”. He said that he had no

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problem with alcoholism or drinking, so he would feel comfortable being in a bar because it is not a temptation for him. Again, we see an awareness of difference in meeting the World and a caution for crossing a moral boundary. Further, the means of evangelising differs between the two churches. Pastor John wrote a review of a youth conference he had attended where they had used rock music and he was critical on how this music led to mixed messages: “The rock musical style includes a non-verbal level of communication, even when the lyrics are Christian. It communicates sensuality and an anti-authoritarianism.” In contrast, Dogwood had an outreach-event where a local artist had a concert at a bar. This was meant to draw people to church and Pastor David was there to introduce the artist. This indicates how Dogwood is using cultural means to reach out, and also staging events outside of the church premises.

Conclusion

In this chapter my focus has been the churches’ different approaches in meeting with the World. This approach is coloured by their idea and use of the term “culture”. As in the previous chapters, my main focus has been on Grace but in this chapter I have also focused on two other churches in order to compare.

In Grace there is an idea of a *Culture* in moral decline and the greatest concerns among my informants are how this decline might influence their spiritual discernment. Their perception is that moral decay is resulting in postmodern tendencies which deny an absolute truth and in secular discourses on abortion and global warming which are opposing Creation. In Grace, they place themselves within the *Culture* by what they have in common with other Americans, but they differentiate themselves from *Culture* morally. As Evangelicals they identify as conservative both theologically and culturally, and by using Barth (1994) I have shown how boundaries between Christians and Non-Christians arise when Christians are over-communicating the decay of morals in *Culture*. This might of course also go the other way, and there is an idea in Grace that “the others” see them as “crazy” and a “cult”. This leads to dichotomisation between “us” and “them” and a separation from *Culture* which is trending in a fundamentalist direction. A practical way of protection from *culture* is homeschooling where the children are being socially kept apart from the society.

In Dogwood they identify as Evangelicals who are theologically conservative, but

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liberal towards *Culture*. According to my informants there, they judge a *Culture* not only by morals but also on whether it is *flourishing*, and by this they mean whether people are happy and content also in “this life”. They seem to have a more complex portrayal of *Culture* and they place themselves within *Culture* and do not want to separate from it. Although they also have critical voices of the *Culture* and are concerned about the moral issues, the boundary between them and *Culture* is not as clear as in Grace and not maintained in the same way, according to the staff in Dogwood. In contrast to Grace, they want to engage in *Culture* and focus more on similarities with them and non-Christians, than on differences.

Both Dogwood and Grace have critical voices towards TBRC and the way TBRC and the Falwell-legacy enters *Culture*. Grace criticise them for wanting to be more concerned with changing the *Culture* than with preaching the Gospel and Dogwood criticise TBRC for their confrontational approach on moral issues. Grace is more concerned with changing *Culture* one by one through evangelism and see politics as just another human institution. Dogwood on the other hand, wants to contribute through politics because they are also concerned with improving life here and now and not only morally preparing for “the afterlife”. This also reflects the voting patterns which in Grace is probably all-Republican where abortion is the decisive issue, while in Dogwood there is room for both discussing and voting for Democratic policies. Here, there is a more complex view of morality in politics where morality is also connected to foreign policy and economic policies and not only the social conservative issues, like abortion and same-sex marriage.

Lastly, the moral approach to *Culture* in Grace also influence their way of evangelising which I showed in an example by using music as a mean of evangelism. Next, I want to conclude this thesis by a summary of points, but I also want to share some thoughts on the future of American evangelicalism.

6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis I have tried to show how a worldview changes after a person converts to Christianity. The world is seen through a new filter where the presuppositions one had before are altered. In a way, my informants in Grace feel as if they are not a part of the social structure around them anymore, and rather feel social belonging when they have Christian *fellowship* in church. This new way of being in the world is a constant negotiation of dilemmas between the *worldly* and the *godly* and they meet this boundary everyday. I have argued with Victor Turner that Christians show liminal characteristics when they are trying to keep themselves in the faith. The way of approaching the World outside of the church is a result of how they maintain this boundary between the *worldly* and the *godly*. This approach influences my informants' engagement with the *Culture* and society around them. In Grace this approach is maintenance of the boundary by emphasising moral differences between “us” and “them”, and in Dogwood their vision is to some extent try to break down this boundary, focusing on similarities in stead of differences.

Dealing with *Culture* is something that many churches are discussing and the challenges are many when “the American culture” is seen as getting more secular and relativistic. Elisha writes that evangelicalism is still predominantly defined by its sense of opposition to and marginalisation from mainstream society and culture (2005:423). However, my impression was that the term “evangelical” was very diverse and liberal ideas of approaching *Culture* were growing stronger. Although my focus has been on Grace and their conservative approach to *Culture* I perceived a tendency in the younger generation in Dogwood to focus more on issues such as social justice and environmentalism than the moral issues, even though abortion will still be a decisive issue among Evangelicals. This is also something the media has picked up on and maybe this will be the start of presenting Evangelicals as a more diverse group⁷⁵.

Pastor David told me that “the term evangelical is about to break up because there is a change going on”. He predicted that the direction which Dogwood was going in now; “this is

⁷⁵ See for example www.nytimes.com.

how churches in the USA will be in 20 years”. There is a new movement going on, he said, which is not termed yet. He said he was part of this new movement and he admitted that it mostly consisted of the younger generation. He said that the misleading term for the movement would be “neo-Evangelicals”⁷⁶, which according to him was not correct because he identified as theologically conservative and culturally liberal and he claimed that neo-Evangelicals had been drifting into theological liberalism. Another new movement that arose in the early 21st century in the scenery of American Christianity is “the emerging church”⁷⁷. This movement is culturally liberal and pro social justice and I asked David if this was the movement he identified with. No, he agreed with some of it, he said, but he saw the church as an institution to very important and the emerging movement rejected the church as an institution and rather sought own communities. “You are in America asking the question of a movement that is transforming right now” he told me and there are several others who claim there is something new on the rise within evangelicalism.

Reverend Jim Wallis⁷⁸ writes in the Boston Globe (www.boston.com) that a new generation is awakening and it is the leading edge of a new movement of "progressive Evangelicals." Further, he writes that this generation “suspects that Jesus would likely care more about the 30,000 children who die globally each day due to unnecessary poverty and preventable disease than he might worry about gay marriage amendments in Ohio”. Sociologist and pastor Tony Campolo has similar opinions and states pejoratively that “over the last decade-and-a-half, Evangelicalism has become married to the Republican Party” (www.christiantoday.co.uk). He suggests the name Red Letter Christians⁷⁹ for “progressive Evangelicals” who hold to the same conservative theologies as Evangelicals and have lifestyles that are in accordance with what is prescribed by the words of Jesus. This group is less concerned with the moral issues such as same-sex marriage in politics and more concerned with simple life styles, environmentalism, fair trade and social justice.

I listed the characteristics of the “new movement” to Pastor John and his response was that back in the early 1900’s “they said the same things” and he referred to “the social gospel” and Walter Rauschenbusch⁸⁰. He saw the focus on social justice as “a blind alley” because the

⁷⁶ “Neo-Evangelicals” is a movement that arose in 1940s. For more information see page 4-5 in chapter one.

⁷⁷ Professor in religious studies Scot McKnight writes that “emerging catches into one term the global reshaping of how to ‘do church’ in postmodern culture”. Further, he writes that it has no central offices and it is as varied as evangelicalism itself. He identifies five streams in the movement: Prophetic, postmodern, praxis-oriented, post-evangelical and political (Democratic) (www.christianitytoday.com).

⁷⁸ Jim Wallis is also one of US President Barack Obama’s spiritual advisors (www.nytimes.com).

⁷⁹ The name “Red-letter Christians” is referring to that some Bibles print the words perceived uttered by Jesus in red ink.

⁸⁰ See page 4 for historical overview.

right way for him to help the poor was to present the gospel to them. He added with a sarcastic undertone: “It’s funny how the historical cycle just repeats itself again and again and again (...). The result is 50 years later that they’ve compromised doctrinal truth. They can’t tell you why they are different than the Red Cross”.

The opposition between the ones who focus on conservative morals and the ones who focus on social responsibility and philanthropy seems to become stronger. Elisha also writes that there is an underlying and equally unrelenting tension within evangelicalism between reactionary conservatism and philanthropic tendencies that “hover near the edge of progressive worldviews” (2005:422). Jonathan Falwell also acknowledged that Evangelicals who were more towards the centre when it comes to their political beliefs were getting more involved now than they have been in the past. He said that he thought this would lead to a healthy debate but stated: “I don’t think you’re gonna see us disappear. You’re not gonna see us stop speaking out”.

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