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Exploring the Emerging Church:

Christianity and Self-religion in the Sacralisation of Inclusivity

DPhil

Abstract

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Trinity 2018

Since the 1960s, church attendance has been steadily declining in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Simultaneously, the number of individuals who claim 'no religion' – known as the 'nones' – is rising. Come the late 1990s, the term 'emerging-' or 'emergent church' began to circulate around Nondenominational Christian discourses in the United States, and soon became an indefinable, but recognisable, concept within contemporary Christianity. In 2004, inspired by the Emerging Church and as a response to the decline in church attendance, the Church of England and the Methodist Church collaboratively published a report titled *Mission-shaped Church*, initiating a movement for the creation of Emerging Church-like groups called Fresh Expressions in the United Kingdom. Today, despite being a popular, if not influential, concept in both the United Kingdom and the United States, very little comprehensive social scientific research has been done on the Emerging Church, not to mention remaining ambiguous in definition. Furthermore, it is not unusual for participants of the Emerging Church to have ambiguous religious identities either—this reflects characteristics of both Christianity and the New Age, or what I call Self-religion. In this research, I aim to demonstrate, through its most deeply held value, the core identity of the Emerging Church: inclusivity. This value of inclusivity is observable from experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma, and is what provides the feeling of belonging and the experience of community. It has its own specific parameters, such as having a relationship to established Christianity, as well as requiring a basic interest in spirituality, making it a sacralised value. I then compare this identity to Christianity and the Self-religion. The Emerging Church, conceived in this way, provides implications to the wider religious landscape of the decline in church attendance and rise of religious 'nones', as well as Christianity and Self-religion: it is relevant to Christianity because it demonstrates the reasons why some people stop attending church, and ways in which it might respond to this information. It also relevant to Self-religion as it demonstrates that it is not a phenomenon that is restricted to alternative religion, and that religious 'nones' are not necessarily unreligious.

Extended Abstract

Title

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Argument

The Emerging Church is a milieu that organises on the basis of the sacralisation of a specific form of inclusivity, borne out of frustrations with Christianity. It is paradoxically neither and both Christian and New Age, or what I call Self-religion. It is Christian insofar as it derives from Christianity, some of its participants identify as Christian, and it continues to engage with – however criticised by – Christian tradition. It is Self-religion in that some of its participants uphold the 'ethic of self-spirituality', and supports, if not socialises, the doctrine of self-authority.

Statement of Significance and Originality

Despite being an observable religious phenomenon in both the United Kingdom and the United States for about three decades, there has only been two comprehensive social scientific research projects conducted on the Emerging Church—*The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (2014) by Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel and *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (2011) by James Bielo.[1]

Most of the academic literature on the Emerging Church has been in the field and sub-fields of theology, with most of its critics going as far as calling it heretical if not blatantly non-Christian. In fairness, some of its participants do not identify as Christian. Nevertheless, it remains a pervasive subject within study of contemporary Christian

[1] James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

theology. That said, it is unclear exactly how Christian the Emerging Church is, and what that means for the Christian tradition.

The Emerging Church also reflects many similarities to the religious phenomenon known as the New Age – its organisation as a milieu, its support of self-authority, among others – which, based on the most recent research on these phenomena, I call Self-religion. Most studies on Self-religion have been restricted within the subjects of secularisation and alternative spirituality, and not on more established religious traditions, like Christianity.

Not only will this research contribute to the literature in the aforementioned subjects, it also provides implications within the wider religious landscape where church attendance is steadily declining, and those who identify with no religion (ie, 'nones') are increasing. Participants of the Emerging Church arguably fall in this demographic: former churchgoers who no longer identify with any religion. It makes suggestions as to why individuals stop attending church, and the form in which religion takes despite not identifying with any religion.

Approach to Conclusion

Firstly, in order to understand the core of the Emerging Church's identity, I sought to find what is most valuable, what is most 'sacred', to the Emerging Church in my observations. Thus, I conducted my ethnography based on the methodology set forth by Gordon Lynch[2] and Carl Dudley,[3] who both argue that it is within trauma that a particular society's most deeply held values – what the society considers most sacred – come to surface.

[2] Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[3] Carl Dudley, "Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 105–31.

In both my observations and interviews, I discovered that the concept of inclusivity is core to the Emerging Church. It is a theme that surfaces in situations of pain and conflict, and *all* of the deeper, more traumatic experiences, among my individual informants and groups. It also appears in happier and more stable moments—inclusivity is what creates the feeling of community for my informants. Lastly, despite what the term implies, inclusivity has its boundaries as well: this particular form is directly linked to experiences with established Christianity, and is sacralised in that a basic interest in spirituality is required in order to practice it.

Returning to the inquiries about the Emerging Church's relationship to Christianity and Self-religion, now that the core identity of the Emerging Church is revealed, I am able to compare it to both. I then reflect these comparisons to the wider conversations of each body of literature, particularly on church attendance decline and the rise of the 'nones'.

Chapter Summary

1 Introduction: Christian or Self-religion?

In this chapter, I give a preliminary description of the Emerging Church based on observations of popular as well as academic literature on the subject. From this description, I point at its problems with established Christianity, and similarities to other religious phenomena popularly known as the New Age, or what I call Self-religion. I narrate these two bodies of literature, and pose my initial research inquiries: What is the Emerging Church? To what extent is it Christian? To what extent is it Self-religion? What does this mean for Christianity, with respect to declining church attendance, and Self-religion, with respect to the increase of religious 'nones'? I then introduce my methodology as a transition to the next four chapters, which focus on the ethnography.

2 Cut from the Same Cloth: The Parallel Histories of Christianity and Self-religion

In this chapter, I detail the history of the Emerging Church and argue that its current form can be linked directly to the 1960s—the same context in which the Self-religion arose. Through the existing literature, I discuss how the Emerging Church has evolved in both the United Kingdom and the United States since its more explicit founding in the late 1990s, and what it is today. This history lays the foundation for conducting the ethnography.

3 Methodology

Here, I delve into the technical details of my ethnography – the selection of particular individuals and groups in London, interview questions, among other things – and provide the justifications for my methodological choices and parameters.

4 Inclusivity through Trauma

This is the first of three chapters devoted solely to my ethnography, which includes popular media analysis, participant observations, and in-depth interviews. In this chapter, I first introduce my informants – popular figures, individuals, and groups – in detail. I focus on the experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma of these popular figures, individuals, and groups, and how they reveal the value of inclusivity within them. I shed light on the role of established Christianity in these experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma. I then analyse the different conceptualisations and relationships to Christianity based on these experiences.

5 Inclusivity as Community

In this chapter, I focus on the experiences of belonging and community – the organising principle – among my informants. My observations affirm Abby Day's work in the concept of 'believing in belonging', [4] in that my informants demonstrate to be most committed to the experience of belonging more so than any ideology. That said, the

[4] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

experience of belonging and community is created in the shared value of inclusivity, borne out of shared experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma from the lack of inclusivity.

6 The Boundaries of Inclusivity

In this chapter, I describe the particular form of inclusivity that the Emerging Church so values. I demonstrate the gaps in the understanding of this value in terms of what is conscious and less conscious to its participants. I then argue that its most basic prerequisites are critiques towards established Christianity and an interest in spirituality. These basic prerequisites establish the Emerging Church as not only valuing, but sacralising, inclusivity. I also recount critiques towards the Emerging Church regarding the topic of inclusivity, and offer responses to them.

7 Discussion: Responses to Common Criticisms

In this chapter, I turn to the Emerging Church's most common criticisms, and respond to them with respect to what as been revealed thus far about the Emerging Church.

8 Conclusion: Healing Christian Trauma

In this chapter, I summarise my findings in chapters 4-6 and offer a more detailed description of the Emerging Church based on its most deeply held value: inclusivity. I then respond to each of my initial research questions and detail the extent to which the Emerging Church is Christian and Self-religion. Finally, I set out the implications of these findings for religion in contemporary society: it is relevant to Christianity because it demonstrates the reasons why some people stop attending church, and ways in which it might respond to this information. It also relevant to Self-religion as it demonstrates that it is not a phenomenon that is restricted to alternative religion, and that religious 'nones' are not necessarily unreligious.

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I Introduction: Christian or Self-religion?

1 Introduction: Recognising the Emerging Church

In a damp and unassuming basement of what appears to be an abandoned church building in London, a group called the Borough Common gathers on Sunday evenings. At the beginning of every gathering, someone gives a brief statement to the wider group in a way not unlike this one, in order to introduce any newcomers to the group:

> 'The Borough Common is a church-like experiment for people who are dissatisfied in some way or another with the mainstream church, and are interested in experimenting with doing church in different ways. It's a community of people where there is no hierarchical structure or particularly appointed leaders or teachers, where [there are] some shared aims, which are, to do good in the world, to grow together spiritually, and to share the community and all its aspects as common property.'[5][6]

This introduction alone, besides what is explicitly stated, reveals many things about the Borough Common specifically. Firstly, regular participants are aware that attending a gathering blindly would require an introduction – that the gathering itself is not self-explanatory – thus giving one. Secondly, that there are significant numbers of people that do attend gatherings blindly, thus requiring to give this introduction as a routine part of the gathering. Thirdly, there is an assumption of a basic understanding of Christian culture, by the use of the term 'church' in various different ways without having to explain each one.

The more explicit details of this introduction, however, reveal things that are not so unusual. Firstly, there are indeed 'people who are dissatisfied in some way or another with the mainstream church'. Secondly, a specific way that 'these people' pose themselves against the 'mainstream church' is the lack of 'hierarchical structures' and

[5] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[6] The names of all of the informants referenced in this research are anonymised, with the exception of David Tomlinson, as he is a public figure and has given me consent to use his name publically.

'particularly appointed leaders or teachers'. Thirdly, some shared values 'that these' people have are 'to do good in the world', spiritual growth, community, and egalitarianism. Just thirty years ago, 'these people' with these aforementioned characteristics may not have been understood as a homogenous group. However, today, particularly within Protestant demographics in the United Kingdom and the United States, 'Emerging Church' and 'Fresh Expressions' would be easily recognisable concepts that are defined by those who share most of not all of these characteristics.

Around the late 1990s, the term 'emerging-' or 'emergent church' began to circulate around Nondenominational Christian discourses in the United States. The term originates as early as the first Evangelicals of the Protestant Reformation,[7] but this contemporary use is most commonly attributed to three figures: Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt.[8] Brett Kunkle explains:

> '[T]he term emergent was first used formally on 21 June 2001 when Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt met and had a conference call with some others to come up with a name for a new network they were starting. The reason they were starting "Emergent" was because Leadership Network had originally formed a theological working group as part of their Young Leaders Network and the Young Leaders theology group was disbanding had ended. So, Doug, Tony, Brian, and some others reformed it and named it "Emergent" on 21 June 2001, and got the domain name "emergentvillage.org" and ".com" on that day.'[9]

Initiated by this web domain, Jones, McLaren, and Pagitt did indeed establish the Emergent Village network, also known as the 'Emerg*ent* Church' or 'Emer*gent* Christianity'. Since the 1990s, the term 'emerg*ing* church' has been used much more

[7] Dominic Erdozain, "Emerging Church: A Victorian Prequel," in *The Great Tradition—A Great Labour: Studies in Ancient-Future Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 93.
[8] Brett Kunkle, "Essential Concerns Regarding the Emerging Church," The Resurgence, 2006, 3, http://www.theresurgence.com/. [Accessed 17 May 2012]
[9] Brett Kunkle, "Essential Concerns Regarding the Emerging Church," The Resurgence, 2006, 3, http://www.theresurgence.com/. [Accessed 17 May 2012]

broadly, with the Emerg*ent* Church within its scope, to name a wider social phenomenon.[10]

Today, despite the term 'church' in 'emerging church', the Emerging Church is not necessarily a 'church'—though it can be. I argue that it can be best understood as an organising concept or milieu, deriving directly from Christian culture, referring to a number of characteristics, which can include but is not limited to:

- 'Glocal' contextualisation (ie, a simultaneous consideration of global and local concerns)
- 'Ancient-future' traditions (ie, an incorporation of the traditions from the past and contextualising it in the present as well as considering its implications for the future)
- Organisational experimentation
- Exploring postmodern thought
- (Re)thinking theology (ie, open reinterpretation to theology and theologies)
- Socially, politically, and environmentally just living (ie, generally socially progressive-leaning commitments)[11]

'Emerging church' can be used *sensu stricto*, to describe established social groups, like the Emergent Village, as well as *sensu lato*, to describe any individual, group, literature, event, or website, that relates to the aforementioned characteristics. Furthermore, there is no clear context for the emic and etic uses of 'emerging church'—for example, it is not unusual for an individual who actively and regularly participates in an Emerging Church event to habitually use 'emerging church' as if it were an external concept unrelated to oneself or the given event. In this research, the Emerging Church is used to describe the concept as a whole, *sensu stricto*, *sensu lato*, emic, as well as etic.

In the United Kingdom, while the aforementioned description also applies, the Emerging Church is commonly associated with a collaborative initiative set forth by the

[10] Brett Kunkle, "Essential Concerns Regarding the Emerging Church," The Resurgence, 2006, 3, http://www.theresurgence.com/. [Accessed 17 May 2012]
[11] Katharine Moody, "'I Hate Your Church; What I Want Is My Kingdom': Emerging Spiritualities in the UK Emerging Church Milieu," *The Expository Times* 121, no. 10 (July 1, 2010): 498, https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524610370762.

Church of England and the Methodist Church called Fresh Expressions. In 2004, inspired by the Emerging Church in the United States, the two established churches published a report titled *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, encouraging the 'planting'[12] of 'fresh ways of being church',[13] which, essentially, is the creation of social groups outside the traditional or institutional conception of 'church'—I will explain and nuance this in more detail in the next chapter. Unlike most, if not all, of the Emerging Church in the United States, the origins of Fresh Expressions is distinctly different in that it is directly linked to two established religious institutions. However, because of the demographic it intends to attract – those who are less inclined to engage with traditional forms of 'church' – many of its participants still tend to fall within the wider scope of the Emerging Church. Furthermore, though Fresh Expressions is the most common association of the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom, it is not to say that the Emerging Church does not exist outside of the two established churches—indeed, Fresh Expressions is a particular movement, yet many of its 'expressions' is still within the wider scope of the milieu of the Emerging Church.

Having been an observable social and religious phenomenon for about thirty years now, the amount of literature on the Emerging Church is vast—but limited to only a handful of fields. There are four primary genres that Emerging Church literature is written in: popular theology, academic theology, ecclesiology, and social science. These genres are not mutually exclusive: popular theology is often informed by academic theology, academic theology is a field with a vast range of disciplines and sub-

[12] The Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 29–36, http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/0715140132.pdf.
[13] The Archbishops' Council, *Starting a Fresh Expression* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), 1; Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 43–44.

disciplines, and ecclesiology and social science are by nature interdisciplinary. That said, the amount of social scientific literature on the Emerging Church is extremely limited. In fact, aside from brief references in the aforementioned genres, and passing mentions in the sociology of contemporary religion, there are only two substantial pieces of work done on the Emerging Church in the social sciences: *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (2014) by Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel and *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* by James Bielo.[14] Needless to say, further research on the Emerging Church in the social sciences is necessary, considering its presence and recognition in such a widespread religious tradition.

Furthermore, though there have been many attempts to define the Emerging Church, there is no consensus, popular or academic, on exactly what it is—my description above is hardly comprehensive, but it is a start. At this stage, without delving into the problematics of defining the Emerging Church, I maintain that it is best understood as an organising concept or milieu, deriving directly from Christian culture, referring to individuals, groups, and products that display a number of aforementioned characteristics. Marti and Ganiel offer the following definition:

> '[R]ather than noting its "anti-institutional" orientation and succumbing to a hopeless lack of definition, we view it as a form of institutional innovation, that is, an institutionalising structure that relies less on formal organisations than informal networks. We argue that the ECM[15] is driven by religious institutional entrepreneurs who share a particular religious orientation based on deconstruction. We conceive of the ECM as a relatively stable package of beliefs, practices, and identities that exist via a series of relationships, affiliations, and affinities, which is sustained both formally through partnerships and collaborative efforts and informally through friendships and shared ideals. The

[14] James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[15] Emerging Church Movement (ECM): Marti and Ganiel's preferential term when referring to the Emerging Church, explained in pp 6-8 in *The Deconstructed Church*

> ECM is therefore relatively coherent yet haphazardly organised. It is deliberately messy.'[16]

Considering this definition, it is initially apparent that, paradoxically, being 'undefinable' is a defining characteristic of the Emerging Church—and perhaps a reason why there is no consensus on any one satisfactory definition. Nevertheless, it does not conflict with my initial description. While I do not disagree with this definition, nor much of Marti and Ganiel's comprehensive research into the Emerging Church, it lacks depth in two significant contexts in which it derives: the very institution that it positions itself against (ie, established Christianity), and its relationship to other social and religious phenomena associated with the New Age or alternative spirituality.

To this end, the Emerging Church displays characteristics of both Christianity and the New Age—and makes an interesting case study in the current trends in the sociology of religion. Since the 1960s, it is an undisputable trend that church attendance has been continually declining in both the United Kingdom and the United States.[17] Alongside this decline, individuals who identify with no religion – known as the 'nones' – are steadily increasing.[18] 'No religion', however, does not necessarily mean 'not

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[16] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 30.

[17] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 2; Abby Day, "What Does It Mean to Believe?" ("What Does it Mean to Believe?" Symposium, University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom, March 8, 2012).

[18] Cary Funk and Greg Smith, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012); Michael Hout, Claude S. Fischer, and Mark Chaves, "More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Key Finding From the 2012 General Social Survey" (Berkeley, CA: Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, March 2013); Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 165, https://doi.org/10.2307/3088891; Barry Alexander Kosmin et al., "American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population" (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, Trinity College, 2009); Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life,

religious', 'no religious belief', or 'no religious practice'—the trend is simply to not identify with any single religion.[19] Many participants of the New Age, for example, are 'nones'.[20] Many scholars have offered insights to these newer, more enigmatic, populations. For example: Grace Davie describes a social landscape where people practice 'vicarious religion',[21] Danièle Hervieu-Léger describes the potential weakening of a religious 'chain of memory',[22] and Peter Berger calls this a rupture of the 'sacred canopy'.[23] These two trends – church attendance decline and the rise of the 'nones' – are not necessarily linked, but the demographic of the Emerging Church includes both of these populations: those who have recently stopped attending to church, known as 'church leavers', and those who identify with no religion. The Emerging Church

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October 9, 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx; Amy Sullivan, "The Rise Of The Nones," *Time*, March 12, 2012, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2108027,00.html.

[19] Funk and Smith, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation"; Hout, Fischer, and Chaves, "More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Key Finding From the 2012 General Social Survey"; Hout and Fischer, "Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference," 165; Kosmin et al., "American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population"; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "'Nones' on the Rise"; Sullivan, "The Rise Of The Nones."

[20] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 176; Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers, and Willem De Koster, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: Why New Age Spirituality Is Less Privatised Than They Say It Is," in *Paradoxes of Individualization: Social Control and Social Conflict in Contemporary Modernity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 36.

[21] Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 177; Grace Davie, "Religion in Europe in the 21st Century: The Factors to Take into Account," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 47, no. 02 (2006): 277, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975606000099; Grace Davie, "Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge," in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, 2007, 22; Grace Davie, "Is Europe an Exceptional Case?*," *International Review of Mission* 95, no. 378-379 (March 25, 2009): 24, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2006.tb00562.x; Grace Davie, "Vicarious Religion: A Response," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 25, no. 2 (2010): 262, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537901003750944.

[22] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2000), 4.

[23] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 151.

demonstrates a population that transcends the sacred-secular binary, which may give valuable insights about these two pervasive trends. In this chapter, I intend to better illuminate the Emerging Church through the lens of Christianity and the New Age, set forth the groundwork that will later bring me to my findings of its core value of a sacralised inclusivity, and what these might offer to the current trends in the field of religion in contemporary society.

2 The Emerging Church and Christianity

In my interviews for this project, I did not explicitly ask an informant's religious identity until the very end—and even then, I did so in a very informal manner. That said, more often than not, my informants would volunteer this information anyway, and oftentimes, even passionately so:

> '[W]hen people ask me if I'm religious, I'll say, "Religion's in my blood". That's my phrase at the moment. And I'll always say, "My grandfather's a pastor, he's a vicar, he helped out at the Samaritans in the 1950s, he had four children, two of them became pastors, one of them had a son who became a pastor, and there's my mum, and she gave birth to me", so I'll always be like, "So it's in my blood". So religion's in my blood, it's not like, "Do you believe it?" I'm just like, it's not even worth it; it doesn't feel like a worthwhile conversation – "Do you believe or not?" – because I could say, "What do you mean by believe? What does that entail? Am I attached to [the Bible]? Like, I definitely don't believe that the things written down in an old book are somehow historically perfect in a way that nothing else is that's ever been written down. I just don't think there's some sort of magical nature of this work. It's not that I don't think that the different councils that look to deciding what was on and what was out had this sort of magical influence over the whole of history and the universe"… I think the spiritual life is . . . not seeing Christian tradition as a set of ideas that I either agree with or disagree with, but as a kind of family line…'[24]

Later along the same conversation, I asked more explicitly, 'How comfortable are you with saying you're Christian?' To which my informant repeated, 'I try to say it's in my blood.'[25]

[24] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[25] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

On this topic of religious identity, like this particular informant, there was almost always a reference to Christianity. Those who identified more explicitly with it did so with some sort of caveat. Those who did not identify with it at all still referenced it in some form or another. Nevertheless, Christianity is an apparent orientation point to participants of the Emerging Church—albeit a complicated one. The literature is not much different.

Focussing on the current literature, as mentioned, the majority of these works are found in the genres of popular theology, academic theology, and ecclesiology. What is most interesting, however, was each author's stance on Christianity. In the same way that my informants were either implicit or explicit about their identification with Christianity, each author, each argument, and particularly on the concept of 'church', be it popular or academic literature, and regardless of the endorsement of established institutional churches (ie, Fresh Expressions), positioned itself at a place where Christianity is perceived as something that can be defined *sensu lato* and implicitly or *sensu stricto* and explicitly. That is, in terms of the use of 'church', what is 'church' for the Emerging Church leaves room for the possibility of interpreting 'church' in an untraditional, even non-Christian manner, though there is a recognition of the Christian source of the term; whereas its critics argue strictly on the basis of an explicit Christian tradition.

Furthermore, this distinction appears to be a significant blind spot for authors engaging in polemics with the Emerging Church: critics are arguing on the behalf of tradition to an audience that is not invested in tradition. That said, the debate is essentially one of 'apples and oranges' – though both sides are arguing for Christianity, they are arguing for two distinctly different conceptualisations of it and can only ever

arrive at an impasse – suggesting that the Emerging Church may indeed be a fundamentally new form of Christianity.

In the next chapters, when I reference quotes from these positions, this gaping hole between the two conceptualisations of Christianity will be apparent. I will also go into more detail about the complexities each of the two conceptualisations, and make further distinctions within them. For now, I highlight six positions regarding the Emerging Church, and demonstrate the two basic conceptualisations of Christianity: (1) affirmative Emerging Church literature, (2) neutral Emerging Church literature, (3) critical Emerging Church literature, (4) affirmative Fresh Expressions literature, (5) neutral Fresh Expressions literature, and (6) critical Fresh Expressions literature. Two are affirmative of the Emerging Church, one coming from either an Independent or Evangelical Church perspective, and another coming from an established church perspective; two have a neutral position on the Emerging Church, one coming from either an Independent or Evangelical Church perspective, and another coming from an established church perspective; and two are critical of the Emerging Church, one coming from either an Independent or Evangelical Church perspective, and another coming from an established church perspective. The following is a summary chart of these positions:

	Implicitly Christian use of 'church'		Explicitly Christian use of 'church'
Independent/Evangelical Church lineage	Affirmative of Emerging Church	Neutral position on the Emerging Church	Critical of Emerging Church
Established/Institutional Church lineage (ie, Church of England, Methodist)	Affirmative of Fresh Expressions	Neutral position on Fresh Expression	Critical of Fresh Expressions

The shading is intended to highlight the two fundamentally different conceptualisations of Christianity: those who interpret church *sensu lato*, and even non-Christian manner (implicitly Christian use of 'church'), and those who conceive of it *sensu stricto* through a lens of tradition (explicitly Christian use of 'church'). As an example, I will detail here two of these positions: those affirmative of the Emerging Church coming from an Independent or Evangelical church perspective, and those critical of the Emerging Church coming from an Independent or Evangelical church perspective.

2.1 Affirmative Emerging Church Literature

Six notable figures in affirmative Emerging Church literature in the United Kingdom are: Brian McLaren, Leonard Sweet, Peter Rollins, Dave Tomlinson, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. McLaren, as mentioned earlier, is one of the original three individuals who is attributed to the 'coining' of the term 'emerging church' in its contemporary use. Since that anecdotal episode, he has published prolifically, and is one of the most popular – if not *the* most popular – figures in the Emerging Church. Sweet is another very popular figure in the Emerging Church. He is often associated with McLaren's work, and has co-written various publications with him. More recently, he has published critiques on the Emerging Church, which I will address in the corresponding section. Rollins and Tomlinson are both popular figures in the United

Kingdom, though do not personally identify with the Emerging Church. Additionally, the two are very different in many ways, but are nevertheless popular figures within the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom. Lastly, Wilson-Hartgrove is noteworthy in his association with another milieu called New Monasticism. In short, New Monasticism is a milieu within the Emerging Church, but with a focus on creating new forms of community life, and particularly communal living. This selection of writings of affirmative Emerging Church texts are all popular publications, though academically informed; there are few purely academic affirmative Emerging Church publications.

At first sight, it may appear that McLaren's use of 'church' is an explicitly Christian one. As with the term, 'church', he is quite liberal in his use of Christian terms. By just his book titles alone, he uses explicitly Christian terms, such as: Christian, Christianity, faith, church, evangelism, [the Gospel of] Luke, and Jesus. Upon a closer read, however, he makes it very explicit that his use of Christian terms are open to interpretation, and may be read to imply non-Christian understandings. Towards the end of *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith* (2010), for example, he candidly states,

> 'I'm . . . ambivalent about the word *Christianity* since, as I've said, I don't believe Jesus came to start a new religion, nor do I believe Christianity (or any other religion) is the answer. Of course, I believe it can be part of the answer, but only if it doesn't see itself as the answer.'[26]

Going back to his conceptualisation of the word, 'church', in the same book, he addresses the concept explicitly in an entire chapter titled, 'The Church Question: What Do We Do About the Church?' Early in the chapter, he defines it in what appears to be a very explicitly Christian way: 'Churches, simply put, come to be communities that form Christ-like people who embody and communicate, in word and deed, the good news of

[26] Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010), 341.

the kingdom of God'.[27] Later in the chapter, however, as he delves more deeply into his understanding of the term, he emphasises that 'church' is 'a school of love':

> 'The Church, then . . . must be above all a school of love. If it's not that, it's nothing. Its goal is not simply to pump knowledge into people, but to train them in "the way of love"'.[28]

Here, his contrasting the 'school of love' with 'pumping knowledge' is the distinction between an inclusive approach to the concept of 'church', as opposed to a strict, traditionally-focussed, conceptualisation of it.

Earlier writings of Leonard Sweet use the term 'church' in a very implicitly Christian way as well. Though, like McLaren, he is liberal in his use of explicitly Christian terms, his interpretation of these terms is actually more broad and inclusive. The entire thesis of his book, *Post-modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (2000), explicitly addresses an 'old' way of conceptualising 'church' versus a 'new' way. In his conclusion, he clearly distinguishes between an 'Old World Church' and a 'New World Church'. Sweet explains that an

> 'Old World Church refuses to change its culture to become more accessible. It either refuses to believe that anything much as changed in the culture or wants to live a separated lifestyle… Old World Churches profoundly misunderstand the world we live in.'[29]

On the contrary, he continues by explaining that

> 'New realities are fundamentally changing the way these churches operate. The New World Church constitutes a new ecclesiastical ecosystem… The New World Church wants to live not a separated lifestyle from the world, but a

[27] Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010), 220.
[28] Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2010), 226.
[29] Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 141.

> sanctified lifestyle in the world. It is reverent abut the message and agnostic about the medium.'[30]

Here, he is particularly pointing at the changing nature of culture – namely, technology and pluralism – and that churches, alongside culture, must learn to adapt. Sweet is arguing that individuals must hold an 'agnostic' stance on the 'medium' – that is, traditional conceptualisations of 'church' – of living a 'sanctified lifestyle', and be open to a more inclusive, even non-Christian, conceptualisation of it.

To press the matter even further, both Sweet and McLaren, along with Jerry Haselmayer, published a book together addressing new Emerging Church terminology and offering new definitions to traditional terms. In *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (2002), they have two entries for 'church': one with a lowercase 'c' (ie, *c*hurch), and the other with an uppercase 'C' (ie, *C*hurch). Here, they define '*c*hurch' as 'The worst form of community ever devised, except for all the others', and explain that 'Too often, sociological structures filled with pachyderms solving problems that no longer exist, or answering questions that no one is asking', anecdotally quoting that 'Jesus hated the church too'.[31] They then contrast it with '*C*hurch', defined as 'The body of Christ—an organic being', 'The communion of saints', and 'A spiritual portal into the kingdom of God'.[32] The primary distinction between these two types of 'church' is that the former is obsolete, and the latter is 'organic', shedding light on the assumption that what is 'obsolete' about 'church' is its inflexibility. Though the definition for '*C*hurch' includes explicitly Christian concepts, like 'Christ', 'communion of saints', and 'kingdom of God', there is an assumption that these concepts should be understood as

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[30] Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 141.
[31] Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 65.
[32] Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A Is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 65.

flexible and inclusive—not to mention that 'Christ', the concept that is most explicitly Christian, comes with the caveat of being 'organic' and being open change.

Rollins is a popular Irish figure within the Emerging Church, particularly for his 'Death of God theology'. He does not directly identify with the Emerging Church, but is no doubt associated with it. He founded a community known as 'Ikon', which describes itself as 'emerging', among other things, such as: 'iconic', 'apocalyptic', 'heretical', and 'failing'. Arguably his most influential book is *How (Not) to Speak of God* (2006), which includes a foreword written by McLaren.[33] In the second half of this book is a section entirely devoted to detailed descriptions of actual services held at Ikon, titled, 'Towards Orthopraxis: Bringing Theory to Church'. In the introduction of this section, it is obvious that Rollins engages with the Emerging Church, and is clear about promoting an implicitly Christian understanding of 'church' in a number of ways: 'In Part I we explored how those involved in the emerging conversation are helping to reintroduce an understanding of faith that radically critiques the "theological" approach found in large sections of the contemporary Church.'[34] First, he recognises that his readers are Emerging Church participants, and explicitly uses the term 'emerging conversation', as opposed to 'emerging *church*'. By using this designation, he is intentional about the problems with the explicitly Christian use of the term 'church', and keeping it open to just being a 'conversation' as opposed to any other form of traditional or institutional construct. Second, he indeed uses the term 'church', but intentionally capitalises the 'C', using it in such a way that is implies inclusivity and flexibility. Third, he intends to 'radically critique' the 'contemporary Church', suggesting that the 'Church' in general,

[33] Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006; Peter Rollins, 'Peter Rollins', 2014, <www.peterrollins.net>. [Accessed 13 June 2014]

[34] Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006, 73.

regardless of his inclusive and flexible use of it, is in need of critiquing. He concludes positively by stating that the 'emerging conversation' is 'concretely involved in sustaining and developing faith communities'[35], where he, yet again, intentionally omits the use of 'church' and substituting it with 'faith community'.

Tomlinson is a particularly popular figure within the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom, and is referenced in much academic literature on religion in contemporary Britain. He has been a leading figure in the House Church Movement, the co-founder, with his wife, of a (late) well-known, London-based, Independent Emerging Church called Holy Joes, and author of *The Post Evangelical* (1996), a highly influential book within the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom. More recently, he has been ordained in the Church of England and is also referenced in Fresh Expressions literature, but because of his Nondenominational background, his work and influence extends to the wider milieu of the Emerging Church.[36] *The Post Evangelical*, in short, as an introductory book to his observation of Evangelical Christianity in the United Kingdom, and suggestions on how he believes it should develop in the changing cultural landscape. He suggests the term 'post Evangelical' to denote the individual making this contemporary transition, focussing more on a temporal concept as opposed to an alternative to the term 'church', which has resonated with the experiences of those within the Emerging Church. When he addresses the term, 'church', what he means is the

[35] Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006, 73.
[36] Graham Cray, *The Post Evangelical Debate*, London, Triangle, 1997; Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002; Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985; David Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, London, Triangle, 1996; David Tomlinson, 'Dave Tomlinson: Explorer of Theology, Spirituality, and Life in General', 2012, <www.davetomlinson.co.uk>. [Accessed 14 June 2014]

common, established, explicitly Christian institutional understanding of it, something that the 'post Evangelical' rejects:

> 'The whole backdrop of the Christian gospel is the organised church and, sadly, this is the biggest stumbling block of all to the postmodern onlooker... The result of this is that people see in the church just more of what they see *and reject* in the outside world: hierarchies, bureaucracies, and power struggles.'[37]

Considering Holy Joes, note that the community's name in itself does not use the term 'church'. Their website directly addresses the different alternatives to 'church', and even rejects 'emerg[ing] church', making it all the more telling that Holy Joes attracts a very similar demographic as the Emerging Church. Directly addressing the question, 'Are we a "Church" or are we not?' they reply, 'The answer is yes and no. The more you insist we are the more we will probably resist.'[38] In this sense, it is clear that the explicitly Christian understanding of 'church' is one that is steered clear from.

A last example of affirmative Emerging Church literature important to highlight are the writings of Wilson-Hartgrove and his offering of New Monasticism. New Monasticism, as mentioned earlier, is a milieu within the Emerging Church with a focus on communal living. The term 'new monasticism' in its contemporary use is attributed to Wilson-Hartgrove's father-in-law, theologian Jonathan Wilson, drawing on the work of philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre, theologian Deitrich Bonhoeffer, and the monastic Rule of Saint Benedict.[39] Wilson-Hartgrove is best known for his co-founding, with his wife, of the Rutba House community in Durham, North Carolina, which published *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (2005), which provided

[37] David Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, London, Triangle, 1996, 144.
[38] Holy Joe's, "Holy Joe's," 2009, www.holyjoes.com. [Accessed 14 June 2014]
[39] Jonathan Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: From After Virtue to a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

momentum for the growth of the milieu.[40] Unlike the aforementioned Emerging Church writers, Wilson-Hartgrove does not shy from using explicitly Christian terms, and means them in very explicitly Christian ways. In fact, he explicitly states,

> '[I]f new monasticism is a movement, I at least want to say that it's a *prochurch* movement. God only knows if our communities will last or if the practices that have given us life will be of some help to other Christians.'[41]

The difference with his writings, however, is the focus of what it is he is trying to 'innovate'—in this case, monastic living for lay people. Wilson-Hartgrove is not concerned about the form of 'church' that other Emerging Church writers are criticising – primarily established, institutional churches with inflexible doctrines – because he already considers New Monastic communities churches in themselves, which are part of a larger, wider church—whatever that might mean, as long as New Monasticism is considered part of it. Considering section titles in his book where he uses 'church' – 'Imagining Church from the Margins', 'The Generosity-driven Church', 'Every Church a Peace Church', 'The Work of the Church is Grace' – his focus is more about promoting social justice work at a grassroots level. Ultimately, this kind of work is the kind of work that the other Emerging Church writers, with their socially progressive agendas, intend to do by tearing down the top-down societal models. That being said, Wilson-Hartgrove's use of 'church' is indeed an explicitly Christian use of the term, but operating from a standpoint where the work he is doing is already doing the work that changing the use of the term does: criticising established, institutional churches with inflexible doctrines.

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[40] The Rutba House, *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005).
[41] Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 147.

With the exception of Wilson-Hartgrove and New Monasticism, the use of 'church' within affirmative Emerging Church literature is implicitly Christian. If used at all, it implies a form of religion that is inclusive and doctrinally flexible—so inclusive and flexible that it does not necessarily have to be Christian at all. If the concept is criticised, it is directly at the understandings of 'church' that are institutional or with inflexible doctrines. That being considered, it is in this social critique that Wilson-Hartgrove and New Monasticism fall within the milieu of the Emerging Church. The implicitly Christian use of the term 'church', therefore, is actually a social critique against institutions and orthodoxy.

2.2 Critical Emerging Church Literature

The literature that is critical of the Emerging Church, from popular writings to scholarly work, is critical of it from the perspective of the term 'church' being explicitly Christian. Some writers, as I will highlight in this section, may have been affirmative of the Emerging Church at one point, but change their position and become critical of it later. These changed positions, nevertheless, critique the Emerging Church on the grounds of its conceptualisation of 'church' as needing to be more explicitly Christian.

One of the most popular, almost tokenistic, critical books on the Emerging Church is the best seller, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (2008), by Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck. Their primary argument here is that they agree that the Emerging Church is 'revelatory', in that it is 'relevant', it 'reaches out', it is 'authentic', it 'includes the marginalised', and 'wants community and life transformation',[42] but also that 'Jesus' prescription for health is more than community,

[42] Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 247.

authenticity, and inclusion'.[43] They address the aspect of the Emerging Church that strives to be inclusive, but criticises it for being problematically 'over-tolerant' and 'under-defined'.[44] That, ultimately,

> 'Emergent Christians need to catch Jesus' broader vision for the church—His vision for a church that is intolerant of error, maintains moral boundaries, promotes doctrinal integrity, stands strong in times of trial, remains vibrant in times of prosperity, believes in certain judgement and certain reward, even as it engages the culture, reaches out, loves, and serves.'[45]

In this, De Young and Kluck's understanding of 'church' is clearly one that has a strict view of Christianity, making it clear that it has to be formed according to 'Jesus' vision', and remains true to doctrinal inerrancy. They argue against the Emerging Church by assuming the values of a very specific image of Jesus and consistent Christian doctrines, when the Emerging Church's conceptualisations of these things are actually broad and fundamentally open to interpretation.

Critical academic literature on the Emerging Church follows very similar arguments. D A Carson argues that the Emerging Church '[drifts] from scripture' and is merely a reactionary trend in postmodernity.[46] Similarly, Noel Woodbridge argues that the Emerging Church does not 'remain biblical and retain the essential character of the gospel'.[47] Roland Riem argues that it is not sustainable because of its leaderless structure.[48] Lastly, Joshua Moritz mentions that many argue that the Emerging Church

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[43] Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 239.
[44] Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 247.
[45] Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 248.
[46] D A Carson, "The Emerging Church," *Modern Reformation Magazine*, 2005.
[47] Noel Woodbridge, "Evaluating the Changing Face of Worship in the Emerging Church in Terms of the ECLECTIC Model: Revival or a Return to Ancient Traditions?," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 5 (2008): 202.
[48] Roland Riem, "Mission-Shaped Church: An Emerging Critique," *Ecclesiology* 3, no. 1 (2006): 125.

has 'an elusive goal that is generally not even sought'.[49] For these scholars, the Emerging Church is in danger of drifting from the Christian tradition, arguing the explicitly Christian position.

Sweet, as mentioned earlier, has recently become critical of the Emerging Church. In a discussion between him, McLaren, and Jones, published in *Relevant Magazine*, he gave what was soon popularly referred to as his 'include me out' critiques.[50] To summarise these critiques, he published on his website that 'The "emerging church" is a young movement grown old very quickly because:

1. 'It is prone to cause political ruckus when it should be rocking the world for Christ
2. 'It is missing a hunger and longing for the salvation of others, a passion for others to fall in love with Jesus and the sense that there are things at stake here that have both earthly and eternal consequences
3. 'It appears more and more to be a new evangelical form of the old 1970s liberation theology
4. 'It makes the mistake of separating the Person of Jesus from His teachings
5. 'It deconstructs everything, including the historic creeds of the church and the divine inspiration of the entire biblical canon
6. 'It revels in spreading doubt more than faith'[51]

Here, in just his use of the term 'church' in the fifth point, it is clear that he is using it in an explicitly Christian way. Taking the rest of his critique as a whole, it is clear that his most recent position is one from an explicitly Christian position, and no longer from the implicit one.

Whether popular, academic, or from the position of a figure that was once affirmative of the Emerging Church, the critiques can all be categorised as those using the term 'church' in a way that is committed to a view of Christianity *sensu stricto*. The

[49] Joshua Moritz, "Beyond Strategy, Towards the Kingdom of God: The Post-Critical Reconstructionist Mission of the Emerging Church," *Dialog* 47, no. 1 (February 24, 2008): 27, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6385.2008.00365.x.
[50] Leonard Sweet, "A Response to Recent Misunderstandings," 2014, http://www.leonardsweet.com/response.php. [Accessed 15 June 2014]
[51] Leonard Sweet, "A Response to Recent Misunderstandings," 2014, http://www.leonardsweet.com/response.php. [Accessed 15 June 2014]

Emerging Church, however, from the affirmative as well as neutral literature, is defined by its use of 'church' of a view of Christianity *sensu lato*. As mentioned, I will go into more detail about the complexities each of the two conceptualisations, and make further distinctions within them, but for now it is important to be clear on the 'apples and oranges' debate in order to distinguish the data that are speaking of the Emerging Church *as it is* versus what it is not—and intentionally not bothered to be.

2.3 The Emerging Church as Christian-derived

To this end, it begs the question of the Emerging Church's authenticity as a form of Christianity. Note that the aforementioned debates have only come from theological literature: popular theology, academic theology, and ecclesiology. To be fair, for those whose basic assumption is that Christianity is a particular tradition, it is consistent that the Emerging Church would be critiqued as being inauthentic and even heretical—these are valid theological arguments.

However, from a social scientific perspective, what can be argued must come from observable and empirical data of the subject at hand. It is quite a surprise that Marti and Ganiel as well as Bielo do not address this issue at all. Marti and Ganiel's entire research assumes that the Emerging Church is indisputably Christian: 'Although much is unknown, our research leads us to conclude that the ECM is one of the most important reframings of religion within Western Christianity in the last two decades.'[52] Bielo overlooks any potential for the Emerging Church to not be Christian, by starting at the base assumption that it is continuous with Evangelical Christianity: '*Emerging Evangelicals* . . . [provides] a multisite, multimodal ethnographic analysis of how

[52] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

Evangelicals have consumed and enacted the kinds of knowledge produced under the moniker of the Emerging Church.'[53]

My position is that while it can be argued that the Emerging Church is not an authentic form of Christianity – evident in the theological literature as well as the fact that its participants can include those who do not identify as Christian at all – Christianity demonstrates to be an inescapable concept within any engagement with the Emerging Church, regardless of a participant identifying as being implicitly or explicitly Christian. As a whole, the Emerging Church *derives directly* from Christian culture—whether it is authentically Christian or not highly depends on the particular individual, group, or product. That said, it is curious that after being a religious phenomenon for about three decades, it persists, and most of the research on the Emerging Church remains and continues to be within theology—despite being critiqued as being non-Christian, it is managing to sustain a connection with it, suggesting it may very well be a form of Christianity that is simply just so new that the measure of tradition is still unable to recognise it.

3 The Emerging Church and Self-religion

On the same topic of religious identity as in the previous section, this informant is an example of an individual who is not strictly invested in her identity as Christian:

> 'I read a book by [David Steindl-Rast, OSB], and in that, he said, "Religion is a framework for the quest of the heart". I really love that and that really resonates with me. Because I've grown up in a Christian culture, the framework for the quest of my heart is Christianity, but if I had been in any other country, and if was to move to another country, then I probably would adopt their framework… [In surveys,] [s]ometimes, [I would tick 'Christian'], depending on the day. Probably not because there are a lot of things Christians believe that I don't believe. I don't believe in an interventionist God, I disagree with lots of these concepts of heaven and afterlife. I think that's a big distraction from living well now… It's about your culture. My cultural background is in the Christian culture, but that means I hold very loosely to a lot of the teachings, because I

[53] James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 6.

> would say that they're not helpful… I think religion is a framework. When the framework becomes the dominant, then it's obstructing [the quest of the heart]… [I agree with open-minded Christians], I think my quest is to be a loving person and to be generous and compassionate and accepting as Jesus was, in a radical way. So that's what I try to do and the rest of it is inconsequential… I've been thinking about [whether or not I would seek out a spiritual community if I moved to another country], because my partner is from Australia, and if we moved to Australia, I think I wouldn't seek out a church, because I would assume I had very little in common with them. I don't know. I don't know what would be there, and what would be available. I think it's more important to try and live in a compassionate, loving, and accepting way, and try and get over your ego, and try and be generous. I don't know if I'd be more likely to find that in a Zen Buddhist group, or in a Christian group. I want to be where I find it.'[54]

Unlike my previous informant, this one's religious identity has less to do with one's family or 'blood', and much more to do with one's personal behaviour and 'quest of the heart'. It is with participants of the Emerging Church, like this one, that makes it arguably un-Christian. That said, this informant's religious identity does echo another familiar religious phenomenon, more popularly known as the New Age, or, what I call Self-religion.

3.1 Self-religion, A Summary

The 1960s were a tumultuous time globally. The West after World War II was particularly economically prosperous. This, however, gave birth to a ubiquitous disillusionment towards traditional institutions and authorities where 'an oppositional counterculture would emerge to challenge the forces of . . . the dominant culture.'[55] In Asia, war and political turmoil was pervasive. Thus, waves of refugees and immigrants from all over the continent settled throughout the United Kingdom and the United States,

[54] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[55] Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, "Introduction," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 1–2.

among other locations in the world.[56] These factors, among many others, gave rise to a religious landscape filled with numerous options.

The counterculture in the United Kingdom and the United States sought out religious alternatives that differed those of traditional institutions and authorities, and it was not difficult to find them. The multitudes of immigrants throughout Asia brought with them their own traditions, particularly forms of Buddhism and Hinduism.[57] World travel was easier than ever with the innovations of commercial flight, thus travellers would import traditions from their expeditions, and various teachers from around the world would come to speak about and teach their traditions to accommodate the demand.[58] Furthermore, innumerable movements of newer, more home-grown religions (ie, new religious movements or 'NRMs') also began to sprout at an exponential rate.[59] These alternative religious options of the counterculture of the 1960s were also not necessarily mutually exclusive—they mixed and interacted to what eventually became known as a religious phenomenon called the New Age.[60]

Without going into the meaning or history of the term itself, what is important to state for now is that the New Age stood as 'an eschatological emblem that seekers could use to navigate their own pathways through alternative spirituality'.[61] Though there existed some organisations, doctrines, and practices that explicitly identified as 'new

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[56] Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 93.
[57] Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 93.
[58] Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 92.
[59] Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, "Introduction," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 1–2.
[60] Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 1–2.
[61] Steven Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003), 54.

age', the New Age was not centralised in any way, but was a term that resonated as the religion of the countercultural zeitgeist of the time.

Today, the New Age is no longer part of the grand countercultural zeitgeist that it once was in the 1960s, but the concept is still used in two primary ways. Wouter Hanegraaff distinguishes these two usages as *sensu stricto* and *sensu lato*—interestingly enough, similar to the Emerging Church, which I will address in the next chapter.[62] *Sensu stricto* refers to having a strict sense of 'new age', referring to explicit organisations, doctrines, and practices attributed to Alice Bailey, a figure acknowledged as the unofficial 'prophet' of the New Age.[63] *Sensu lato* is having a more broad or diffuse sense of 'new age', when referring to any cluster of beliefs or practices of or related to holism, 'mind-body-spirit', the occult, or esotericism.[64]

The latter sense can also be recognised in the colloquial, where 'new age' is used as an etic adjective (eg, 'new age*y*') to describe any number of those beliefs and practices.[65] Sometimes, the term 'new age' is not used at all, even when referring to those particular clusters of beliefs and practices, sometimes as a way to distinguish the reference from the *sensu stricto*.[66] Furthermore, this sense can also be implied in particular established traditions as well as nonreligious contexts, so long as the

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[62] Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "Introduction," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 4.

[63] Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "Introduction," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 4; Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 35.

[64] Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "Introduction," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 4.

[65] Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "Introduction," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 4; Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I B Tauris, 2007), 64–65.

[66] Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, "Introduction," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 4.; Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I B Tauris, 2007), 64–65.

aforementioned clusters of beliefs and practices can be distinguished within them.[67] In Christianity, for example, the phenomenon called the Emerging Church can be argued to be New Age *sensu lato*.[68] Similarly, businesses commonly incorporate New Age training as part of professional development and training programmes.[69] Because of its persistent elusiveness, the interest of this research is in this latter *sensu lato*.

Because of the diffuse nature of *sensu lato*, its tendency to be referred to by various different names, and even the uncentralised nature of its predecessor from the 1960s, one can assume that studying the New Age brings great methodological challenges for scholars in the field. Thus, even in the basic process of defining such an amorphous phenomenon, the field progressed with the tendency to define the New Age in ways that attempted to demarcate its boundaries. It did this in two distinct, but not mutually excusive, ways: via authority, and via organisation.

Those that traversed in the direction of studying the New Age in terms of authority have come to a general consensus with the thesis of self-authority. That is, a way to make sense of the infinite religious options and how individuals navigate one's way though them, is through the concept of the self or individual as the ultimate authority in social life. Self-authority, then, makes the New Age distinct from religions of traditional forms of authority (eg, doctrinal, institutional, hierarchical).

In this thesis, the economic prosperity of the 1960s freed the individual, and generated a dramatic shift from the collective to the self as the ultimate authority in social life. Danièle Hervieu-Léger calls this landscape of self-authority the 'culture of

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[67] Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I B Tauris, 2007), 64–65.
[68] Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century* (London: I B Tauris, 2007), 25.
[69] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 186–89.

the individual'.[70] From a wider cultural-historical lens, this 'culture of the individual' is part of Charles Taylor's influential 'subjectivisation thesis' explaining 'the massive subjective turn of modern culture'.[71] Furthermore, various sociologists of religion from North America to Western Europe – Nancy Ammerman[72], Robert Bellah[73], Peter Berger[74], Paul Heelas[75], Thomas Luckmann[76], Linda Woodhead[77], and many more – have made their own contributions affirming and extending the thesis of self-authority. In short, in a process called 'individualisation'[78], where the individual becomes increasingly aware of one's own agency, the self thus increasingly becomes the primary authority in social life.

As for religion, because of self-authority, each individual is able to 'pick-n-mix' and create one's own personally crafted religion that caters to one's particular needs—originally called *religion bricolage* or *religion à la carte* by Hervieu-Léger.[79] Oftentimes, this type of religion is called 'Sheilaism', coined by Bellah in his renowned book, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (2007),

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[70] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 'Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social Nature of Religion in Modernity' in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, R Fenn (ed), Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 161–175 (p. 161).
[71] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 26.
[72] Meredith McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2002), 293.
[73] Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 142–63.
[74] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Doubleday, 1967), 83.
[75] Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 2–5.
[76] Meredith McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2002), *Religion*, 293.
[77] Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 2–5.
[78] Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualisation: Institutionalised Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London: SAGE, 2002), xxi.
[79] Meredith McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2002), 293.

referring to the highly personalised religion that an informant of his named 'Sheila' has identified with.[80] Furthermore, because of self-authority, religious collectives, traditional and non-traditional, that cater to the self also tend to thrive.[81]

Those that traversed in the direction of studying the New Age in terms of organisation, though not as developed as self-authority, have come to a general consensus that the milieu is the way the New Age is organised. Like self-authority, this distinguishes the New Age from more traditional forms of organisation with clearly defined boundaries (eg, church, sect, NRMs). The milieu, on the other hand, by nature, has extremely permeable boundaries. While studying the New Age in terms of self-authority accounts for the individual's navigation through multiple options, studying it in terms of organisation accounts for its nature of diffuseness.

Colin Campbell was the first to define 'milieu' as a particular model of organisation in the publication of his articles, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu, and Secularisation' (2002) and 'Clarifying the Cult' (1977).[82] In his description of the structure of the 'cultic milieu', he describes that it is 'a "very amorphous, loose-textured, uncondensed type of social structure" [where participants] are transient, tolerant, non-exclusive, lack a clear distinction between members and non-members and are poorly

[80] Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 221, 235.
[81] Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2005, 75–76.
[82] Colin Campbell, 'Clarifying the Cult', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 28, 1977, 375–388; Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu, and Secularisation' in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalisation*, Walnut Creek, CA, Altamira Press, 2002, pp. 12–25.

differentiated from the surrounding cultic milieu'.[83] Despite this lack of structure, however, participants are 'united and identified by the existence of an ideology'.[84]

Oftentimes, the New Age is referred to as a 'movement', as well as a 'network', but even those that used these organisation models to describe the New Age recognise their flaws and point back at the milieu. Paul Heelas, for example, in his comprehensive book titled, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralisation of Modernity* (1996), even when using the specific term 'movement' in the title, explains within the introduction that 'movement' is not what he means at all: 'It is not [a movement]… [the New Age] is predominantly comprised of other modes of affiliation'.[85] Massimo Introvigne, in his article, 'The Gothic Milieu: Black Metal, Satanism, and Vampires' (2002), describes 'the gothic milieu' as a 'metanetwork' of the general interest, and not necessarily ideology, of black metal, Satanism, and vampires.[86] Though he uses the term 'metanetwork', as implied in the title of his article, what he really means is 'milieu'.[87]

That being said, individuals that gather together in the form of a milieu of shared religious ideology or interests are a way to define the New Age *sensu lato* organisationally. Going back to the original description of *sensu lato* – referring to any cluster of beliefs or practices of or related to holism, 'mind-body-spirit', the occult, or

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[83] Colin Campbell, 'Clarifying the Cult', in *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 28, 1977, 377.
[84] Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu, and Secularisation' in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalisation*, Walnut Creek, CA, Altamira Press, 2002, 23.
[85] P Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralisation of Modernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, 9.
[86] Massimo Introvigne, "The Gothic Milieu: Black Metal, Satanism, and Vampires," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 138–51.
[87] Massimo Introvigne, "The Gothic Milieu: Black Metal, Satanism, and Vampires," in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 147.

esotericism – its organisation is important to demarcate as there remain those holistic, 'mind-body-spirit', occult, and esoteric beliefs and practices that organise in more traditional ways. The New Age, because of the way it is organised, is also distinct from those.

As much as the field has progressed in the process of defining the New Age in terms of authority and organisation, what has now been lost is the relationship between the two. The study of self-authority and the milieu have traversed so deeply in their own directions that they have forgotten that what they were attempting to define was one same phenomenon in the first place: the New Age. This, however, brings about two new dilemmas. Firstly, *since* the two directions of study *have* in fact progressed, they may no longer have that relationship that they once started with. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, to use the term 'new age' has become problematic—not least because it can mean multiple things, but to use it can also restrict its intended use.

For the first dilemma, the solution appears simply enough. Just with the brief description of self-authority and the milieu, the two appear to actually complement one another: because of self-authority, individuals are able to pick-and-mix those beliefs and practices that content oneself, which means individuals have no single source from which one acquires all of one's beliefs and practices. Furthermore, a sea of individuals picking and choosing beliefs and practices as much and as often (or even as little as) they wish, creates the ephemeral organisational model of the milieu. Self-authority, then, creates the milieu, and the milieu is dependent on the concept self-authority.

As for the second dilemma, considering that self-authority and the milieu do continue to have a close relationship to one another, a single term that denotes this phenomenon could be helpful for the field. Since the term 'new age' has already demonstrated its problems in the current context, I suggest 'self-religion'. Self-religion,

then, is the New Age *sensu lato*. It denotes the religious phenomenon that claims the self as the primary authority in social life, which simultaneously creates the countless coexisting organisational forms that the milieu is. In the next sections, I will delve more deeply into the current discussions on the assumptions of self-authority and the milieu, and demonstrate that despite the continuing complexity, the two can still be conceived together—and conceived together, as Self-religion, it can shed light on wider dynamics in social life.

3.2 Self-religion and the Doctrine of Self-authority

As already briefly summarised, the concept of self-authority not only has been a nearly uncontested thesis in the study of Self-religion, it is also an essential element in the explanation of its organisation. In this section, I pose two critical positions to the concept of self-authority, and demonstrate that these critiques take the position that self-authority, despite common notions of it, is still a socially constructed reality. Furthermore, this rethinking of self-authority continues to affirm its relationship to the milieu.

In the article, 'Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket' (2013), Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman challenge two major assumptions about Self-religion: (1) its nature of being doctrinally diffuse, and (2) that it is non-formative.[88] In this section, I argue that Aupers and Houtman's critiques offer a suggestion for a coherent doctrine for Self-religion.

Exploring the first assumption, Aupers and Houtman observe trainers at a spiritual centre in an urban location that offers a variety of courses from various different traditions. Within each interview, they discover that in that there is unanimous rejection of placing any one particular tradition at the core of one's worldview, alongside a

[88] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013).

unanimous assumption of what is known as *philosophia perennis* (ie, 'perennial philosophy') – 'the belief that the diversity of religious traditions essentially refers to the same underlying spiritual truth'[89] – alongside 'the belief that in the deeper layers of the self one finds a true, authentic, and sacred kernel, basically "unpolluted" by culture, history, and society, that informs evaluations of what is good, true, and meaningful.'[90] Therefore, the beliefs of their informants are not doctrinally diffuse at all. Aupers and Houtman call the latter part of this doctrine the 'ethic of self-spirituality'[91], and together with *philosophia perennis*, this is self-authority conceived as a religious doctrine.

As for the second assumption, Aupers and Houtman observe trainers that specialise in spiritual courses for business life. Here, they explore the assumption that formation or socialisation of the New Age is impossible, considering the diffuse nature of the beliefs at hand. Furthering the concept of the 'ethic of self-spirituality', Aupers and Houtman find that there is in fact a common process of transmitting this doctrine: participants are led to believe that they are 'less authentic than they typically believe they are', then 'socialised into a shared emphasis on the primacy of personal authenticity'.[92] The 'ethic of self-spirituality', therefore, is actually a doctrine that is not only consistent and coherent, but also can be successfully socialised by and to its participants. Aupers and Houtman have made a significant contribution to the study of Self-religion in shedding light on its doctrine and how it is transmitted. Still, it does not look directly at

[89] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 176–77.
[90] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 178.
[91] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 176–79.
[92] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality," in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion* (Durham, England: Routledge, 2013), 185.

the assumption of self-authority—that is, the self-as-primary authority, which Matthew Wood addresses.

In recent works by Wood, namely, the book, *Possession, Power, and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies* (2007), and additional articles supporting it, he challenges the assumption of self-authority in Self-religion directly.[93] Ultimately, Wood argues that what individuals are engaging in is 'perceived self-authority', when in fact, there are multiple authorities at play.[94] In his observation of various individuals and groups within Nottinghamshire in the United Kingdom, it was very clear that there were leaders, teachers, and facilitators, and even philosophies and institutions, that individuals gave authority to. Wood calls these 'nonformative authorities' in that no single authority completely dominates an individual (represented in Aupers and Houtman's work as *philosophia perennis*)—and even if there are preferences in terms of context, there are still multiple authorities contributing to the individual's formation.[95] Formation, in this sense, refers to authority, as opposed to the formation of doctrine as described by Aupers and Houtman earlier.

Considering Wood's conceptualisation of 'perceived self-authority', he, like

[93] Matthew Wood and Christopher Bunn, "Strategy in a Religious Network: A Bourdieuian Critique of the Sociology of Spirituality," *Sociology* 43, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 286–303, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508101166; Matthew Wood, *Possession, Power, and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007); Matthew Wood, "The Nonformative Elements of Religious Life: Questioning the 'Sociology of Spirituality' Paradigm," *Social Compass* 56, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 237–48, https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768609103359; Matthew Wood, "The Sociology of Spirituality," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan s. Turneressor leader Director member Fellow (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 267–85, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781444320787.ch12/summary.

[94] Matthew Wood, "The Nonformative Elements of Religious Life: Questioning the 'Sociology of Spirituality' Paradigm," *Social Compass* 56, no. 2 (June 1, 2009), 297; Matthew Wood, "The Sociology of Spirituality," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Bryan s. Turneressor leader Director member Fellow (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 271.

[95] Matthew Wood, *Possession, Power, and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

Aupers and Houtman, recognises that there is still legitimacy in the concept of 'self-authority'—just not in the way that it has been habitually used in the literature of self-authority. While Aupers and Houtman conceive of self-authority as a socialisable doctrine, Wood demonstrates that it exists as a social misperception of multiple nonformative authorities. In fact, these two perspectives are actually complementary: self-authority is a socialisable doctrine that consists of multiple nonformative authorities. From these findings about self-authority, I argue that Self-religion has a coherent, socialisable doctrine, which is disseminated by multiple nonformative authorities. [96]

What these studies do not account for, however, is how self-authority ties to organisation—it was always the authority of the individual that had a relationship to diffuse organisation or the milieu. To this point, the concept of 'diffuseness' has been mentioned to describe and challenge Self-religion only in terms of doctrine and how it is transmitted, but still leaves the concept of diffuse organisation unaccounted for. Keeping in mind that self-authority is actually the *doctrine* of Self-religion, and that *multiple authorities* (not the sole authority of the individual) are what is actually involved in Self-religion, requires a rethinking of Self-religion's organisation.

As mentioned earlier, diffuse organisation, in the form of the milieu, was habitually explained by self-authority, as in the 'pick-n-mix' model; that the milieu is formed because of the ultimate authority of the individual social actor. However, as Wood explains, this position completely overlooks the fact that individuals are always socially influenced; that individuals are always actors and can really only choose from the actual choices available for them in their social contexts.[97] Wood, however, is not pointing at anything new here—whichever model of society one looks at, though some

[96] From here onwards, to avoid confusion, I will refer to the *doctrine* of 'self-authority' as self-authority, and the *misperception* 'self-authority' as the authority of the individual.
[97] Matthew Wood, *Possession, Power, and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies*, Aldershot, UK, Ashgate, 2007, 38.

authorities may be more influential than others, and some individuals may have more agency than others, multiple authorities – which includes individual, but not ultimate individual, agency – are always at play.[98] That being said, the milieu is not anything new either—though coined to denote a particular phenomenon by Campbell, since multiple authorities have always existed, the milieu has always existed as well. Therefore, it is not the authority of the individual that creates the milieu or diffuse organisation, but multiple authorities.

As for the actual element of organisation in the milieu, what makes a milieu 'organised', despite its diffuse nature, are a shared ideology or set of interests. Previously, when conceived with the authority of the individual, the amount of religious milieux could number as many as there are individuals, for every individual was conceived to have one's own set of ideologies for which one could cater in countless ways—leaving the field of religious studies with the impossible task of naming every individual's personal religion. What I have been pointing at here is that *self-authority* is *the* shared ideology, the unifying doctrine, of Self-religion. Conceived in this way, the study of Self-religion thus becomes clearly demarcated despite its diffuse organisation: wherever the doctrine of self-authority is socialised, in the presence of multiple nonformative authorities, is the presence of Self-religion.

3.3 The Emerging Church and the 'Ethic of Self-spirituality'

Considering how the New Age *sensu lato* has evolved, alongside where the literature on the New Age *sensu lato* has evolved, Self-religion could, conceivably, be present in any context where individuals are being socialised into the doctrine of self-authority. Recalling the vignette at the beginning of this section, my informant states that her religious identity rests upon one's personal behaviour and 'quest of the heart'. It

[98] Matthew Wood, *Possession, Power, and the New Age: Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies*, Aldershot, UK, Ashgate, 2007, 59.

is indeed a religious identity that reflects the 'ethic of self-spirituality'. Granted, this informant pointed at multiple authorities in this quote – Steindl-Rast, culture, Christianity, among others – but the most explicit authority that she gives credit to is one's personal behaviour and 'quest of the heart'. What cannot be discerned from this vignette is whether or not this valuing of one's personal behaviour and 'quest of the heart' is something that is socialised from this individual's engagement with the Emerging Church. However, it does suggest that if this individual participated in the Emerging Church *because* it affirmed this ethic of hers, that the Emerging Church may have elements of Self-religion within its bounds, if not actually being a form of Self-religion.

4 The Sacralisation of Inclusivity

Within this research, I was able to interview the aforementioned Dave Tomlinson, who is arguably one of the 'founders', if there were any, of the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom. In describing the religious identity of his parish, St Luke's Holloway, he says,

> 'I don't think I would use a label [for us] because I think we rather don't fit one. I would quite happily say that we're Anglican; we're part of the Church of England—that is such a loose and meaningless term in itself. Anyway, that works for me. But I think I would say that we are as very strongly a community of friends, that we are inclusive in the sense that we try to make space for anybody and everybody. And, in the present context, quite a bit of that focuses on sexuality—that we are a place that's welcoming to people in the LGBTQI community. And I think that, most of all, it's a place of spiritual and theological openness, really, where there's no prescribed thing that you have to sign up to... [Inclusivity and openness] is absolute core. I think it is totally core, yeah. And I suppose there's a lot of people who would say they're bad Christians really. [laughs]'[99]

Here, he explicitly claims 'inclusivity and openness' as 'absolute core' to the identity of St Luke's Holloway. Without being sociologically irresponsible here, what an informant

[99] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London, September 15, 2016. Appendix III.

says must be taken at face value; what one says is often not the entire reality. In the same way that individuals may claim self-authority, and it does not necessarily mean that the self is the only or the ultimate authority in social life, inclusivity may not necessarily mean what it is intended to mean as it is stated and conceived by informants. Still, there is something quite core about the use of the term 'inclusive' in the Emerging Church.

Evident in the literature that I have narrated in this introduction thus far, my interest in the Emerging Church is to assess the extent to which it is Christianity, Self-religion, or both. To what extent is the Emerging Church Christian? As demonstrated, I maintain that it is Christian as far as it can sustain an engagement with the wider tradition. To what extent is the Emerging Church Self-religion? I measure this by the extent to which the doctrine of self-authority is being socialised. What does it mean for the Emerging Church to be Christian or Self-religion? I will then apply my findings to the wider discussions of religion in contemporary society, and make suggestions on the implications. This is the theoretical framework that I am engaging with in this research.

In conducting the ethnographic portion of this study, first and foremost, I intended to allow the Emerging Church to reveal itself in its own right. In order to do this, I sought to find what is most valuable, what is most 'sacred', to the Emerging Church in my observations. Not only will the values of the Emerging Church reveal the core of its identity, but it will also provide a basis for which to compare it with Christianity and Self-religion, and, perhaps, offer wider implications for religion in contemporary society. To this end, this research is very similar in method to the ethnographic work on NRMs done by sociologist Eileen Barker and those influenced by her work.[100]

[100] Eileen Barker, *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), ix.

In the next chapter, I will recount my methodology in more detail, but for the purposes of this section, I turn to the lenses of sociologist Gordon Lynch and ecclesiologist Carl Dudley. In Lynch's *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach*, he offers a 'critical rereading' of the influential social scientist, Émile Durkheim, and claims the following in his definition for 'the sacred':

> 'The normative reality constituted by a sacred form simultaneously constructs the evil which might profane it, and the pollution of this sacred reality is experienced by its adherents as a painful wound for which some form of restitution is necessary.'[101]

That is, the sacred within a society is revealed through pain; that the experience of pain is due to profaning what is held sacred. Similarly, Dudley, when discussing methods by which to study congregations in his article, 'Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life' (1998), says, 'What people are willing to fight about may put in bold relief the functional priorities of faith and practice of a congregation.'[102] Like Lynch with pain and the sacred, he argues that conflict sheds light on priorities of faith and practice. In other words, both argue that it is within trauma that a particular society's most deeply held values – what the society considers most sacred – are surfaced.

In my search to find the deepest values of the Emerging Church, I paid close attention to moments of pain and conflict. It is with this that I came to discover that the value inclusivity does run much deeper than a mere conscious positive trait that participants of the Emerging Church give credence to. In *all* of my comprehensive interviews, when recounting an experience of trauma, pain, or conflict, it was within the experiences of personally feeling exclusion or witnessing the exclusion of others. In my

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[101] Gordon Lynch, "The Sacred in Contemporary Society" ("What Does it Mean to Believe?" Symposium, University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom, March 8, 2012); Gordon Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 47.

[102] Carl Dudley, 'Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life' in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998, 119.

in-depth observations of one particular Emerging Church group, I observed that conflict also arose from moments that demonstrated a lack of acceptance. I detail and analyse these accounts in a later chapter devoted to these experiences.

Furthermore, like in the aforementioned interview with Tomlinson, not only is the theme of inclusion prevalent in moments of trauma, but I discovered that it was present in the highest, most ecstatic moments of my informants' experiences as well. In my interviews as well as observations, this was most often described in the experiences of being part of a community – that is, the sense of belonging and social identity within a group – but not just any community, a community that was open and inclusive, in contrast to past experiences of pain due to the feelings of judgement and exclusion. To this end, I use sociologist Abby Day's work claiming 'believing in belonging' as a device to observe religious behaviour beyond the sacred-secular binary. I detail and analyse these accounts in a later chapter devoted to the experience of community through a particular form of inclusivity.

Lastly, at this stage, I am well aware that 'inclusivity' is a broad subject. As many critics of the Emerging Church may point out, though it claims to be inclusive, it certainly has its own specific boundaries and particular intolerances. After having already recognised inclusivity as a value in the Emerging Church through its traumas and raptures, I sought to illustrate specifically the form in which this inclusivity takes. In short, though the Emerging Church claims inclusivity, it tends to attract a very specific type of person: Christians who have become dissatisfied or hurt by the Church in some way. Furthermore, though the Emerging Church claims to welcome all people, when inviting others, there appears to be a very specific condition to invitations: one must be interested in spirituality in some form—thus adding a sacred element to this version of inclusivity. Boundaries of the Emerging Church, then, involve some direct tension with

the Christian tradition and a basic interest in spirituality. I detail and analyse these boundaries in a later chapter devoted to these observations.

In this exploration of the Emerging Church, I find that its most deeply-held value is a very specific form of sacralised inclusivity, borne out of frustrations with Christianity, and is what holds its communities together. It is Christian insofar as it derives from Christianity, some of its participants identify as Christian, and it continues to engage with – however criticised by – Christian tradition. It is Self-religion in that some of its participants uphold the 'ethic of self-spirituality', and supports, if not socialises, the doctrine of self-authority. In a religious landscape where church attendance is declining, and those who identify with no religion ('nones') is rising, a phenomenon like the Emerging Church – one which includes participants who identify as Christian and as well as with no religion – may have wider implications for understanding contemporary Christianity, religious 'nones', not to mention religion in general in contemporary society.

II Cut from the Same Cloth: The Parallel Histories of Christianity and Self-religion

1 Introduction

Dan, a participant of the Borough Common – a London-based group which I will detail later in this chapter – is a white British male married to a South Asian-British Atheist female. He lives on the English southern coast, is a practicing barrister in London, owns an independent record label, and dabbles with music and photography in his free time. As one might imagine, he aligns with left-leaning politics, and takes pride in his unconventional Christian upbringing—though is undecided about his own identity as a Christian. In an informal conversation on a Borough Common 'weekend away' trip, he spoke to me about his parents like a badge of honour: his parents were among the first generation of people who engaged in the House Church Movement—a movement which I will detail later in this chapter. However, despite all this, when discussing New Age or Self-religion practices like astrology and crystals, his body language changed – he squirmed, clenched his teeth, lost eye contact – and, admittedly, he said, 'The Evangelical in me still has a lot of rough edges on those things.'[103]

Tara is a vivacious Oxford theology graduate, poet, and artist, who works in business and finance in London. She identifies as Christian, has an Atheist boyfriend, and does not participate in any church, group, or service of any form. She is a participant of the Borough Common in that she is a member of its Facebook group and is close to many of its participants, but not once in my seven years of observing the Borough Common have I ever seen her attend an official gathering. Everyone knows Tara, though, and the longer or more intimately one engages with the Borough Common, meeting her is nearly inevitable. She, like Dan, is unsurprisingly politically left-leaning, but unlike Dan, she is not as outspoken about her Christian celebrity status: her father,

[103] Dan, Informal Conversation by S Francesca Po in Swansea, UK.

Graham Kendrick, is well-known as the 'founding father of modern worship'[104] music. Also unlike Dan, she is comfortable with Self-religion practices and can engage in conversations about it without flinching. However, one evening, at the end of an informal conversation with her, she warned me, 'Be careful with that. You know a lot of Christians would think you're dealing with the Devil with those things.'[105]

Both Dan and Tara might appear to be the type of people who would be uncritical about Self-religion: white British, politically left-leaning, educated professionals, who are open-minded about religion and spirituality. However, in both of these encounters, both Dan and Tara gave a caveat about Self-religion, and particularly pertaining to Christianity's relationship to it. In both of the encounters, one can observe that there is an unfriendly perception about Self-religion from the point-of-view of Christianity.

It is ironic that this is the case, however, when one looks at the history of the Emerging Church alongside of the history of Self-religion. In this chapter, keeping the history of Self-religion that I narrated in the previous chapter in mind, I will narrate this Christian history and demonstrate how both were, so to speak, cut from the same cloth.

[104] Cross Rhythms, "Modern Worship Founding Father Graham Kendrick Returns with Single and Video," Cross Rhythms, July 11, 2017, http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/news/Flying_The_Banner/60740/p1/.
[105] Tara, Informal Conversation by S Francesca Po in Oxford, UK.

The following is a summary timeline of this shared history:

1960s Jesus Movement (USA)
South Chard Movement (UK)
Pastor North groups (UK)
South Chard and Pastor North groups (UK)
1965 Calvary Chapel (USA)
1970s House Church Movement (UK)
1971 Hope Chapel (USA)
1974 Vineyard Christian Fellowship (USA)
1974 Greenbelt (UK)
1989 Holy Joes (UK)
1990s Alternative Worship (UK)
1991 *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas
1992 *The Universe Story*, Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry
1994 Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness programme (USA)
1997 *The Post-Evangelical*, Dave Tomlinson
2001 Emergent Network (online)
A New Kind of Christian, Brian McLaren
2003 Rutba House (USA)
The Shaping of Things to Come, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch
The Story We Find Ourselves In, McLaren
2004 *Mission-shaped Church*, The Archbishops' Council/Fresh Expressions initiative (UK)
2005 *School(s) for Conversion*, Rutba House
The Last Word and the Word After That, Brian McLaren
'25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America', *Time*
2008 *New Monasticism*, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
The Great Emergence, Phyllis Tickle
2010 *Coming Home*, Sean Kelly
A New Kind of Christianity, Brian McLaren
2012 *Emergence Christianity*, Phyllis Tickle
Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church, The Archbishops' Council
2013 *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Revised and Updated), Frost and Hirsch

This shared history lays the foundation for conducting the ethnographic study.

2 1960s: The Jesus Movement, South Chard, and Pastor North

Without going as far back as the Enlightenment and Protestant Reformation, as briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the story of the Emerging Church, as it is understood by the groups relevant to this research today, begins most explicitly during the religious landscape of the 1960s.

In the 1960s, during the 'oppositional countercultural' landscape and upsurge of NRMs, arose the Jesus Movement. Colloquially called 'Jesus Freaks', participants of the Jesus Movement engaged in a practice of being 'born again' into a new form of Christianity, which was 'in rebellion against intolerant establishment religion'.[106] This 'new life' was so compelling that they 'began Bible studies in parks and started churches in homes, which soon pushed their way into recreation centres and rented school auditoriums as hundreds and then thousands of people responded.'[107] Some observers would be 'repulsed by their long hair, beards, and politics', nevertheless were also 'stunned by the inner transformations occurring in [the] young people and their zeal for sharing their new faith.'[108] Donald Miller in *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (1997) mentions that many of their practices and enthusiasm were reminiscent of the early Christian church, and that they also adopted many of the principles of the Protestant Reformation—two of the most notable periods of fervour in Christian history.[109]

Also during the 1960s were two notable figures in the United Kingdom: Sidney Purse and G W North. In as early as the 1940s, Purse, also known as 'Uncle Sid', along with his wife, began to 'speak in tongues' and were overcome with 'charismatic' or Pentecostal experiences – experiences like those of Jesus' disciples', on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them – which were received with controversy in their then

[106] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 11–12.
[107] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 11–12.
[108] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 33.
[109] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 12.

[Brethren] church.[110] Thus, they began holding their own church services at their house, where they taught that 'tongues' was an individual's unique language with God, which soon became known as the 'praise and preaching ministry'.[111] Not long after, they began training others to set up their own house churches, locally and internationally, a movement eventually called the South Chard Movement by the 1960s.[112] North, known as 'Pastor (Wally) North', was a charming and compelling religious leader, and founded countless fellowships wherever he happened to reside.[113] While South Chard encouraged individuals to 'speak in tongues', Pastor North's teachings focussed on personal holiness.[114] Both started movements of independently functioning house churches, known as South Chard and Pastor North groups.

During the 1960s, the Jesus Movement, South Chard, as well as Pastor North groups all display characteristics that were common in many of the NRMs of the time. Religious studies scholar, Michael York, explains that the Jesus Movement's practice of being 'born again' is characteristic of many of the 1960s NRMs' having 'symbolic metaphors [centred] on awakening from sleep or gaining sight after blindness'.[115] Both South Chard and Pastor North groups, in their teachings of 'tongues' and personal holiness, gave authority to the individual, which was, as mentioned in the previous chapter, characteristic of the social landscape of the time. Also like many of the NRMs

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[110] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 34.
[111] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 34.
[112] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 34.
[113] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 35–36.
[114] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 36.
[115] Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 12.

in the 1960s, all three encouraged the creation of independently functioning churches, whether in private residences or hired buildings.

3 1970s-1980s: Social Stability and the Nondenominational Era

As the political climate of the 1960s began to cool down, so did the participants of the religious movements of the 1960s—although renewed and changed for the path ahead. During the 1970s and 1980s, the teenagers of the 1960s grew into adulthood, 'became more individualistic and conservative, starting their own families and working hard at their jobs'.[116] American sociologist of religion, Robert Wuthnow, explains, 'Some of them flocked to megachurches, where they could worship without the stale trappings of their parents' religion'[117]—which I will describe further in this section. Wuthnow continues, 'Others became interested in Evangelical politics, while still others explored New Age spirituality and new styles of meditation.'[118] Whether Christian, New Age, or anywhere in-between, the 1970s and 1980s was a time of social stability for the demographic of the 1960s to begin planting the roots of what they begun in the previous dynamic decade.

In the 1970s, the Jesus Movement then developed into what was then being called 'new paradigm' churches – churches of the 'post-denominational era' of Christianity – where Christians from all denominations regrouped under the new ideas born of the 1960s.[119] The most notable are: Calvary Chapel, Hope Chapel, and The

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[116] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- And Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.
[117] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- And Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.
[118] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- And Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.
[119] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, 1, 19.

Vineyard Christian Fellowship.[120] Calvary Chapel is the direct descendant of the Jesus Movement. Calvary Chapel was founded in 1965 by Chuck Smith as a ministry for hippies and surfers in Southern California, now with churches all over the world.[121] Hope Chapel was founded in 1971 by Ralph Moore, a young pastor also from around the beach cities of Southern California, with similar characteristics and ideology as Calvary Chapel churches.[122] Lastly, The Vineyard Christian Fellowship, or simply 'Vineyard', was founded in 1974 by Kenn Gulliksen, who later passed the movement on to John Wimber in 1982, who was greatly influenced by the Jesus Movement.[123] Today, participants of these numerous churches are sometimes informally called 'born again Christians', directly referring to the practice popularised by the Jesus Movement. Ironically, despite their 'post-denominational' ideology, these churches and their participants are so great in number – oftentimes meeting in 'megachurches' – that they have arguably developed into a denomination in themselves, referred to as Nondenominational.

Also during the 1970s, South Chard and Pastor North developed into what is most commonly known as the House Church Movement or Restoration Christianity. In general, and without going into the complexities and particularities of the wide range of different groups, the House Church Movement is exactly what the name implies: varying independent house churches, that may or may not have developed into whole independent churches in themselves. In this sense, the House Church Movement is not an NRM at all, but a milieu operating on 'House Church Movement' as its organising

[120] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, 1, 19.
[121] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, 19, 29–37.
[122] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, 19, 37–44.
[123] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, 19, 44–51.

concept. House Churches are uncetralised, but nevertheless share common characteristics: they are 'extra denominational' (ie, do not belong within mainline denominations), come from Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian backgrounds, and practice 'anarchic' or 'syncretic' forms of spirituality (ie, *religion bricolage*).[124] Today, House Churches and churches that developed through South Chard and Pastor North groups, like Calvary Chapel, Hope Chapel, Vineyard, and churches that developed through the Jesus Movement, are often referred to as Nondenominational Christianity.

In 1974, the Greenbelt festival celebrated its inaugural gathering in the United Kingdom.[125] It is advertised as 'a festival of arts, faith, and justice'[126], bringing together 'extra denominational' Christians of all ages. Like the Jesus Movement, its audience through the 1970s and 1980s were 'long-haired, folk-singing hippies'[127] that had a new way of engaging with Christianity. Today, Greenbelt remains committed to its original 'inclusive, open-minded, participatory, and generous spirit' and continues to draw crowds by the thousands every year, inspiring other festivals with a similar 'spirit' throughout the world.[128]

The 1970s and 1980s were a dynamic time organisationally. In the same way that the Jesus Movement developed into a 'post-denominational' milieu, South Chard and Pastor North churches developed into an 'extra denominational' milieu, both demonstrating a shift away and regrouping from mainline denominations.

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[124] A Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 25–27.
[125] Doug Gay, *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology*, 1 edition (London: SCM Press, 2011), 13; Greenbelt, "Greenbelt," August 10, 2018, https://www.greenbelt.org.uk. [Accessed 10 August 2018]
[126] Greenbelt, "Greenbelt," August 10, 2018, https://www.greenbelt.org.uk. [Accessed 10 August 2018]
[127] David Tomlinson, Informal Conversation by S Francesca Po in London, September 15, 2016.
[128] Doug Gay, *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology*, 1 edition (London: SCM Press, 2011), 36; Greenbelt, "Greenbelt," August 10, 2018, https://www.greenbelt.org.uk. [Accessed 10 August 2018]

Nondenominational Christianity is their common organisational concept, which is also now a concept that is recognised globally. Recalling the New Age, this organisational shift is strikingly, if not precisely, similar: both Nondenominational Christianity and the New Age are milieux that operate on their corresponding names as its organising concept.

4 1990s: Technology and the 'Postmodern' Churches

Particularly noteworthy of the 1990s is the dawn of technologies advancing at unparalleled rates—and in terms of human sociality and organisation in the United States and United Kingdom, the introduction of the internet to private households. The internet has allowed individuals to access unlimited amounts of information at lightning speeds, and interact with people around the world that one might not have had the opportunity to interact with otherwise. One can imagine what this kind of exposure could do to religious organisation—it was one thing for the world to have become exposed to a wide influx of differing peoples and cultures since the immigrant waves of the 1960s, it is another thing to have the exposure come about with political stability (being 30 years since a world war), the normalisation of commercial flight, in addition to the mass use of the internet. Sociologist Manuel Castells argues that today, the internet is largely responsible for 'the fundamental cultural matrix of contemporary societies'.[129] At this point, religious organisation is already operating as milieux, but now, with the added element of the internet. Castells further argues that this form of socialising 'simultaneously accentuates individual autonomy'—something already accentuated since the 1960s, 'and personal interaction'—emphasising that despite the new technologies,

[129] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 177.

humans remain social beings.[130] From the 1990s onwards, the internet's role in the American and British social landscape is absolutely paramount. Furthermore, considering the rapid spread of media, note that from this point forward, the 'paper trail' for the timeline can be traced primarily by publications of noteworthy books.

In the late 1990s, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the term 'emerging church' and 'emergent church' began to circulate around Nondenominational Christian discourses in the United States. Its attributed 'founder', Brian McLaren, in fact, was a devoted participant of the Jesus Movement—making the Emerging Church a descendant of the Jesus Movement. During a period of questioning and rebellion in the 1960s, 'participation in the Jesus Movement revitalised his faith as a "thin, raggedy-looking blue-jeaned, guitar-playing, long-haired and beardy young guy without standard credentials'.[131] In addition to the aforementioned internet-based network that initiated the phenomenon that is known as Emergent Christianity, in a biography about McLaren by social scientists Shayne Lee and Philip Sinitiere, they point that

> '[I]t is important to recall that the electronic medium through which McLaren offers his messages appeals to today's younger generation. Prior to the release of *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* in October 2007, McLaren posted three YouTube segments about his book in June and July of the same year, and by the time of the book's release had retooled his website with a new look, countless more resources, and – due to the new networks formed by his global travels – a section devoted to non-English speakers.'[132]

McLaren had a direct link to the Jesus Movement, which puts him in the direct lineage of this narrative from the 1960s, but more importantly, he was extremely technologically

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[130] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 177.
[131] Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 90.
[132] Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 103.

inclined, which clearly helped, if not was integral to, the reception of the Emerging Church and his teachings globally.

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, recalling the House Church Movement of the previous decade, a figure named David Tomlinson gained notoriety. He began as a prominent leader in the movement[133], and was one of the primary sources for the research that went into one of the most noteworthy books on the subject titled, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (1985) by Andrew Walker. Walker mentions him in the acknowledgements saying, 'David Tomlinson offered me hospitality as well as information, and was extremely helpful as a sounding board for my ideas.' Furthermore, in the first chapter, Walker admits: 'Leaders of the new movements such as . . . David Tomlinson . . . would agree with me that the kingdom of God is too big to be exclusively identified with a particular segment of the Christian Church.'[134] Tomlinson was not only a primary source, but also shared the same ideas as the author on the subject, making his impact significant, to say the least. In 1989, however, Tomlinson, alongside a handful of others, began to disassociate themselves with Evangelical Christianity and founded a group called 'Holy Joes'—initially meeting at a house basement, and later to a local pub where they gained popularity. After so many years of getting established as a group, in 1997, Tomlinson published *The Post-Evangelical* where he lays out the ideas behind Holy Joes. As the title implies, in it, he teaches about a Christianity that challenged, if not moved away, from the beliefs and assumptions of the Evangelical Christianity of the time—what he calls a 'Christianity for a New Age'.[135] Since then, the concept of the 'post-Evangelical'

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[133] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 37.
[134] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, 30.
[135] David Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, London, Triangle, 1996, 139.

began to spread, with people throughout the United Kingdom and beyond resonating with the ideas that Tomlinson voiced.[136] While 'post-Evangelical' is not necessarily a term that Tomlinson coined, because of all this, it is most attributed to him.[137]

Also in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, on the praxis dimension of Christianity, independent groups and churches began to adopt what is known as 'alternative-' or 'alt worship'. Though there was no formal connection between Tomlinson and 'alternative worship', it was common to find participants of 'alternative worship' groups that had at the very least known about the concept of the 'post-Evangelical'; the two were complementary to one another. Sociologist Gordon Lynch explains: 'If the concept of the "post-Evangelical" can be seen as a reaction against rigid, traditional Evangelical ideas of theological truth, then it may be possible to see alternative worship as a reaction to mainstream forms of Evangelical worship.'[138] Christian worship since the 1960s continually adopted new forms, but 'the ideology underlying the worship remained largely unchanged.'[139] 'Alternative worship' changed that—what made it different was that it 'attempt[ed] to create environments for Christian worship that [were] culturally authentic for those who [had] planned the event.'[140] Furthermore, it used much more technology than ever before, and

> '[Made] frequent use of traditional and contemporary symbols – candles, crosses, icons, sculpture, or art/video installations – from which participants draw their

[136] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 37–42.
[137] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 37–42.
[138] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 43.
[139] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 44.
[140] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 46.

> own meaning, rather than attempts to proscribe the meaning that participants draw from the worship through the sermons or statements by worship leaders.'[141]

During the 1990s, alongside the technological advances, it is important to highlight that the 'emerging/-ent church', 'post-Evangelical', and 'alternative worship' audiences were the 'younger generations'[142], which, at the time, was predominantly what is popularly known as 'Generation X'[143]. 'Generation X' is generally known to be the generation born between 1960 and 1981, although without delving into the world of 'generational studies', it 'is primarily understood as a particular *attitude* that emerges in the "late" or "post" modern culture in which capitalism provides the fixed foundation of social organisation whilst the meaning of life on a personal level is in flux.'[144] In much of the popular and academic literature on 'emerging/-ent church', 'post-Evangelical', and 'alternative worship', the concept of these forms of Christianity being 'postmodern' – a very 'Generation X' concept – is generously used. Recall that 'exploring postmodern thought'[145] is one of the defining characteristics of the Emerging Church listed by Katharine Moody in the previous chapter. Unlike Nondenominational Christianity and the House Church Movement of the last decade, during the 1990s, though many people were familiar with the 'emerging/-ent church', 'post-Evangelical', and 'alternative worship' concepts, they were not all related as a particularly noteworthy milieu . . . yet. They were, however, arguably related by being collectively known as 'postmodern

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[141] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 46.
[142] Shayne Lee & Phillip Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace*, New York, NYU Press, 2009, 103.
[143] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, *After Religion*, 33–51.
[144] Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning*, London, Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002, 15, 32.
[145] Katharine Moody, '"I Hate Your Church; What I Want Is My Kingdom": Emerging Spiritualities in the UK Emerging Church Milieu', in *The Expository Times*, vol. 121, 2010, 498.

Christians'—though still not with the same organising power comparable their predecessors.

Theologian Tony Jones – who is known as a prominent voice within the Emerging Church today – in his more sociological-ecclesiological book titled, *The Church is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (2011), argues that from 1997 onwards

> 'Much of the early innovation in the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) was distributed on internet venues like www.theooze.com and www.emergentvillage.com, and these and other sites also became clearinghouses for announcing local "meet-ups", national and regional conferences, and published books. The ECM also arguably boasts the most robust presence in the "blogosphere" of any stream within American Christianity. Quite simply, the effect of the internet (as well as mobile phones, instant messaging, and other forms of "new media") cannot be underestimated when tracing the growth of the ECM'.[146]

The effect of 'new media' on the spread of the 'post-Evangelical' and 'alternative worship' can similarly be argued. In all of my research, I cannot say I have encountered or even heard a mention of any group who did not use 'new media' in a significant way. Of all the groups that I observed, all of whom advertise themselves with the concepts 'emerging/-ent church', 'post-Evangelical', and 'alternative worship', their participants claimed that most members found their corresponding group via the internet. Since the 1990s, in both the United States and United Kingdom, technology and the internet – with its continued emphasis on the individual – were integral to the development of 'postmodern Christianity'.

5 2000s: The Emerging Church Matures

Come the first decade of the 2000s, 'postmodern Christianity' continued to develop with various other, new constellating concepts and terms. However, despite the

[146] Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis, MN: The JoPa Group, 2011), 20.

dizzying array of concepts and terms, it did manage to reach that level of 'organising power' around one concept after all: 'emerging church'. In the previous section, I narrated the beginning of the 'emerging/-ent church', 'post-Evangelical', and 'alternative worship' concepts, and how they evolved from groups from the 1960s amidst specific social contexts. In the first decade of the 2000s, a number of new concepts began to arise, namely: 'new-' or 'neo-monasticism', a metanarrative about 'Christendom', another metanarrative about 'emer*gence* Christianity', and 'fresh expressions'. In this section, I will describe each of these concepts, relate them to the previous concepts, and point at how they are all intimately related as the Emerging Church.

The concept of 'new' or 'neo-monasticism' is inseparable from nearly any thorough conversation about the Emerging Church. However, it takes a distinctly different form of socialising than other Emerging Church groups. At this point, I have mentioned the following ways of socialising since the early days of the Emerging Church: online networking, home groups, festivals, and pub gatherings. New Monasticism – unlike the others, which socialise in ways that require a range of individual commitment to a particular group – requires the commitment of the entirety of one's life to a particular group. In other words, New Monastic groups are intentional communities, experimenting with different ways of 'living faithfully in a fragmented world'[147]. Like the others, New Monastic communities all vary in specific ways: some may choose to live in community together in one house or property, others may choose to live in separate residences in the same neighbourhood; some may structure their community around a set Christian prayer life, while others may get more eclectic and experimental with the way they choose to structure their particular community's life. What they are all committed to, however, despite the wide range of differences they

[147] Jonathan Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: From After Virtue to a New Monasticism*, Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2010, ix.

might have, is living life in such a way that mirrored the lives of religious monastics of the past and present: communally and intentionally.

One particular New Monastic community worth mentioning is the Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina, which was co-founded in 2003 by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and his wife, Leah.[148] It was named after a town in Iraq, Rutba, where the two founders served as part of the Christian Peacemaker Team.[149] Rutba House is 'a house of hospitality where the formerly homeless are welcomed into community with the formerly housed to eat, pray, and share life together'[150]. In 2005, Rutba House published an edited book titled *School(s) for Conversion: Twelve Marks of a New Monasticism*, laying out their way of life according to what they call the 'twelve marks of a New Monasticism'.[151] In it, a number of authors connected in the 'emergent network' offer a chapter interpreting each 'mark' in detail. In 2008, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove published *New Monasticism: What it Has to Say to Today's Church*, where he integrates his experiences as a theologian and member of Rutba House, describing the uses of New Monasticism in the contemporary world. In the same way that the previous figures that I have noted are not official 'founders' of particular concepts, because of this publication and his work at Rutba House, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is the person that is most attributed to the concept of 'new monasticism'. Today, many New Monastic communities structure their ways of life using the 'twelve marks' as a starting point.

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[148] Juian Washio-Collette, "Episode 26—Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove of Rutba House: Family Economics in the Household of God," Emerging Communities, June 28, 2012, https://emerging-communities.com/2012/06/28/26-jonathan-wilson-hartgrove/. [Accessed 15 August 2018]

[149] Juian Washio-Collette, "Episode 26—Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove of Rutba House: Family Economics in the Household of God," Emerging Communities, June 28, 2012, https://emerging-communities.com/2012/06/28/26-jonathan-wilson-hartgrove/. [Accessed 15 August 2018]

[150] Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, 'Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove', in *Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove*, <http://jonathanwilsonhartgrove.com> [Accessed 15 August 2018].

[151] Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church*, Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press, 2008.

Since 2003, Rutba House has moved from its original structure and has transitioned into the School for Conversation, a nonprofit organisation that works towards building 'beloved communities that unlearn habits of social division', which Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove directs. New Monasticism has also since developed into a recognisable and observable milieu, with the same organising power as the previous 'movements' of the 1970s. It is simultaneously understood as the 'intentional community' or 'monastic' branch of the larger milieu of Emerging Church.

In 2003, two missiologists, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, wrote *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century*. In brief, it is a book on how to be missionaries in the contemporary world, which shares the same assumptions as the Emerging Church. In it, however, is a metanarrative about 'Christendom':

> 'Christendom is the name given to the sacral culture that has dominated European society from around the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth. Its sources go back to the time when Constantine came to the throne of the Roman Empire and granted Christians complete freedom of worship and even favoured Christianity, thereby undermining all other religions in the empire...
> 'In the fifth to tenth centuries Christianity grew from infancy to adulthood throughout Western Europe, emerging in the eleventh century as fully grown and in control of the culture. By the Middle Ages, the church-state symbiosis was formalised…
> 'And while the Christendom narrative no longer defines Western culture, it still remains the primary definer of the church's self-understanding in almost every Western nation, including and perhaps especially the United States…
> 'That metanarrative not only defined church and state, it defined all the individuals and social structures in its orbit of influence…
> 'Overall, Christianity moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual movement to being a religious institution with its attendant structures, priesthood, and sacraments…
> 'Taken as a sociopolitical reality, Christendom has been in decline for the last 250 years, so much so that contemporary Western culture has been called by many historians (secular and Christian) as the *post-Christendom* culture.'[152]

[152] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 21–22.

This metanarrative is the touchstone from which Frost and Hirsch defend their teachings. They encourage their readers to 'get over'[153] 'Christendom' and live a form of Christianity appropriate in the 'post-Christendom' world, explaining that 'what is needed is the abandonment of the strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profane spaces in our world and the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption.'[154] Like the other aforementoned figures, Frost and Hirsch did not necessarily coin the 'Christendom' metanarrative, but since their publication of *The Shaping of Things to Come*, this metanarrative continued to be a common theme in defending the Emerging Church.

In 2008, a popular American author and speaker on religion, Phyllis Tickle, published a book titled *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. In it, she describes the variations, and even tensions, within the Emerging Church, ultimately pointing at a cultural metanarrative that she calls the 'great emergence', and within it, 'emergence Christianity'. According to Tickle, Christianity undergoes 500-year cycles, when it tended to 'clean it its attic' and renew itself:[155] in 1054 CE was the Great Schism, when 'the Patriarch of Greek or Eastern Orthodox Christianity had his anathemas and Leo IX had his bulls of excommunication'[156]; in 1517 CE was the Protestant Reformation, when '[Martin] Luther had his Theses and his hammer'[157]; and at the beginning of the 21st century, comes the 'great emergence', and in it, 'emergence

[153] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013).
[154] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 24.
[155] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing And Why*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2012), 19–31.
[156] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing And Why*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2012), 20.
[157] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing And Why*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2012), 20.

Christianity', which is essentially what she calls the entire Emerging Church phenomenon[158]. While Tickle's metanarrative did not catch on as well as Frost and Hirsch's did, her conception of 'emergence Christianity' became another concept that fell into the general vocabulary of the Emerging Church. Additionally, her conceptualisation of the Emerging Church being part of a larger paradigm shift has become a common position among those in the Emerging Church:

> 'That is, we use the term "Great Emergence" to name a movement within Christianity as easily and as often as we use it to name the larger context in which the shift in Christianity is occurring and to which it is responding.'[159]

In 2012, in the wake of the momentum of *The Great Emergence*, Tickle published a follow-up book titled *Emergence Christianity: What it Is, Where it Is Going, and Why it Matters*. In the first decade of the 2000s, the Emerging Church was no longer just an array of constellating ideas that people shared—Frost, Hirsch, and Tickle developed and put it within a wider cultural context.

Meanwhile, the New Age was offering metanarratives of its own. Within the 'intellectualist wing of the New Age'[160], a metanarrative about the coming together of ideas and culture throughout human civilisation bringing about a paradigm shift began to take root. In 1991, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* by cultural historian Richard Tarnas, a book narrating the history of thought and culture, was published. In 1994, Tarnas founded the 'philosophy, cosmology, and consciousness' (PCC) academic degree programme at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), a programme that teaches its students about these

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[158] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing And Why*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2012), 119–21.
[159] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing And Why*, Reprint edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2012), 20.
[160] Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralisation of Modernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, 5.

metanarratives and their uses in a 'coming paradigm shift'.[161] One of its core faculty members, psychiatrist Stanislav Grof, in *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy* (1985), says:

> 'Western science is approaching a paradigm shift of unprecedented proportions, one that will change our concepts of reality and of human nature, bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern science, and reconcile the differences between Eastern spirituality and Western pragmatism.'[162]

In 1992, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, a book about the history of Earth with respect to the birth of the cosmos, by mathematician Brian Swimme, another of PCC's core faculty members, and historian Thomas Berry, was published. In 2010, *Coming Home: The Birth and Transformation of the Planetary Era*, a book about 'cycles' in the history of human religious thought and culture, by religious studies scholar Sean Kelly, another of PCC's core faculty members, was published. Since the 1960s – from an emphasis on the individual, to new forms of organisation and milieux that transcend traditional institutional boundaries, to intentional communities, to the contextualising of ideas within 'cycles' in human civilisation and metanarratives – it appears that Christianity and the New Age continue to share striking similarities.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 2004, inspired by the Emerging Church in the United States as well as specific British cultural factors, the Church of England and the Methodist Church published a report called *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. The report served as a handbook to the Fresh Expressions initiative all over the United Kingdom encouraging

[161] California Institute of Integral Studies, 'California Institute of Integral Studies', in *California Institute of Integral Studies*, <https://www.ciis.edu> [Accessed 15 August 2018].
[162] California Institute of Integral Studies, 'California Institute of Integral Studies', in *California Institute of Integral Studies*, <https://www.ciis.edu> [Accessed 15 August 2018].

the 'planting'[163] of 'fresh ways of being church'[164], which, essentially, is the creation of social groups outside the traditional or institutional conception of 'church'. In the first chapter of *Mission-shaped Church*, in fact, it refers to the 'Christendom' metanarrative as one of the primary arguments for this initiative:

> 'Much of Britain's self-understanding comes from centuries of Christian faith, but many in Britain now have minimal knowledge of the Christian faith. The Christian story is no longer at the heart of the nation…
> 'The consequences for a national church, used to operating among people and institutions on the assumptions of Christendom, are acute…
> 'We need to find expressions of church that communicate with post-Christian people, and which enable them to become committed communities of followers of Jesus Christ.'[165]

If observing Fresh Expressions topographically, since it is an initiative directly linked to two established religious institutions, it would seem oxymoronic to argue that it is part of the larger scope of the Emerging Church, which, by nature, holds itself in tension with established religious traditions. However, considering Fresh Expressions intends to attract the same demographic as the Emerging Church, as well as uses the same ideology and methods in doing so, observing it from the ground-level, many of its participants can in fact fall within the scope of the Emerging Church. That is, not all Fresh Expressions are part of the Emerging Church, but many definitely are.

That being said, Fresh Expressions is the reference point that people have of the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom. In a conference on Theologically Engaged

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[163] The Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 2nd ed., London, Church House Publishing, 2009, <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/0715140132.pdf>, 29–36.
[164] The Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 2nd ed., London, Church House Publishing, 2009, <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/0715140132.pdf>, 43–44.
[165] The Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 2nd ed., London, Church House Publishing, 2009, <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/0715140132.pdf>, 11–12.

Anthropology, British anthropologist, Joel Robbins, agreed that 'We don't really have the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom like they do in the United States. If you talk to people about the Emerging Church, they'll know the concept, but they'll think of Fresh Expressions.'[166] While there are indeed Emerging Church groups outside of the Fresh Expressions initiative, unless one is a participant of one, or knows somebody who is a participant of one, they are not particularly recognised or visible to the religious landscape of the United Kingdom. Understandably so, as the United Kingdom has a completely different religious history as the United States, not least because of the United Kingdom having a state-sponsored church, while the United States does not. Still, sharing the same language allows for the exchange of ideas to happen fairly smoothly and seamlessly, allowing for concepts to transfer fairly well across the Atlantic. Since the publication of *Mission-shaped Church*, primarily because of Fresh Expressions, the Emerging Church has been recognisable in the British religious social landscape.

Skipping back a few years, in 2001, the not-yet-popular Brian McLaren's life was about to change: he published *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. That year, it immediately 'became a best seller and won the distinction as *Christianity Today's* book of the year'[167]. Arguably his *magnum opus*, this former 'Jesus Freak's' book 'resonated with ministers worldwide and is enormously popular in seminaries.'[168] Two years later, he published a sequel to the book, *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*, and in 2005, completed the trilogy with *The Last Word and the Word After That: A Tale of Faith,*

[166] Joel Robbins, Conversation by S Francesca Po in Oxford, UK, October 30, 2017.
[167] Shayne Lee & Phillip Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace*, New York, NYU Press, 2009, 92.
[168] Time Staff, "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America," February 7, 2005, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,1993235,00.html. [Accessed 14 August 2018]

Doubt, and a New Kind of Christianity. Also in 2005, *Time* magazine named him the 'Paradigm Shifter' among '25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America'[169]—note this title is a concept usually only seen in popular religious literature, while *Time* is a secular magazine, pointing at just how entangled the concepts in popular religious literature are to the rest of society. Throughout the decade, as discussed in this section, McLaren, alongside a number of others, continued to speak, write, and promote the ideas discussed in *A New Kind of Christian* as the 'emerging church'—simply observing the publication dates and titles is telling of how the phenomenon has developed through the years. At the end of the decade, McLaren published a summary book of his ideas in *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming Faith* (2010).

With the added element of the internet and 'new media', as Jones mentioned in the previous section, these ideas and the concept of the 'emerging church' spread quickly and widely in the first decade of the 2000s. Also because of the internet and 'new media', in addition to McLaren's popularity, the 'emerging church' quickly became more than just a concept—it became a popular and recognisable religious phenomenon that people organised with. It was not, by any means, centralised, but still provided a sense of belonging to anyone who engaged with it. Though there were many constellating concepts in discourses and in practice – 'emergent', 'emergence', 'post-Evangelical', 'alternative worship', 'new monasticism', 'fresh expressions' – they were all part of the same overarching milieu that was internationally recognised as the 'emerging church'. In the first decade of the 2000s, the Emerging Church reached maturation.

6 2010s-Present: 'Missional' Churches and the Legacy of the Emerging Church

[169] Time Staff, "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America," February 7, 2005, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,1993235,00.html. [Accessed 14 August 2018]

By the 2010s, while the Emerging Church continued to be a concept that people recognised and organised with, it also started branching out into new milieux that may or may not consider the Emerging Church as something rather passé. This is where my research begins—I started this project in 2011, and the following has been my observation since then. Since the 2010s, most of the research available on the Emerging Church has been based on observations from the previous decade, and, unlike the previous decade, it is unclear how the Emerging Church has evolved even through popular and theological literature.

Recall that in the previous chapter, much of the literature on the Emerging Church highlights a particular 'apples and oranges' debate among theologians: those affirmative of the Emerging Church hold a broad view of Christianity, while those critical of the Emerging Church hold a strict view of Christianity. While both sides argue for Christianity, they have incomparable assumptions about how broadly Christianity is to be interpreted. By nature, the Emerging Church positions itself in tension with most, if not all, traditions of Christianity – from its doctrine, to its scripture, to its liturgy – while the arguments against the Emerging Church is to use its traditions against it. That being said, from an observer's perspective, this debate appears futile. The question, however, underlying these debates is this: to what extent is the Emerging Church really a form of Christianity? Perhaps the simple passage of time may begin to shed light on the answer to this question. In this section, I will describe the various directions that I have observed the Emerging Church evolve into since the beginning of the 2010s—observations that will be introduced here and expanded upon in the subsequent ethnographic chapters.

Recalling missiologists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, while introducing the Emerging Church to the 'Christendom' metanarrative, as mentioned, *The Shaping of*

Things to Come was first and foremost a book promoting a new form of Christian mission. As a result, alongside the existing momentum of the Emerging Church, this form of Christian mission unintentionally created what is known as the 'missional church movement' or simply 'missional movement' or 'missional church' tasked with 'church planting' all over the world. Because of its popularity, in 2013, ten years after the original publication of *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Frost and Hirsch published a revised and updated edition of the book. Like the House Church Movement, Nondenominational Christianity, New Monasticism, and the Emerging Church, the Missional Church is now globally recognised as an organising concept and milieu in itself.

In *The Shaping of things to Come*, Frost and Hirsch point to research done by the Gospel and Our Church Network (GOCN), a nonprofit research centre that 'gives careful attention to the interaction between culture, gospel, and church'[170], who have 'revisioned a new missional approach to the church' according to 'twelve hallmarks of a missional church',[171] which are:

1. 'The missional church proclaims the gospel.
2. 'The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. 'The Bible is normative in this church's life.
4. 'The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
5. 'The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.
6. 'A missional community is indicated by now Christians behave toward one another.
7. 'It is a community that practices reconciliation.
8. 'People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
9. 'The church practices hospitality.

[170] Gospel and Our Culture Network, 'The Gospel and Our Culture Network', in *The Gospel and Our Culture Network*, 2017, <https://gocn.org/> [Accessed 17 August 2018].
[171] Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2013, 25.

10. 'Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. 'This community has a vital public witness.
12. 'There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.'[172]

Additionally, Frost and Hirsch offer three overarching principles in order to 'give energy and direction'[173] to the twelve hallmarks, which are:

1. 'The missional church is *incarnational*, not attractional, in its ecclesiology.
2. 'The missional church is *messianic*, not dualistic, in its spirituality.
3. 'The missional church adopts and *apostolic*, rather than a one-dimensional top-down, mode of leadership.'[174]

Given these 'hallmarks' and 'principles' of the Missional Church, unlike the language and rhetoric used in the texts arguing for the Emerging Church in the previous chapter, the language and rhetoric used here makes it clear that the intention of the new 'church plants' is to continue with the wider tradition of Christianity.

In the United States, the Emerging Church has evolved in six observable and fluid directions. Considering the Emerging Church – amidst the contemporary social landscape in general – organises with permeable boundaries, any individual in any of these six fluid directions may engage simultaneously with any number of them.

The first direction that the Emerging Church has evolved into in the 2010s is the milieu that belongs in the aforementioned Missional Church trajectory. These are usually church groups that were 'planted' by an individual or groups of individuals, with the intention of developing the 'plant' into a self-sustaining church in itself. While these

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[172] Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2013, 25.
[173] Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2013, 25.
[174] Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, Revised edition edition, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 2013, 25–26.

American Missional Churches are highly influenced by the wider Emerging Church, many of them have maintained their Christian identity. At the ground-level, individuals may question or challenge Christianity, but only to the extent that what they are truly questioning and challenging is the Christianity of 'Christendom'. To this end, the 'Christendom' metanarrative is key to Missional Churches—by nature, its intent is to remain within the wider tradition of Christianity despite its rejection of 'Christendom'. Furthermore, while non-missional Emerging Churches may consume the 'Christendom' metanarrative, it is not as essential to them as it is in the Missional Church. That being said, many Missional Churches might distance themselves from the branches of the Emerging Church that are not explicit about remaining in the wider Christian tradition.

The second direction are those that, to an extent, have come to terms with Christianity; they have 'softened their edges', so to speak, with their criticism of the wider Christian tradition. Some call this stream 'new wave emerging/-ent/-ence'[175]—although, this term is not a particularly widespread one. 'Emerging Voices' contributor, Holly Roach explains:

> 'New-wave emergents are missional community developers; they are faith-rooted organizers, contemplatives, theologians, teachers, and activists. New-wave emergent folks have deconstructed church and are now left wanting to create alternatives, to be the church they wish to see in the world, to embody the answers to our struggles in real and lived out ways. New waves are influenced by voices from the margins. New-wave emergents are bridge-builders in addition to being relational-bonders. New-wave emergents are LGBTQ-inclusive and engaged in dismantling prejudices in their own persons. New-wave emergents have moved beyond critiquing the hegemony of white cisgendered persistently at the centre of conversations to creating spaces where the centre is filled with voices from the margins. Thus new-wave emergents are passionate about justice and see dialogue, action, and reflection as integral pieces of a holistic effort. New-wave emergents are both pre-figurative and strategic. They are plotting for

[175] Holly Roach, "A Conversation on New Wave Emergence," *Emergent Village* (blog), February 1, 2015, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/2015/02/a-conversation-on-new-wave-emergence/. [Accessed 13 April 2018]; Mark Longhurst, "From Emergent Church to Emergent God," *Emergent Village* (blog), March 1, 2015, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/2015/03/from-emergent-church-to-emergent-god/. [Accessed 13 April 2018]

> goodness while already living as best they can here and now—as if the kingdom has already come, "on Earth as in Heaven." New waves embrace the rich tapestry of liberation theologies, and continue to surprise and invert the entrenched hierarchies of church.'[176]

Those in this milieu of the Emerging Church might still have criticism against the wider Christian tradition, but have settled comfortably in the tension. That being said, those in this milieu of the Emerging Church would likely identify as Christian, albeit with a strong stance against certain aspects of the wider tradition. They might also have criticism against some of the ideas of the Emerging Church of the earlier decade, but admit that the phenomenon has greatly influenced what their faith has become today.

The third direction is similar to those in the previous direction, except they are individuals and churches that have always been explicitly Christian, but have recently integrated the teachings and characteristics of the Emerging Church. They are similar in language and practice as the previous direction, except they are coming into the ideas of the Emerging Church in a context where the influence of the Emerging Church has already become commonplace in the contemporary Christian landscape. In this, their distancing from the wider tradition of Christianity was more of an organic transition, and not a polarised one that the first decade of the 2000s encountered. Recalling the aforementioned Emerging Village online network that Brian McLaren helped found, in the past decade, it has undergone a couple of changes. In the past years, it merged with a website called *Patheos*, as a blog called 'Emerging Voices'. Today, there is no longer a separate link on the home page leading towards the 'Emerging Voices' blog. In its place, there is a 'Progressive Christian' link, where all of the previous posts of the 'Emerging Voices' blog are redirected. That being said, books by McLaren and his contemporaries

[176] Holly Roach, "A Conversation on New Wave Emergence," *Emergent Village* (blog), February 1, 2015, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/2015/02/a-conversation-on-new-wave-emergence/. [Accessed 13 April 2018]

continue to be read and consumed by Christian churches all around the world—without the need to re-identify as an Emerging Church. This direction of the Emerging Church, among the other directions, sheds light to the current state of the Emerging Church in general: the concept no longer holds the impact and power that it did in the previous decade, but what it teaches and represents continues to permeate contemporary Christianity.

The fourth direction that the Emerging Church in the United States has evolved into in the 2010s are those who, like in the previous decade, have a difficult relationship with Christianity. Those in this milieu of the Emerging Church might have encountered it in the previous decade or even earlier, and continue to question or challenge the Christian tradition. Others might have come into the Emerging Church anew, whether from a religious background or no religious background. In either of these cases, this form of the Emerging Church remains fairly similar to that of the previous decade, in that the questioning of and criticism against the wider Christian tradition is a central aspect of its identity, except it is in the context where the original momentum of the Emerging Church is no longer at the rate that it was before. Nevertheless, the resources for this demographic of the Emerging Church are by no means limited—like the previous direction, this demographic consumes the literature, media, events, and other religious products that the previous decade disseminated, alongside the new religious products that are continuing to be produced.

The fifth direction are those who turn to a more traditional form of Christianity that they practiced prior to encountering the Emerging Church. This demographic is wide ranging: it might include those who reject the Emerging Church completely, like Leonard Sweet, as mentioned in the introductory chapter; to, like in the second direction, those who have reached a level of stability with their relationship with the wider

Christian tradition; to those who are still questioning Christianity, and continue to engage with Emerging Church, but have decided for whatever reason that going to a more traditional church is what is best for them at the time.

The sixth direction that the Emerging Church in the United States has evolved into in the 2010s are those who, for some reason or another, have explicitly decided to no longer identify as Christian. This demographic, however, maintains much complexity. Firstly, this implies that these individuals once identified as Christian, but have now decided, in terms of religious identity, to identify with a different religion or perhaps no religion at all. The latter of these two, I discussed in the previous chapter as a demographic known as the 'nones'. Secondly, many participants of the Emerging Church might have already been counted in this category from the very beginning—so, in surveys, for instance, there might not be an observable change. Furthermore, while they no longer identify as Christian, they may continue to engage with the Emerging Church or even traditional Christianity in some way. They might also identify or engage with other religious traditions or other spiritual practices as well. Some might not identify nor engage with any religious or spiritual traditions or practices altogether. While I intend to shed light on the 'nones' and touch on religious identity in this research, in-depth research on the 'nones' and identity studies in particular goes beyond the scope of this project. However, it is important to mention that, like any religious phenomenon, there are those who disassociate from it – and in this case, dissociate from its root tradition – altogether.

In the United Kingdom, the above six fluid directions that the Emerging Church has evolved into in the 2010s is fairly similar, with the added complexity of Fresh Expressions and the established religious institutions. In the same way that some in the United States may consider the Emerging Church as 'a young movement grown old very

quickly'[177], there are those in the United Kingdom who may question whether or not Fresh Expressions is 'still fresh'[178]. From other perspectives, there is life yet in Fresh Expressions. However, before delving into the evidence behind these sentiments, I point first to a second report on Fresh Expressions that the Church of England and Methodist Church published.

In *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: A Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (2012), eight years after the publication of *Mission-shaped Church*, Fresh Expressions is concisely and explicitly defined—whereas in *Mission-shaped Church*, the Archbishops' Council only made suggestions as to what a Fresh Expression might be. The fourth chapter *Mission-shaped Church* is devoted solely to 'Fresh Expressions of Church', yet only broadly describes it as such in the opening paragraph:

> 'This chapter will identify a number of ways in which "church" is being expressed. It cannot offer an exhaustive list, but simply some examples of key themes and ideas. We expect there will be more expressions and (as we discuss in the next chapter) under God it is right that a variety of ways develop in which different sets of people can connect with Christian community.'[179]

On the other hand, in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, it states that 'A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church:

- 'It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission, and making disciples;

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[177] Leonard Sweet, "A Response to Recent Misunderstandings," *Leonard Sweet* (blog), 2007, https://leonardsweet.com/response-recent-misunderstandings-2007/. [Accesed 17 August 2018]
[178] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 1.
[179] The Archbishops' Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, 2nd ed., London, Church House Publishing, 2009, <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/0715140132.pdf>, 43.

- 'It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.'[180]

It is clear that within eight years of the Fresh Expressions initiative, the Archbishops' Council had narrowed its intentions with it. Nevertheless, that did not stop churches and individuals from forming a wide range of Fresh Expressions since the commencement of the initiative in 2004.

Another thing to note in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* is a peculiar relationship to the Emerging Church. While it is not mentioned at all in *Mission-shaped Church*, there are at least four explicit references to it in *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of Church*. The first mention is in the context of 'the doctrinal legacy inherited from previous generations'.[181] It says that it

> '[S]hould be set aside so that new forms of the Church can develop under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those who adopt this position often distinguish between so-called "inherited" or "traditional" church and "emerging" church, of which fresh expressions are thought to be one particular strand.'[182]

The second mention explains that one of the goals of this particular report is to 'Provide a perspective on the terminology of "emerging church" and "new church"'.[183] The third mention is more explicit on its stand regarding the Emerging Church:

> 'The term "fresh expression of church" was devised in preference to "emerging church", which label is widely associated with a particular phenomenon in North

[180] Archbishops' Council and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 2.
[181] Archbishops' Council and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 10.
[182] Archbishops' Council and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 10.
[183] Archbishops' Council and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 23.

> America. The emerging church movement are in the latter part of the twentieth century in practical and theological response to the rapidly changing mission context. For the purposes of this present report, fresh expressions of church are regarded as a separate phenomenon to emerging church.'[184]

The fourth mention is simply a definition of Emerging Church in the 'Glossary of Terms': 'In this report, *emerging church* refers to the phenomenon of post-denominational mission projects led by groups and individuals that are independent of the historic churches.'[185] In all of these mentions, and particularly in the third one, it is very clear that the Archbishops' Council is explicitly dissociating Fresh Expressions from Emerging Church. However, also most evident in the third mention, this 'explicit dissociation' sheds light on the fact that there is a common association of Fresh Expressions with the Emerging Church. As mentioned in the last section, the reference point to the Emerging Church of most people in the United Kingdom would be Fresh Expressions. While the Archbishops' Council may want to explicitly disassociate from this relationship on writing, it is nevertheless present in popular understanding and practice. All that being said, while Fresh Expressions still has a relationship with the Emerging Church, since the beginning of the 2010s, it has been redefining itself as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own unique variations. I will describe three of the most noteworthy[186] in the next paragraphs.

One of its noteworthy varieties is its 'missional' variety. Like the Emerging Church, the Missional Church is most often recognised as part of Fresh Expressions.

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[184] Archbishops' Council and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 37–38.
[185] Archbishops' Council and Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), 198.
[186] George Lings, "The Day for Small Things: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church in 21 Dioceses of the Church of England" (Sheffield, UK: Church Army's Research Unit, November 2016), 10–11.

Some might argue that Fresh Expressions and the Missional Church are one in the same – that Fresh Expressions is a Missional Church initiative in the United Kingdom – given its language and intentions. For instance, the mere title of the Church of England and Methodist Church report in 2004, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, indicate as much—it uses distinctly Missional Church concepts such as: 'mission-shaped' and 'church planting'. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, it also refers to the 'Christendom' metanarrative in the same way that Frost and Hirsch do, in its previous chapter. However, while many Fresh Expressions would identify as being part of the larger Missional Church, and perhaps that is precisely what the Archbishops' Council intended for Fresh Expressions, in practice, it is important to note that Fresh Expressions are varied and wide-ranging, and there would be many that would not identify as a 'church plant' or part of the larger Missional Church. Like the Emerging Church, it may seem oxymoronic for Fresh Expressions to be part of the Missional Church as well, considering its fundamental criticism against 'Christendom' and Fresh Expressions being an initiative of established institutional churches. Also like the Emerging Church, there are also Missional Churches in the United Kingdom that are outside the scope of Fresh Expressions—though not particularly visible in the British religious landscape. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that since the beginning of the 2010s, like the Missional Church in the United States, many of the Fresh Expressions 'church plants' grew and developed into vibrant congregations, making its 'missional' variety noteworthy indeed.[187]

Another variety of Fresh Expressions since the 2010s is its 'messy church' variety. In 2014, missiologist John Walker published a book analysing the development

[187] George Lings, "The Day for Small Things: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church in 21 Dioceses of the Church of England" (Sheffield, UK: Church Army's Research Unit, November 2016), 10–11.

of Fresh Expressions since its commencement in 2004 titled, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*. Here, while claiming his position that Fresh Expressions 'do not and cannot compete with the depth and breadth of life and experience of parish churches'[188], Walker ultimately demonstrates positive aspects of Fresh Expressions and concludes that it is indeed 'fresh still'[189]. While he does not discuss the Missional Church, Walker highlights a form of Fresh Expressions called 'messy church'. In short, Messy Church is an informal church service for all ages that started in the Loughborough Methodist Circuit in Knightthorpe and Sileby, United Kingdom.[190] Walker describes Messy Church in three simultaneous voices:

1. 'This is a fun place for children…
2. 'This is an effective way for both parents and children to learn about God, some for the first time…'
3. 'Our Messy Church is a safe place where adults and children can socialise and the children can have fun.'[191]

In this, Messy Churches are 'able to attract children and socialise them into a Christian faith community'[192]. He continues that Messy Churches are particularly noteworthy because they find 'that a strategy of enculturation is necessary and that one of homogeneity is not'[193]. Furthermore, he claims that 'It may be that Messy Churches will have a similar effect in the twenty-first century to that of Sunday schools in the

[188] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 233.
[189] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 233.
[190] Archbishops' Council & Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party*, London, Church House Publishing, 2012, 51–54.
[191] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 141–42.
[192] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 204.
[193] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 4.

nineteenth'[194] and ultimately 'may be particularly effective in helping reverse long-term decline'[195] of the established institutional church. Messy Church, then, has definitely become a noteworthy variety of Fresh Expressions. With respect to the Emerging Church, like the Missional Church and Fresh Expressions in general in the United Kingdom, Messy Church most certainly shares permeable boundaries with the Emerging Church, while simultaneously maintaining its more traditional Christian identity.

While there are countless other varieties of Fresh Expressions, including the aforementioned 'alternative worship' variety, the third and last noteworthy variety of Fresh Expressions since the 2010s is the 'emerging church' variety. These would be the Fresh Expressions that share the majority of the characteristics of the Emerging Church in the United States and elsewhere. Recalling the six fluid directions that the Emerging Church in the United States has evolved into since the 2010s, these six directions are also applicable to the Emerging Church variety of Fresh Expressions. Furthermore, in the United Kingdom in general, the same six directions are also applicable to the Emerging Churches outside the scope of Fresh Expressions.

In sum, in the 2010s, the Emerging Church can be best seen as branching out. The Missional Church, which was borne of the same landscape as the Emerging Church in the first decade of the 2000s, developed into a global organising concept and milieu in itself and maintains permeable boundaries with the Emerging Church. In the United States, the Emerging Church evolved into six fluid directions: (1) the Missional Church, (2) 'new wave emergence', (3) Christians that have integrated characteristics of the Emerging Church, (4) those who maintain a difficult relationship with Christianity, (5) those who turn to a more traditional form of Christianity, and (6) those who explicitly no

[194] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 205.
[195] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 4.

longer identify as Christian. In the United Kingdom, Fresh Expressions, which is often associated with the Emerging Church, became more explicitly defined by the Archbishops' Council as well as evolved into three noteworthy varieties: (1) the Missional Church, (2) Messy Church, and (3) the Emerging Church. The last of these three, along with the non-Fresh Expressions Emerging Churches, evolved into the same six fluid directions as the Emerging Church in the United States. Despite these many branches, and regardless of one's opinion of the Emerging Church's continued vibrancy today, it is undeniable that the Emerging Church has left an impression – a legacy of a sort – on the American and British religious landscape.

At this point, the Jesus Movement, South Chard, and Pastor North groups of the 1960s all seem but a forgotten memory, but considering the lineage of the notable figures of the groups since then, it becomes apparent that the Emerging Church is part of an even longer legacy—a legacy that shares the same origins, not to mention a parallel development, with the New Age, or Self-religion. Namely, they share: an emphasis on the individual, the creation of new forms of organisation and milieux that transcend traditional institutional boundaries, the founding of intentional communities, and the contextualising of ideas within 'cycles' in human civilisation and metanarratives. This is a story that has not been told before, evident in the lack of social scientific research on the subject, and even in the initial attitudes of my informants mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Furthermore, it is an important story to tell, as it demonstrates that Christianity is not separate from or immune to the wider social landscape as the academic literature, or lack thereof, might imply—it is, in fact, an undeniable part of it.

Recalling my initial question regarding the extent of the Emerging Church's being Christian, it appears that the passage of time only maintained this ambiguity. I started this research in 2011, and now, being near the end of 2018, I was able to observe

the maturity and evolution of the Emerging Church. In the subsequent chapters, the above six fluid directions will become more clear as I narrate the experiences of my informants through the years—and perhaps begin to answer my initial research questions. For now, I turn to the methodology used in this research.

III Methodology

1 Introduction

Recall the concluding section of the introductory chapter, where I explained that in my observations, I intended to allow the Emerging Church to reveal itself in its own right. In order to do this, I sought to find what is most valuable, what is most 'sacred', to the Emerging Church. Not only will the values of the Emerging Church reveal the core of its identity, but it will also provide a basis for which to compare it with Christianity and Self-religion, and, perhaps, offer wider implications for religion in contemporary society. To this end, this research is very similar in method to the ethnographic work on NRMs done by sociologist Eileen Barker and those influenced by her work.[196]

In this chapter, I expand on the specificities of the methodology of my ethnographic work. I begin with explaining my use of 'Emerging Church' to assist in clarifying the specific phenomena I am studying. Next, I give a detailed explanation of the choices and parameters I made in selecting the groups studied, the observations made, and the interviews conducted. Lastly, I explain the method in which I conducted in-depth interviews. This chapter is also accompanied by three appendices for reference: (1) Ethnography and Group Details, (2) In-depth Interview Questions, and (3) Interview Transcripts.

2 Use of 'Emerging Church'

Within one of the comprehensive interviews that I conducted, my informant, Joe, referenced the Emerging Church explicitly at least five times (in **boldface**):

- 'the first thing really was sharing a mutual Christ, so it was around the word "mutual" because we all came from the **emerging** church culture, scene, blah blah blah…

[196] Eileen Barker, *New religious movements: a perspective for understanding society*, Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen Press, 1982, ix.

- 'one of the things that **emerging** punctured and accentuated but then possibly didn't do enough on, was this idea of reclaiming responsibility for our own spirituality and story and where that then relates to children…
- 'the **emergent** culture of America just bored us to death in the end because we just said, "For fuck's sake, do something, stop talking about it and do it"…
- 'I did my placement [in the United States] three years ago and that was my research – was what's **emergent** really look like on the ground – and there were some very great groups that were doing remarkable things, particularly in city areas like Detroit and New York…
- 'their contribution to an **emerging** landscape was massively important and affected Europe massively…'[197]

In just this one interview with one informant, the term 'emerging' and 'emergent' is used interchangeably in a variety of different ways: sometimes as a proper noun; sometimes as a common noun; and sometimes distinguished as a 'church', 'culture', 'scene', 'landscape', and even as a 'blah blah blah'. Furthermore, it is important to note that Joe is not just any lay person, but one that holds a bachelor's degree in theology, with an emphasis on the Emerging Church. Despite Joe's educational background, it is highly apparent that the interchangeable use of 'emerging' and 'emergent' in a variety of different ways is the typical way that the Emerging Church is referenced in everyday conversation.

Social scientists Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, in their book specifically devoted to this topic, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (2013), explain that among practitioners, of those who have a preference to define themselves explicitly with a label, distinguish 'emerging', 'emergent', and 'emergence' as such:

- '*[E]merging* is more representative of churches that are Evangelical and conservative in nature'[198]
- '*[E]mergent* currently tends to reflect churches inclusive in character of all sorts of conditions of people'[199]

[197] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[198] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

- '*[E]mergence* was a word used to communicate the movement as a whole'.[200]

That being said, Marti and Ganiel indirectly and seemingly unintentionally pointed at an important detail: that these are labels for those 'who explicitly identify with labels'[201], indicating that there are others who may not use any of these labels to define themselves at all. This detail is important indeed to recognise because it stands in direct contrast to the broader population of the Emerging Church. In fact, Marti and Ganiel explicitly state that a 'reluctance to be labelled is common among ECM groups'[202] and 'many we consider Emerging Christians resist definition'[203]. In this more prevalent resistance to definition, the actual usage and meaning of each term becomes more ambiguous. While it might be helpful to attempt to distinguish between the three terms, what is more true is, when observing participants of the Emerging Church, as with my informant above, there is no precise distinction in how each concept is used.

At this point, I have been using the term Emerging Church – as a proper noun – to refer to the phenomenon at hand. Other terms that have been used thus far are: 'emerg*ing* church/Christianity' (common noun), and 'emerg*ent* church/Christianity' (both proper and common nouns), 'emerg*ence* Christianity' (both proper and common nouns), and 'Emerging Church Movement' ('ECM'). For now, I will offer my own attempt at distinguishing the differences between these terms with respect to history and context, and explain my preference of the term Emerging Church.

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[199] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6–7.
[200] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.
[201] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.
[202] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.
[203] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8.

The coining of 'emerg*ing* church/Christianity' (both proper and common nouns) as well as 'emerg*ent* church/Christianity' (both proper and common nouns), as mentioned in the previous chapter, is most often attributed to a meeting between Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt in 2001. In this meeting, they formed an online network called Emergent Village—note here, 'emergent' is a proper noun used to denote a specific online network. When the Emergent Village network popularised, terms like 'emergent church', 'emergent Christianity', 'emerging church', and 'emerging Christianity' – as proper and common nouns – started being spoken in popular language, with specific and not-so-specific usages. What is important to understand at this point is that these terms had non-academic origins. While many academics may have contributed to the uses of these terms during this time, the popular usages have prevailed.

'Emergence Christianity' (both proper and common nouns), as mentioned in the previous section, was coined by Phyllis Tickle in *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (2008). Unlike 'emerg*ing* church/Christianity' (both proper and common nouns) and 'emerg*ent* church/Christianity' (both proper and common nouns), the use of 'emergence Christianity' is largely unproblematic. It is a term used in the context in which Tickle introduced and intended: in the context of a grand metanarrative.

'ECM' is the term often used in the limited social scientific discourse on the Emerging Church. By 'limited' – while there are numerous academic articles available, and much interdisciplinary literature, primarily within theology – I mean there are only two purely social scientific books devoted solely on this topic: *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (2011) by anthropologist James Bielo, and the aforementioned *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (2013) by sociologist Gerardo Marti and political scientist Gladys Ganiel.

By ‘discourse’, I mean written and spoken word by academics and non-academics alike, when referring to the Emerging Church in a social scientific way—even if not trained in the social sciences. While Bielo uses ‘Emerging Evangelicals’ – and he is very nuanced in his use of this – Marti and Ganiel, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and a majority of other authors and speakers use the term ‘ECM’—note that Jones, mentioned in the previous section, uses it in *The Church is Flat*. What is peculiar, however, is that nowhere in Marti and Ganiel’s book – nor in any other articles that I have encountered – does it mention the origins of the use of ‘ECM’.

My suspicion is, like the other terms, ‘ECM’ originated as a popular, emic term used by participants when in social scientific discourses. That is, while ‘ECM’ implies social scientific scholarship, it actually does not have academic origins. *The Deconstructed Church*, to me, is a very comprehensive and helpful book, but uncritical of the Emerging Church and not particularly nuanced in its usage of the varying constellating terms—even in defining the three earlier. Marti and Ganiel uses ‘ECM’ the majority of the time, with no particular explanation for the preference of the term for the subject at hand, and sometimes use ‘emerging Christians’ and ‘emerging Evangelicals’ in lieu of ‘ECM’ with no specific reason for the substitutions. In this, it is questionable just how clear Marti and Ganiel’s understanding of the usages truly are. Jones, as I mentioned, is a reputable scholar, but is a public practitioner of the Emerging Church, and not necessarily trained in the social sciences. In my own observations, many of my informants refer to the Emerging Church as a ‘movement’ – a specific sociological term – but without the academic training to know specifically what the term ‘movement’ really means. My first encounter of ‘ECM’ as an abbreviation was in Jones’ writings in 2011, and from then, I became aware of it being used in academic conferences by my colleagues—again, though among people I respect in the field, not once did I hear a

mention of the social scientific support as to why 'movement' was being used for the Emerging Church, nor what the origins of 'ECM' being used as an abbreviation were. All that being said, my understanding is that the Emerging Church has always been understood by its practitioners as a 'movement', without the nuanced knowledge of 'movement' as a social scientific concept, which later evolved, unproblematised, to the abbreviated 'ECM' in continued social scientific discourses by academics and laypeople alike around the early 2010s.

All that being said, my intention is not to criticise the important work that my predecessors have done on this subject, but more point at a gaping hole in the research. As mentioned, there is a limited amount of social scientific work on the Emerging Church, which accounts for the lack of nuance in the usage of the terms associated with it. Most of the work is in theology, a discipline that has less experience than the social sciences in the study of religious organisation and movements. Regarding the use of the term 'movement' for the Emerging Church, I choose not to use it for reasons stated in the previous chapter. There, I explained that there is a substantial amount of the study of organisation in the social sciences, particularly in studying the New Age and other religious phenomena since the 1960s. Like the New Age, the Emerging Church is not simply a movement, but an internationally recognised organising concept or milieu. By intentionally omitting 'movement' from the Emerging Church, I intend to distinguish it as a religious phenomenon with permeable boundaries. Furthermore, I prefer to use 'emerging' to 'emergent' or 'emergence', not least because the use of 'Emerg*ing* Church Network' already has relationship with the social sciences, but also, in my experience, it seems to have the broadest connotation and usage of the three. Despite what Marti and Ganiel stated, 'emergent', as mentioned earlier, tends to have more of a connotation to a specific online network, and 'emergence' is often only associated with Tickle's work. I

also omit the use of 'Christianity' or 'Evangelicals' as an accompanying term to 'emerging' to account for those who do not identify as Christian, and might even be averse to being identified as Christian, in the Emerging Church. Like 'emerging' – in that its usage already has relationship with the social sciences – I maintain the use of the term 'church', despite its Christian and other traditional meanings, because of the already popular understandings of 'emerging church'. Lastly, I refer to the Emerging Church as a proper noun, like the New Age and Self-religion, leaving it open to be understood as an overarching religious phenomenon that includes both *sensu stricto* and *sensu lato* understandings of the term. In sum, Emerging Church is my preferential term from an overall social scientific point of view.

3 Field Work Choices and Parameters

As mentioned, I began this research in 2011, which was arguably around the maturation of the Emerging Church. Since then, as narrated, the Emerging Church has evolved in a variety of different directions and branches. The following are the choices and parameters I made during the seven years of conducting the research.

My initial interest in this project, even before selecting the Emerging Church as a subject, rooted from a curiosity about the largely uncharted territory of the 'nones'. This population is particularly interesting to me because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, contrary to popular thought, those who identify with no religion do not necessarily mean 'not religious', 'no religious belief', or 'no religious practice'—a population that overlaps heavily with Self-religion. The 'nones' apparently transcend the sacred-secular binary, and I wanted to understand the kinds of religious behaviour they engaged in, if at all, and how that fit in the context of society in general. I was also curious about why one would choose to identify with no religion, and the process in which this happened.

From there, it seemed most appropriate to make this a qualitative ethnographic study. However, this type of inquiry presents a number of problems. First of all, with what is known about the 'nones', like Self-religion, this population is one that is understood to be diffuse and dispersed throughout the society—it would be difficult to choose any one group, or one type of group, to be representative of all of the 'nones'. Nevertheless, I was determined, and eventually arrived at selecting the Emerging Church as my case study.

Considering the phenomenon of the 'nones' and Self-religion is of interest in predominantly Christian societies – particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States – one hypothesis that I brought into the research is that it is a phenomenon for individuals who previously identified as Christian. Current research on the 'nones' demonstrates a parallel – though not necessarily a correlation – in the decline of church attendance and the rise of the 'nones'. I intended to better shed light on this parallel, or correlation, if there was one at all—this would answer the 'how' question about becoming a 'none'. After discovering the Emerging Church through friends who engaged with Self-religion, I found that it presents itself as a religious phenomenon of people from a wide range of religious – and nonreligious – interests and engagements. Upon further investigation, despite what it presents itself as, I also found that the Emerging Church not only derives from – if not still part of – the Christian tradition. That being said, the Emerging Church shares the characteristic requisites of the 'nones' – it is (1) a demographic of individuals who previously identified as Christian, and (2) a demographic of individuals who previously, but no longer, attend church – all of which made it an appropriate case for this study. While the Emerging Church is not necessarily the exact same demographic as the 'nones' in that it may have participants that identify explicitly with Christianity and attend church, it certainly also encompasses the two

requisites. Furthermore, in selecting the Emerging Church, with its demographic that *does* include participants that identify explicitly with Christianity and attend church *alongside* those who did not, it presents itself to be a population that might demonstrate a correlation between identifying with no religion and the decline in church attendance.

Using the theoretical framework and methodology that seeks to find a group's most deeply held values explained in the previous chapter, this study encompasses the potential to make a contribution to the existing research from a perspective that is often disregarded. As mentioned, most of the existing literature on the Emerging Church is in theology, with very little in the social sciences, and even less so in qualitative ethnographic studies. Research on the 'nones' usually starts with quantitative studies and identity studies, and I wanted to take a different perspective. While there are indeed qualitative ethnographic studies on the 'nones', I have not come across any that observes it first from the perspective of a religious tradition.

This is where the Self-religion factors in more explicitly. In the social scientific research on the 'nones', as mentioned, there are often overlaps with Self-religion. Furthermore, as demonstrated in this chapter, the Emerging Church, too, shares many historical similarities with the Self-religion—and, as will be demonstrated more closely in this research, much more. While the Emerging Church, after all of this, is still not the necessarily a comprehensive representation of all of the 'nones', it offers a perspective about them that is rarely investigated. Recalling again the specific questions I posed for the ethnography, I sought to answer: (1) to what extent is the Emerging Church Christian, and (2) to what extent is it Self-religion? Additionally, to round back to the original inquiry about the 'nones', I asked: what does it mean for the Emerging Church to be Christian or Self-religion?

Considering my research was being conducted in the United Kingdom, and upon learning the complexity of Fresh Expressions amidst the British religious landscape with respect to the Emerging Church, I had to create quite a number of limitations to the groups and types of groups I would be observing. Firstly, despite the Emerging Church's prevalence in the United States, I wanted to study the Emerging Church in the United Kingdom precisely because of this aforementioned complexity—while the Emerging Church is certainly recognised in the United Kingdom, I found it even more interesting that it took on a different shape in a different context.

Secondly, I selected groups in London because of its being metropolitan. While it is generally understood in the study of religion in the United Kingdom that there are distinct, even vast, differences in the religious landscape of London and the rest of the United Kingdom, I thought it still the best place to study the Emerging Church in particular. Considering the Emerging Church is originally an American phenomenon, it would understandably have wider exposure in metropolitan cities than rural regions. That being said, while the Emerging Church in London might not be representative of what it is of the rest of the United Kingdom, it might be comparable to what it might be in other metropolitan cities in the world.

Thirdly, I selected to observe a small, but representative and even tokenistic, range of groups that advertised themselves with the 'emerging church' label. I wanted my sample to be small, because I wanted to keep it focussed; in staying with the qualitative focus of the research, I sought to gain more depth than breadth in the work that I was doing. I searched for groups in a variety of ways. First, I searched for the groups that I most often found referenced in Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions literature. Next, considering how technologically savvy the Emerging Church is, I did a general search online for groups that advertised themselves with the 'emerging church'

label. Then, I took recommendations from these initial contacts of other groups that I might have missed that they believed would be noteworthy to include in this research. In the end, I chose to work with the following five groups – which I will detail later in this section – groups that, without fail, were repeatedly mentioned in all of my searches, and would arguably be the most recognised Emerging Church groups in London:

- Grace
- Moot
- The Earlsfield Collective
- St Luke's, West Holloway
- The Borough Common

Of these groups, Grace is known to have the most popular 'alternative worship' services, Moot was known to be the most popular city centre Emerging Churches *and* New Monastic communities, the Earlsfield Collective is known to be one of the most popular and 'successful' New Monastic communities in London, St Luke's is the parish community and church congregation of Dave Tomlinson of 'post-Evangelical' fame, and the Borough Common is known to be the most popular independent – that is, non-Fresh Expressions – Emerging Church group. Grace, Moot, and the Earlsfield Collective are all Fresh Expressions, while St Luke's is an actual parish church. With all five of these groups, I conducted at least one participant observation, usually at their primary gathering, and interviewed at least one key individual in-depth.[204]

One group, the Borough Common, I chose to observe more in-depth than the rest. I attended their regular meetings, extracurricular activities, and immersed myself as much as possible in their community life for nearly the entire duration of this research. Considering they are the only group that had no official institutional relationship, they (1) were closer in comparison to the Emerging Church in the United States and potentially other countries with no established religious institution, and they (2) were

[204] Appendix I.

more 'neutral' and better represented a sort of 'link' between established Christianity and the 'nones'.

As for the interviews, by 'key individuals', I mean the people who tend to take leadership roles in the group. While most of these groups boast a horizontal or egalitarian structure of leadership, there are no doubt individuals that hold unofficial positions of authority. I chose to only conduct in-depth interviews with these key individuals instead of occasional participants, average participants, or a mix the three, not because of their position of leadership, but in order to gain a particular perspective of the relevant group. I attribute this method to cultural sociologists Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers, and Willem de Koster, in their ethnographies on the New Age, where they '[Focus] on this "spiritual elite" rather than on people who only vaguely identify with labels such as "spirituality" or "New Age" enables us to study the worldview of the spiritual milieu in its most crystallised and "pure" form.'[205] With respect to the Emerging Church, I wanted to gain the in-depth perspective of those who were most committed to the particular group, and not the occasional or average participants, primarily because of the historical perspective of the relevant group. However, this is not to say that the perspective of the occasional participant or average participant was not relevant—I most certainly took note of and used my conversations and interactions with them as evidence in this research. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, when I delve into the significant peaks and valleys of the experiences of groups, it would require the perspective of someone who experienced them all first-hand.

Despite these supposed 'biases' with the Borough Common and the key individuals for the in-depth interviews, as I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters,

[205] Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers, and Willem De Koster, "Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: Why New Age Spirituality Is Less Privatised Than They Say It Is," in *Paradoxes of Individualization: Social Control and Social Conflict in Contemporary Modernity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 34.

they will not reveal themselves as such. References from the Borough Common will not be favoured in any way over any of the other groups, and will be contextualised in cases that might present itself as a bias. The feedback from the key individuals, at most and unless stated otherwise, will only be 'favoured' in terms of being used as a starting point to narrate particular stories or events that occurred within the relevant group.

4 In-depth Interviews

The style of the interviews were guided and semi-formal. They were done one-to-one, recorded, and with my taking as minimal notes as possible. I wanted to make the interviews as informal and comfortable as possible in order to acquire the most authentic responses possible. I tried not to take notes in order for the conversation to flow organically, as opposed to that of a formal interview. I had prepared questions, but only used them as a guide as needed—I had particular points in mind already and asked specific questions as they were relevant and flowed in the natural conversation. Furthermore, some of these questions elicited potentially very personal and sensitive responses, which furthers my wanting to maintain a safe and comfortable atmosphere for the interview. The following are the prepared interview questions, separated in sets here for the purposes of explaining each the particular intentions behind each question.[206]

These four questions were intended to elicit information about what the individual values and what the relevant group as a whole appears to value, with the intention of collectively allowing the relevant group to reveal itself in its own right:

- What are some positive qualities that you have to say about [group name]? Explain.
- What are some positive experiences you have had in [group name]? Explain.
- What are some negative qualities you have to say about [group name]? Explain.
- What are some negative experiences you have had in [group name]? Explain.

[206] Appendix II.

The next two questions touch at the sense of belonging of the individual in the relevant group, but aims at drawing out what personal reasons an individual might have for participating in this group or a group like this at all:

- In what ways do you feel you fit in [group name]? Why? Is this important? Why?
- In what ways do you feel you don't fit in [group name]? Why? Is this important? Why?

This particular question is similar to the last two, but aiming specifically at gauging the potential of the individual to seek outside if this particular group to cater to other dimensions of one's spirituality:

- Do you like being part of [group name]? Why?

Lastly, if it did not present itself naturally in the interview, I asked the question about religious identity last, in order for it not to influence the interview in such a way that put the informant into thinking this interview was about official religious affiliation. After careful consideration as to whether or not this question might do more harm than good, considering the above dilemma, I find this question to be relevant information for the purposes of gauging the authorities acknowledged by any one individual:

- In as much or as little detail as you like, how would you describe your religious identity—if you have one?

* * *

Keeping the background and history of the Emerging Church, alongside my methodological choices and parameters, in mind, I now turn to the first of three ethnographic chapters of this research. In them, I will focus on allowing the Emerging Church to reveal itself in its own right, by observing for what is most valuable and what is most 'sacred' to them. I will then revisit my initial inquiries in the concluding chapter.

IV Inclusivity Through Trauma

1 Introduction

At this point, I have referenced a number of informants already. In the introductory chapter, I referenced the Borough Common and St Luke's, as well as quoted Randy, Kate, and Dave Tomlinson. In the historical and methodological chapter, I referenced two participants of the Borough Common, quoted Joe, and briefly mentioned my ethnography groups: Grace; Moot; the Earlsfield Collective; St Luke's, West Holloway; and the Borough Common. I have also mentioned a number of popular figures of the Emerging Church as a whole.

In this chapter, I will introduce my informants – key individuals and groups – in detail. I will then focus on the experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma of these popular figures, key individuals, and groups, and how they reveal the value of inclusivity within them. I will also shed light on the role of established Christianity in these experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma. I then analyse the different conceptualisations of and relationships to Christianity based on these experiences.

2 Ethnography

The following is the description of each group, and their corresponding key individuals, in detail. I disclose each key individual's stated religious identification for the purposes of shedding light on whether or not she or he would be considered a 'none'. I also reference the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into for each group and key individual in the context of their biographies. To this end, the groups and key individuals demonstrate just how fluid the different directions are: individuals might be considered to have evolved in a different direction than the group they are affiliated with, and vice-versa.

Grace is a globally recognised 'alternative worship' group that started at St Mary's Church of England parish church in South Ealing, London, in 1993, and has been an active community since. When the Fresh Expressions initiative commenced in 2004, the Church of England labelled Grace a Fresh Expression. On their website, they explain the following, revealing a bit about the participants of Grace, and their relationship to the wider Church of England:

> 'Grace was founded by members of St Mary's and has always been a part of that church. However it operates with a high degree of freedom and independence, which is based on a relationship of friendship and trust with the "mother" church. Some people come to Grace and also go to other services at St Mary's, but generally Grace doesn't overlap much with the other congregations of St. Mary's. However we believe that it is good to be part of a wider church community, in spite of the ambiguities and challenges that sometimes arise.'[207]

They have one official gathering per month, with multiple formal and informal gatherings throughout the week. Their official gatherings are a 'service' that usually falls on a Sunday at 8pm, with an informal 'café' – socialising and refreshments – afterwards.

Jared is the key individual that I conducted an in-depth interview with from Grace, who firmly identifies as being Christian. He is a long-standing lay member of Grace, and continues to be in its planning committee. While he is not a founding member, he was certainly present during its early years, and is often attributed to be one of its founding members due to his work in reviving Grace after a 'burnout break'[208]. In general, Grace functions on an egalitarian model of leadership, and their planning meetings are open for any who want to participate. However, occasionally, more senior or active members of the group will meet separately in more closed planning meetings—

[207] Grace, 'Grace', 2018, <http://www.freshworship.org> [Accessed 26 August 2018].
[208] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, Highlighting edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 242.

of which Jared is part. In 2003, Jared started working for the Church Mission Society (CMS), an independent religious organisation, with partnerships to established churches, committed to Christian mission globally.[209] This role, however, is not to be confused with the founding of Grace, which was founded independently from Jared's role at CMS—Grace was a community that Jared and his family discovered and joined on their own volition. Nevertheless, since the commencement of Fresh Expressions, Jared was assigned by the Church of England to be the 'missioner', with respect to new understandings of 'mission', of Grace—which can be best understood as being the primary contact person reporting the activities of Grace to the wider Church of England. That being said, in addition to being associated with 'alternative worship', the Emerging Church, and Fresh Expressions, Grace can also fall within the milieu of the Missional Church.

Recalling the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into since the 2010s, Grace might be considered to fall in the category of the Missional Church, considering the direction it has taken since Jared's influence. They might also fall in the category of a group that maintains their criticism against traditional Christianity. Jared, as an individual, might be considered to be a significant figure in the Missional Church in the United Kingdom.

Moot is best known as a New Monastic and Emerging Church group that started at Wren Church, St Mary Aldermary, a Church of England parish church in the City of London, in 2003, and has been an active community since. It was founded by Ian Mobsby, an ordained Church of England minister and missioner, as a response to 'alternative worship'—while it still attracted the same demographic of people who

[209] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, Highlighting edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 243.

criticised established institutional Christianity, instead of creating a community that sought out new and innovative ideas, it focussed more on reviving ancient traditions of Christianity. It runs a coffee shop, which is open daily to the public, inside St Mary Aldermary's called Host Café. Since the commencement of Fresh Expressions, Moot, as well as Host Café, were recognised by the Church of England as Fresh Expressions. Moot is an Emerging Church in that it draws from the Emerging Church milieu. However, between 'emerging church' and 'new monasticism', it identifies more with the latter. Moot is not a residential New Monastic group, in that participants do not live together in one household or neighbourhood, but is New Monastic in the sense that participants followed a 'rule of life' – a daily pattern of prayer – in the way that Christian monastic traditions do together as a community. They can meet as much as multiple times a day to pray together at St Mary Aldermary's, or as little as an individual simply praying along with any of the gatherings, on one's own, from anywhere in the world. That being said, there is a house shared by a group of participants of Moot, though not considered an official New Monastic household. Among participants, there is an understanding of a narrow as well as a wide reach of who is considered part of the community: 'Mooters' are those who regularly attend the prayer gatherings at St Mary Aldermary's, particularly on Sundays, and the 'weekday Mooters' are those who are one-off drop-ins, or perhaps are just regular customers at Host Café.

In 2015, alongside some bureaucratic changes implemented by the Church of England onto Moot, Mobsby moved on and started a different New Monastic group in Peckham, London. In 2012, the Bishop of London formally gave consent for Moot to begin the process of discernment – a process it is currently still in – about becoming a fully recognised Acknowledged Religious Community in the Church of England.[210] I

[210] Moot, 'Moot', 2018, <http://www.moot.uk.net> [Accessed 26 August 2018].

did the majority of my observations of Moot in 2016, and during that time, since 2015, Moot had been in an 'interregnum'—an official Church of England term for any community in-between a priest-in-charge. At that time, Aaron, an ordained Church of England minister, was assigned as a chaplain to Moot to oversee it on a part-time basis while they sought a replacement for Mobsby. In 2017, Moot selected Paul Kennedy, an ordained Church of England minister, to be its new priest-in-charge. All that being said, it is evident that Moot functions on a traditional hierarchical leadership model and has very close ties with the wider Church of England—however, considering 'Mooters' and 'weekday Mooters', the individual experiences of its participants might reflect otherwise. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Moot, in its process of discernment in becoming an Acknowledged Religious Community, might be considered to fall in the category of 'new wave emergence'. They might also fall in the category of those who have turned to a more traditional form of Christianity.

Aaron is one of two key individuals that I conducted an in-depth interview with from Moot, who firmly identifies as being Christian. As mentioned, he was a part-time chaplain to Moot, and was only a member of its community for a year at the time of my interview. While he gave some interesting insights about the group, had many positive things to say about it, and is definitely considered part of the Moot community, I gained the sense that he maintained a certain distance with Moot considering his role was only a temporary one. He often spoke about the temporality of his role, his perspective as part of the wider church, and referred me to other, long-standing members of Moot, regarding certain questions. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Aaron, being an ordained minister who fully identifies with the established church, while simultaneously involved with a group like Moot, might be considered to fall in the

category of one who has integrated the Emerging Church into his experience of Christianity.

Kate is the second of two key individuals that I conducted an in-depth interview with from Moot, who 'sometimes, depending on the day'[211] would identify as being Christian. She has been a lay member of Moot since 2009, is one of the two Churchwardens of St Mary Aldermary's, is its Safeguarding Officer, as well as a member of its Guild Church Council (GCC). Kate was a wealth of information in terms of describing the varying perspectives on the group, and, despite all her leadership roles at Moot and St Mary Aldermary's, would argue against how close Moot's official relationship with the Church of England truly is. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Kate might be considered to fall in the category of one who maintains her criticism against traditional Christianity.

I had hoped to interview Ian Mobsby as well, but, considering his new group in Peckham was still at its early stages of formation, he was much too occupied, and we were unable to schedule a time to meet for the interview. He is, however, a prolific writer and has published numerous books and articles on the Emerging Church, New Monasticism, Fresh Expressions, and other constellating subjects. One noteworthy piece is a book that Moot published in 2006, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How Are They Authentically Church and Anglican?* his inaugural work which arguably continues to influence his ideas to the present day. I did not interview Paul Kennedy, as by the time Moot selected him as their new priest-in-charge, I was already nearing the end of this research. Moreover, considering that he was such a new member of the group, his perspective would not give me the historical perspective that I was seeking in the in-depth interviews.

[211] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

The Earlsfield Collective is best known as one of the most popular and 'successful' New Monastic groups that started in the Earlsfield neighbourhood in London from around 2006 – then called the Earlsfield Friary – and has been an active community since. In 2009, Joe, one of its founding members, describes its formational years as such:

> 'Three years ago my wife and I came to this area of London to explore mission spirituality through a communal rhythm of life with others. We began our own journey living in an extended household for two years, trying to practice a pattern of life together. From then a small community has come together which now orientates around five households. We are exploring how we could live out the Christian faith in practice. We have a central rhythm of life, seeking to focus on our individual spirituality, work, and home lives. We focus on mission life, discipleship, and open community. The Friary itself has four key values: mutual rhythm, mutual Christ, mutual support, and mutual mission. We are not into becoming a specific "intentional community" living all together. Instead we seek to become a 'community of intention' by the way we choose to live as a network of people.'[212]

Influenced by the Emerging Church and New Monasticism, they originally called themselves a 'friary' because most of their 'rule of life' was inspired by the Franciscan Rule of Life. Later, as they began to evolve as a community, integrating other forms of spiritual practice, along with both the local parish church as well as residents of the entire neighbourhood in general, they decided to call themselves a 'collective' in order to distinguish themselves from just the Franciscan Rule of Life. They are also considered a Fresh Expression by the Church of England, with Joe as the 'pioneer missioner'. Since 2006, the Earlsfield Collective continue to be a mix of separate private family homes and shared houses, but all within walking distance from one another in the Earlsfield neighbourhood of London. They also continue to live together according to a very detailed 'rule of life'—from daily prayer, to weekly, monthly, seasonal, as well as annual events and activities. While they work and interact with a wide variety of people in the

[212] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

neighbourhood, the boundaries of the Earlsfield Collective as a community is very distinct: they are those who follow their prescribed 'rule of life', and there is a discernment process for becoming a member. They perceive the wider community as the people they serve together as the Earlsfield Collective. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, the Earlsfield Collective might be considered to fall in the category of the Missional Church. They might also fall in the category of 'new wave emergence'. Considering the parish in their neighbourhood, they might be considered an established church that has integrated the Emerging Church into the wider tradition of Christianity.

Joe is the key individual that I conducted an in-depth interview with from the Earlsfield Collective, who identifies as a 'rewilded'[213] Christian. In 2014, eight years after the founding of the Earlsfield Collective, Joe was ordained minister in the Church of England, with the Earlsfield Collective as his primary assignment. While he is a founding member, has the title of being the Fresh Expressions 'pioneer missioner', and is assigned by the Church of England to work with the Earlsfield Collective, the group functioned and continues to function on an egalitarian model of leadership. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Joe, as an individual, in his getting ordained, might be considered to fall in the category of one who has turned to a more traditional form of Christianity. He might also fall in the Missional Church, as well as 'new wave emergence'.

St Luke's Church of England parish church in West Holloway, London, is well-known throughout the United Kingdom, not so much because it is an Emerging Church group, but because it is the community of David 'Dave' Tomlinson of none other than House Church Movement, Holy Joes, and 'post-Evangelical' fame. Tomlinson was first

[213] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

a curate, then later became the priest-in-charge of St Luke's in the year 2000. Prior to Tomlinson's arrival at St Luke's, it was already well known in the particular lineage of Christianity that I narrated in this chapter—it was the location of the Greenbelt offices. That being said, despite being an fully-functioning Church of England parish church, St Luke's certainly attracted a particular type of Christian – or non-Christian – in its congregation. Among the events and activities that happen at St Luke's, in addition to what one may usually see occurring at a typical Church of England church – for instance, weekday prayers and Sunday services – they host weekly Astanga yoga classes, 5Rhythms dynamic movement practice classes, voice classes, a choir called Vox Holloway, a periodic Enneagram workshop that Tomlinson facilitates, and a monthly 'alternative worship'-style Sunday evening service called Soul Space that Tomlinson also facilitates. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, St Luke's might be considered to fall in the category of those who have integrated the Emerging Church into the wider tradition of Christianity. Unlike the other groups that I observed, St Luke's has always had an unbroken history with the lineage of Christianity that the Emerging Church is part of. They demonstrate a type of church that, despite being affiliated with the wider established church, continues to integrate the new ideas that challenge the very institution it is part of.

Dave Tomlinson, as one can imagine, is the key individual that I conducted an in-depth interview with from St Luke's. Despite being an ordained Church of England minister, he could not get himself to answer whether or not he was Christian—a couple of the answers he gave me were: 'I find labels very difficult because I am a natural beach comber. I am an eclectic person'[214] and 'I think the word Christian is loaded, that's the

[214] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

problem with it so you have to immediately explain what you don't mean by it'[215], which leads me to consider him as a 'none' as he simply refused to identify with any one thing. As mentioned earlier, Tomlinson was first known as a significant figure in the House Church Movement in the 1970s and 1980s, founded Holy Joes in 1989, published *The Post-Evangelical* in 1997, and was ordained and started working at St Luke's in the year 2000. In just Tomlinson's biography alone, one can see that the lineage that I narrated in this chapter is one that can be continuous. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Tomlinson, like Joe, in his getting ordained, might be considered to fall in the category of one who has turned to a more traditional form of Christianity.

The Borough Common is best known as the Emerging Church group in London that is independently managed and not at all connected to an established institutional church. It was founded in 2009 by a group of eight friends who were attending an 'alternative worship'- and Emerging Church-inspired 'service' called Headspace, based in a Baptist-affiliated church called Oasis. This group of friends decided they wanted to start their own community, separate from Headspace and Oasis, in order to explore spirituality in a way that was not bound by established Christianity. Upon their first conversations about this, Ben Brown, one of the founding members of the Borough Common, stumbled upon an abandoned-looking church building that advertised a meeting space for hire – the Welsh Congregational Chapel in Borough, London – and the rest became history. From 2009 to 2016, the Borough Common met at the basement of the Welsh Congregational Chapel every Sunday evening at 6pm, for a 'service' of some sort exploring spirituality in some way, followed by informal socialising at the Libertine Pub nearby. For a period of time in 2013, the Borough Common met on a monthly Sunday morning at the House Café in Camberwell called Brunch Church, for families

[215] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

with children who found it difficult to meet on Sunday evenings. Also in 2013, the Borough Common reached a level of maturity and presented the community and its ideas at Greenbelt titled 'The Borough Common: Church as Common Property—A 4-year Experiment'. Since then, they became nationally recognised informally as the 'anarchist church' in London—a label that was held with pride by many of its participants. In 2016, while still being independently managed, seven years after its founding, the Borough Common changed its venue to St Giles Centre in Camberwell, London, the community hall of St Giles Church of England parish church, now meeting on the first Sunday of the month at 11.30am.

Throughout the years, the Borough Common formed various different splinter groups that met weekly on the evenings during the week, namely:

- Cross Currents: A group focussed on the activism side of spirituality
- Waffle: A group that focussed on theology, philosophy, and the academic side of spirituality over a meal of waffles
- Spirituality Group (SOUP): A group that focussed on deepening their spirituality over a meal of soup

These groups were considered part of the larger Borough Common community, but sometimes had participants that never attended the primary Borough Common Sunday meetings.

Occasionally, the Borough Common would gather for a group trip or volunteer project together, namely:

- Borough Common Weekend Away – usually once a year during the summer
- Borough Common Folk Carols – an annual pub folk Christmas carols evening, performed by members of the Borough Common and open to the public, at the Libertine Pub
- Contact the Elderly Tea Party – usually once a year, hosting a tea party for elderly people at a nursing home, through the Contact the Elderly organisation
- Robes Project Sleep Out– usually one overnight during the winter; cooking meals, offering friendship and comfort, and 'rough sleeping' on the streets with the homeless; through the Robes Project organisation

The Borough Common generally functions on an egalitarian model of leadership. However, like Grace, certain planning meetings were closed to a number of active participants of the community. In 2013, their 'year of maturation', these more 'closed' meetings were opened up to the community in general. Additionally, those who were founding members were looked upon with an unofficial authority within the group. Like Moot, the Borough Common has very wide-reaching boundaries – from those that attended every gathering without fail, to those that only joined for drinks at the Libertine – nearly anyone who has an association with the Borough Common is considered part of the community. The Borough Common has evolved considerably through the years, but still remains an active community to this day. Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, the Borough Common might be considered to fall in the category of those who maintain their criticism against traditional Christianity.

Randy is one of two key individuals that I conducted an in-depth interview with from the Borough Common, who, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, identified as being Christian insofar as it is 'in his blood'[216]. He is a founding member of the Borough Common, and the only one of the founding members who remains a regular participant. Randy has neither a formal theological nor a ministerial background, but has had an unwavering interest in spirituality. He comes from a family with multiple ordained Church of England ministers, and has led as a lay leader in various Christian groups throughout his teens and early twenties. When I first started my observations in 2011, Randy was working in China, and founded a spiritual community there based on the ideas of the Borough Common. When the Borough Common started meeting at St Giles Centre in 2016, Randy had been participating in a Zen yoga community based in Camberwell, London, regularly, and has since been interested in exploring entheogens.

[216] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Randy might be considered to fall in the category of 'new wave emergence'.

Elle is the second of two key individuals that I conducted an in-depth interview with from the Borough Common, who generally identifies as being Christian but 'it depends who she's talking to'[217]. She is not a founding member, but, within her first year of participating in the Borough Common in 2012, immediately became an unofficial person of authority in the group. In 2014, Elle, along with a handful of other members of the Borough Common, felt that its frustrations with Christianity were a hindrance from delving more deeply into a spiritual life. Thus, she co-founded SOUP, which, unlike the other splinter groups of the Borough Common, is arguably a community of its own.

SOUP had a more explicitly Christian flavour than Borough Common—namely, they said a set prayer written by a Christian community called the Northumbria Community together. Nevertheless, it was also a space where other forms of spirituality were comfortably explored. In time, Elle lessened her attendance to wider Borough Common events, started attending services at St Luke's, and made SOUP her primary spiritual community. Most of the participants of SOUP discovered it through the Borough Common, although there are a number that discovered SOUP with neither reference nor association with the Borough Common. Many participants of SOUP, like Elle, would consider it their primary spiritual community as well. What is interesting about Elle, SOUP, and the Borough Common is that they demonstrate a religious demographic that is often invisible to society—they are neither connect to nor affiliated with an established religious tradition, but continue to expand and persist.

Of the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved into, Elle might be considered to fall in the category of 'new wave emergence'. Considering her

[217] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

participation with St Luke's however, she might also fall in the category of one who has turned to a more traditional form of Christianity. SOUP, as a group, might also be considered to fall in the category of 'new wave emergence'.

Considering these groups and individuals, I have demonstrated that even the 'spiritual elite' of the Emerging Church can be considered a 'none'. I have also demonstrated the six directions that the Emerging Church evolved in context. The six directions are categories that have revealed themselves in the historical perspective of each group and key individual. They also demonstrate fluidity in that individuals might be considered to have evolved in a different direction than the group they are affiliated with, groups might be considered to have evolved in a different direction than the individual participants in it, and that both individuals and groups may have evolved in multiple directions simultaneously.

At this point, the background work is complete: the theoretical framework and methodology has been explicated, the history of the case study has been told, and the biographies of popular figures, groups, and key individuals of the case study have been described. Recalling the observational methodology that Gordon Lynch and Carl Dudley have offered, explained in detail in the introductory chapter, I now highlight the experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma of my case study.

3 'Post-traumatic Church Syndrome': Trauma Inflicted by Established Christianity

In a memoir written by Reba Riley titled *Post-traumatic Church Syndrome: A Memoir of Humour and Healing* (2015), she jokingly defines 'post-traumatic church syndrome' (PTCS) as such:

1. 'A condition of spiritual injury that occurs as a result of religion, faith, and/or the leaving, losing, or breaking thereof.
2. The vile, noxious, icky, and otherwise foul *aftermath* of said spiritual injury.

3. A serious term intended to aid serious spiritual healing—without taking itself too seriously in the process.'[218]

In a *Time* magazine article she also wrote, endorsing this book, she asserts,

> 'PTCS is real, pervasive, and quite possibly one of the reasons why the percentage of adults who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percentage points since 2007. It's part of the "why" behind the "what" of Pew [Research Centre]'s findings, but, as my experience shows, it can be much more than that. PTCS is a place to begin a conversation about the reality of spiritual injury and the many, many paths to healing.'[219]

Based on my observations, though her definition was given with a bit of jest, I am compelled to agree with her.

Riley is a common type of participant of the Emerging Church. On the sleeve of this book, her biographical note reads, 'Reba Riley is an author, speaker, former Evangelical poster child, and lover of all things sparkly.'[220] On the back of the book sleeve, there are endorsements by a variety of popular religious writers from various different religious backgrounds, including Emerging Church figure, Brian McLaren. Just by the conceptualisation of 'PTCS' and these book sleeve notes alone, Riley already sounds like an individual who would be considered part of the Emerging Church. In fact, in her acknowledgements, she thanks two popular Emerging Church figures: Brian McLaren—'[you] encouraged me when I needed it'[221], and Rob Bell—'your books made

[218] Reba Riley, "Losing My Religion: America's 'Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome,'" *Time*, May 19, 2015, http://time.com/3859374/losing-my-religion-americas-post-traumatic-church-syndrome/; Reba Riley, *Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome: A Memoir of Humor and Healing*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2016), 3.
[219] Reba Riley, "Losing My Religion: America's 'Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome,'" *Time*, May 19, 2015, http://time.com/3859374/losing-my-religion-americas-post-traumatic-church-syndrome/
[220] Reba Riley, *Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome: A Memoir of Humor and Healing*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2016).
[221] Reba Riley, *Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome: A Memoir of Humor and Healing*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2016), 344.

me believe there might be a Christianity I could believe in'[222], confirming, considering the Emerging Church's broad reaches, her being at least loosely part of the Emerging Church. Additionally, in the aforementioned *Time* magazine article, she actually declares, 'PTCS was the reason I was a "none"'[223], confirming my hypothesis that there are 'nones' who are also part of the Emerging Church. In fact, this sentiment is a recurring theme that can be observed in all dimensions of the Emerging Church. In this section, I will demonstrate – through academic texts, popular texts, the experiences of the groups I observed, as well as the experiences of the individuals that I interviewed – that experiences of 'trauma' inflicted by established Christianity is indeed chronic, and points particularly in contexts when it is experienced as being exclusive. Furthermore, these experiences imply that those who experienced them may not necessarily have had predetermined intentions of leaving Christianity, but left because they felt they were not welcome.

Oftentimes, because the popular theology of the Emerging Church is so prevalent, it is perceived to be an extremely intellectual milieu. Though there is definitely much truth to this characterisation, Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel paint a different picture when describing scenes from Emerging Church conferences:

> 'From the moment of approaching the church building housing the conference, Gerardo saw attendees gathered in clumps talking, and a buzz of earnest conversation and warm embraces were evident throughout the conference. It was a diverse group in terms of denominational background and social class… Most importantly, they included people with various affiliations, including those involved with LGBTQ issues and advocacy, practitioners within neo-monastic communities, and members of the "Outlaw Preachers"… What drew them together is a shared sentiment that the pretentiousness of Christianity as they have known it must change.

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[222] Reba Riley, *Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome: A Memoir of Humor and Healing*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2016), 345.
[223] Reba Riley, "Losing My Religion: America's 'Post-Traumatic Church Syndrome,'" *Time*, May 19, 2015, http://time.com/3859374/losing-my-religion-americas-post-traumatic-church-syndrome/

> 'Judging from the excited talk from morning to evening, everyone seemed to have strong opinions on modern Christianity. At times confronting and at other times confrontational, the conference created a meeting ground for issues regarding the practice of Christian community by mixing both inspiration and practicality. The intensity at times was overwhelming; nevertheless, there was also a notable casualness in the air that suggested the ambience of a church social hour… In one session – a classroom packed so tightly that people sat on the floor – a megachurch pastor described his "coming out" as gay during his Sunday sermon. A young woman sitting in the front began to cry; and as she was invited to share her experience, she talked about how she had struggled for years to serve God in youth ministry while hiding her sexual orientation. She spoke through her tears, and a sense of camaraderie imbued others around her. It was her first emerging conference, and these new relationships showed her a way to embrace both her spirituality and her sexuality. In these and other engaging, often emotional, sessions, the tone was less philosophical than relational as the meeting continually emphasised tolerance, sensitivity to trauma and brokenness, and a willingness to support any participant dubbed to be "sincere" toward God and themselves.'[224]

Marti and Ganiel continue by stating that they observed similar dynamics in Emerging Church conferences throughout the United Kingdom and the United States. Furthermore, they claim that between conference participants,

> 'Their connections do not come from what they are *joining* but rather from a shared sense of what they are jointly *leaving*. Emerging Christians have a contested relationship with the established structures of mainstream Christianity and willingly take on a badge of being "misfits" and "outsiders."'[225]

In other words, Marti and Ganiel observed that, at least at Emerging Church conferences, a shared sense of trauma inflicted by established Christianity is what brings participants together. In this particular case, it was the issue of homosexuality, and in other cases, individuals may have felt alienated from Christianity because of a number of other reasons.

Similarly, in the afterword titled 'The World and the Church' by Ian Mobsby in an edited book about Fresh Expressions titled *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World,*

[224] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.
[225] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.

and the Kingdom of God (2013) by theologians Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard, Mobsby introduces his chapter by highlighting a need to address the 'difficult and painful questions'[226] of Christianity, pointing at similar issues as Marti and Ganiel. He says,

> 'Many long for an expression of the Christian faith that reconciles heart and head, that offers a positive, engaging spirituality that is also committed to grappling honestly with difficult and painful questions, and that longs to make the world a better place.'[227]

Recall that Mobsby was the founder of one of my ethnography groups, Moot, and continues to be a significant figure in the Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions, and New Monasticism in the United Kingdom. This sentiment is telling indeed, considering his vast experience in working with participants of the Emerging Church; that Christianity is lacking in a number of qualities that is causing difficulty and pain in its participants.

Taking on a slightly different angle is theologian Michael Riddell in *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (1998). Here, he focuses more on what people are seeking after leaving established Christianity. He claims that 'people are turning to deeper and supra-rational sources to provide meaning for their lives. The most enthusiastic participants in this quest envisage the current period of history as a flowering of spiritual evolution'.[228] He continues by saying,

> 'Unfortunately, the great majority of these spiritual explorers do not make any connection between their personal quest and the existence of the church. To them, the contemporary Christian church is a relic of a bygone era; a monument to religious sentiment in the past, but irrelevant to the vital pilgrimage that they are embarked upon. Those expressions of spirituality which are demonstrated by the church are regarded as shallow and repressive. Christian people seem to them

[226] Ian Mobsby, "Afterword: The World and the Church," in *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World, and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 170.
[227] Ian Mobsby, "Afterword: The World and the Church," in *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World, and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 170.
[228] Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1998), 11.

> to be materialistic and emotionally stunted. They further appear dogmatic, rigid, and unwilling to experiment spiritually or to learn from experience.'[229]

Here, Riddell observes that many who leave Christianity not only see it as spiritually shallow and obsolete, but also repressive and stubborn. Established Christianity is causing trauma it its theological and doctrinal exclusivity.

In *The Invisible Church: Learning from the Experiences of Churchless Christians* (2016) by missiologist Steve Aisthorpe, he focuses on a demographic of Christians that fully identify as being Christian, but do not attend any particular church. Here, Aisthorpe devotes a whole chapter on the experiences of belonging – or lack thereof – from those who have stopped attending church called 'A Longing for Belonging'. In this chapter, he points at 'unintentional exclusion' that is present in churches: 'evidence indicates that even a church that is perceived as welcoming by many of its members can sometimes be the scene of "unintentional exclusion"'.[230] Though Aisthorpe points that sometimes, exclusion is not necessarily intentional or maliciously inflicted by established Christianity, it is nevertheless experienced.

In an independent study conducted by the Barna Group, an Evangelical research organisation based in the United States, in *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (2014), they name 'six main reasons young Christians give for leaving the church'[231]:

1. Churches seem restrictive and overprotective
2. Christianity as practiced is too shallow
3. Churches seem antagonistic to science
4. Churches are judgemental and rigid about sexuality
5. The exclusivity of Christianity is a turnoff
6. Churches are unfriendly to those who doubt

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[229] Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1998), 11.
[230] Steve Aisthorpe, *The Invisible Church* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2016), 78.
[231] Barna Group, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, First edition (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014), 97–102.

I argue that all of these reasons can be interpreted as the experience of the church's exclusivity being a cause for pain and trauma. The fifth reason is the most explicit about exclusivity:

> 'A hallmark value of modern society is the ability to choose one's beliefs in a manner that is personally satisfying and unique. Sociologists have hailed today's young adults as the most eclectic generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, technological tools, and sources of authority. Young adults typically embrace tolerance, open-mindedness, flexibility, and inclusiveness, and most want to find areas of common ground with each other, even if that requires minimising real and critical differences.
> 'In this context, Christianity's claims that Jesus is the only way to salvation, that the Bible is the only reliable and authoritative word of God, and that Christianity is the only faith that connects people to the Creator and Ruler of the universe upset many young adults.'[232]

Here, the Barna Group points at exclusivity in terms of social issues as well as theological and doctrinal issues. That being said, though trauma is not mentioned here, it is clear that exclusivity in a variety of forms is a primary reason for those to leave established Christianity.

In another book about those leaving Christianity, *Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People are Leaving the Church* (1993), by William Hendricks, while this book focuses on a demographic from a decade earlier than participants of the Emerging Church, it still sheds light on a common reason people leave Christianity. One of the common themes that recur throughout his interviews has to do with pain inflicted by fellow Christians. Hendricks calls this 'Who is the enemy? Who is a friend?'[233] and quotes one of his informants: 'When I look back over the years, the hurt and the pain, do you know where it's from? It's from the family of God. It hasn't been from

[232] Barna Group, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, First edition (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014), 101.
[233] William D. Hendricks, *Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People Are Leaving the Church* (Chicago. IL: Moody Press,U.S., 1995), 262.

unbelievers.'[234] He continues and says, 'This comment . . . was echoed by many of the others. Tragically, almost all the casualties recoded here were from "friendly fire".'[235] Here, Hendricks finds that most, if not all, of the pain experienced by those who left Christianity was inflicted by fellow Christians. While he does not explain what caused these experiences of pain, the other themes point at different forms of exclusivity within other themes. To this end, this book is complementary to the research done by the Barna Group.

Turning towards my ethnography, in Grace, it was unclear whether or not individuals or the group as a whole had experiences of trauma from exclusivity inflicted by established Christianity, but there are certainly some clues. Recalling the 'About' section of the Grace website where it describes its relationship to the wider Church of England, it says,

> 'Grace was founded by members of St Mary's and has always been a part of that church. However it operates with a high degree of freedom and independence which is based on a relationship of friendship and trust with the 'mother' church… However we believe that it is good to be part of a wider church community, in spite of the ambiguities and challenges that sometimes arise.'[236]

By stating this, despite Grace's association with the 'mother church', it is acknowledging a tension with it. Also in the website, there is a whole page dedicated to 'Structure and Community'. Here, Grace details and gives careful attention to how their egalitarian model of leadership functions, revealing a particular stand against the more authoritative and hierarchical models of leadership in which established Christianity functions. Furthermore, Jared commented on Grace's 'flat structure' as opposed to 'hierarchical

[234] William D. Hendricks, *Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People Are Leaving the Church* (Chicago. IL: Moody Press,U.S., 1995), 262.
[235] William D. Hendricks, *Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People Are Leaving the Church* (Chicago. IL: Moody Press,U.S., 1995), 262.
[236] Grace, 'Grace', 2018, <http://www.freshworship.org> [Accessed 26 August 2018]

structure' being an aspect of it that he particularly liked.[237] Grace might not explicitly demonstrate any trauma from established Christianity, but reveals an aversion to its authoritative and hierarchical elements.

Moot was substantially more explicit. In Kate's interview describing Moot, she says:

> 'I think Moot is the elbow of the Church of England… Yes, it's part of the body, but it's not a welcome part of the body. But I think the Church of England hierarchy recognises its value. A lot of people in Moot have had hard experiences in church, maybe less so than before, but it's always been quite a part of our identity that people have been into quite fundamentalist evangelical tracks of Charismatic preachers that have not fitted and they've not been welcome there because of who they are, the questions they ask, the discomfort that they bring as person in their identity.'[238]

Here, it is very clear that many participants of Moot have been traumatised by social and theological exclusivity in established Christianity. In Aaron's interview, though not as explicit as in Kate's, he points at areas of pain inflicted by established Christianity still lingering in the group. Regarding the word 'church', he says, 'for some of our community, "church" is a dirty word and so people wouldn't regard it as a church'[239]. Regarding specific aspects of Christian doctrine, he says,

> '[T]here are people who are really struggling with the person of Jesus, or with the Holy Spirit, or with the Trinity, or with the Bible and how to interpret it, or with the Church and its liturgy and historic tradition, or with patriarchalism'[240].

In these, Aaron points at a clear aversion towards established Christianity, and considering Kate's interview, it is because of their 'hard experiences' of exclusivity.

In the Earlsfield Collective, while their Christian identity appears stable, they take an explicit stand against theological and doctrinal exclusivity, revealing an

[237] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[238] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[239] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[240] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

acknowledgement of established Christianity's tendency to do this. Recalling their key values, they share a 'mutual Christ', which is their primary Christian value:

> '[I]f you read anything that we write about, the reality of Christ is paramount to how we see. Our Christology's big, but I think what we're trying to do in the letting go and rediscovering is not feel that we have to kind of create a model that we don't think actually captures what mission evangelism and spirituality are all about… We're not trying to obsessively move [Christ] towards a point of naming so that we can tick a box that says, "we got him"…'[241]

Here, Joe explains that despite having a 'mutual Christ' as central to the Earlsfield Collective, they are relaxed in this value's boundaries. They are not rigid on how they define 'Christ' despite this concept being so central to them. The Earlsfield Collective also recognises that established Christianity has caused trauma to some of its members. Regarding those from an Evangelical background, Joes explains,

> '[Y]ou actually end up feeling bipolar because you've got two lives going on at the same time and it drains your energy and resources and really fractures your identity, which is one of the things we've seen psychologically. We've come up a lot with people that have had experience of this kind of particularly Evangelical life in the last 20 years, they're very fractured in their identity… It's very draining… There's some really serious mental health issues around it, at its worst, and that isn't to say at all that there isn't a lot of good that's gone on in that world…'

Here, Joe explains the psychological issues that those from Evangelical backgrounds have experienced because of having to separate their lives between who they are and who they are supposed to be according to Christianity. Participants of the Earlsfield Collective, though comfortable in their variation of Christianity, have experienced some trauma in the form of theological and doctrinal exclusivity in more established Christianity.

At St Luke's, Tomlinson describes the congregation's positioning with established Christianity as parallel to his own:

[241] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> '[P]eople say to me when I go round talking, "We like all of this but you're a vicar. How do you reconcile this?" To which I would say, "Well I feel I've got a foot in two camps." I don't think that this form of Christianity, the sort of church building type form, I don't think it's got a long future actually or I think its future is very problematic and it will have to adapt massively in the future. But I think it's still there right now. I think it still connects with a certain kind of demographic of people. So if I can give anything I've got to help to reform and renew that model, I will do it. But my heart is not totally there. I also think that we need other fresh models and I feel stretched that I want to give some input or effort or thought to that too, really. So I think St Luke's actually is a place where we do have some of both going on, really, and most of the people who come on a Sunday morning, a high percentage of them probably wouldn't go to another church. They just happen to have found this where they feel they belong.'[242]

Here, Tomlinson starts by acknowledging that he is often criticised by being hypocritical for being ordained – and associated with established Christianity – and also being a public critic against established Christianity. He then explains how he reconciles these two opposing positions, and describes the congregation of St Luke's as reconciling these opposing positions in the same way that he does. St Luke's is a congregation of people who have so many criticisms against established Christianity that, if they did not find St Luke's, they would probably not be attending church at all. While this does not describe a particular type of trauma, it is very telling that established Christianity indeed hurt individuals at St Luke's enough to not want to continue going to church if not for Tomlinson's teachings.

In the Borough Common, the experience of being traumatised by established Christianity in terms of exclusivity is very explicit. In Randy's interview alone, 'trauma' comes up ten times, with three of them relating to his experience with society and people in the Borough Common:

- 'I think there's just a lot of, basically I think there's a lot of **trauma** in the general population about church and the word "Christian" and I find it interesting…
- 'there's this kind of interesting thing and I think so many people have got all these anxieties and **traumas** which is mostly to do with a kind of evangelical

[242] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> Christianity that they've been exposed to, or a kind of, like a lot of people talk about Catholic schools or religious schools, so you've got a certain type of Catholicism when someone's a child and a certain type of Christianity normally when someone's a student or a young adult, including a lot of stories, like, I did this anthropology of religion course at the start of the year and this woman was talking about how one of her friends, her and some of her friends when they were teenagers, they started going to this youth club and then this older girl in her mid-20s started hanging around with them and they were like about 16 and basically started kind of manipulating them to, to convert them…
> - 'so I think a lot of people's thoughts about religion are really thoughts about an experience they've had or a **traumatic** difficult thing they've had…'[243]

These were in response to how he would describe the Borough Common, with respect to acknowledging shying away from being explicitly Christian:

> 'Depending on who they are and depending on whether I've got an interest in their emotional well-being, so like if they're a Christian and I think that that's kind of important to them, then I would say it's kind of like a church that, where we don't really have hierarchy, and we're not particularly attached to dogma.'[244]

Here, even when faced with someone who is explicitly Christian, Randy still acknowledges an aversion towards the concepts 'church', 'hierarchy', and 'dogma'. That being said, according to Randy, it appears that many participants of the Borough Common have experienced trauma inflicted by established Christianity with respect to theological and doctrinal exclusivity.

According to Elle, she mentioned lots of similarities between the Borough Common and SOUP, although points out that SOUP is more open to more explicitly Christian topics. When speaking about the Borough Common, she says, it

> '[G]ives a space and a voice to people who are disillusioned in the church in some way, but not ready to give up on their faith entirely. So it provides a space for those people who would otherwise probably just leave any kind of church or community altogether. So that's really important I think.'[245]

[243] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[244] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[245] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Here, she acknowledges that many in the Borough Common have a 'disillusionment' with established Christianity, enough to stop attending church altogether. Furthermore, she explains that,

> '[I]t was put together by people very jaded from their church experience and therefore part of that experience had been this feeling of obligation and just having stuff put on them and feeling like they just have to do stuff out of loyalty or out of responsibility to the church that they're a part of. So they very much wanted to avoid that in their culture of Borough Common.'[246]

Here, she acknowledges that many in the Borough Common are 'jaded' by established Christianity, enough to change the kind of dysfunctional culture that they came from. She then goes on to explain,

> 'I mean God was barely mentioned. Nothing Christian was barely mentioned, in fact they became . . . I started to realise over time they were sort of dirty words in the community, that's how it felt. Which is really interesting, and that was probably just the place of a lot of people in the group at the time. But it then became a place where I find it difficult to talk about prayer or what Jesus would say in that context.'[247]

Here, Elle reveals just how severe the trauma of established Christianity was to the participants of the Borough Common—enough for one to feel that anything explicitly Christian was a 'dirty word'. For Elle, this was a step too restricting, which is why she founded SOUP:

> '[I]t was all the things that you couldn't talk about in Borough Common, it was all the things that we felt our hands were tied with in Borough Common. We just wanted to be able to have a space where we could just do that stuff, where we could pray for each other. To mention God and call yourself a Christian, you can have and it's all right with those things. I started to realise through discussions that there were quite a few of us in Borough Common who were feeling that way and I thought, "Well there's enough of us to have our own thing"… We are all still people who have our issues with mainstream church, we are all still people who are in some respect or other on the edge of that or have different theological out-workings of what we believe and all of that. But not people for whom

[246] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[247] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> mentioning God or prayer will make us so uncomfortable that no one can do it.'[248]

Here, Elle acknowledges that many in SOUP are indeed 'people who have issues with mainstream church', but also wanted an outlet for spirituality or elements that are explicitly Christian. All that being said, the Borough Common in general, including SOUP, are a collection of those who have been hurt or traumatised by established Christianity in its various forms of exclusivity.

To this end, I have demonstrated that Riley's 'PTCS' is in fact a very real and pervasive aspect of the contemporary religious landscape in the United Kingdom and the United States. Through academic texts, popular texts, the experiences of the groups I observed, as well as the experiences of the individuals that I interviewed, it is clear that experiences of pain and trauma inflicted by established Christianity is indeed chronic. At this point, the causes for this trauma only point at social and theological exclusivity within Christianity. However, considering the observations I have made in my ethnography, this cause becomes more apparent. Considering the Emerging Church's critical position against established Christianity, its most deeply held values shed light on the things that established Christianity is lacking. Although it is important to note that despite this critical position, participants of the Emerging Church care about Christianity enough not to disengage completely. I turn now towards the experiences of my ethnography groups, where the specific value of inclusivity arises from their experiences of pain and trauma.

4 Inclusivity through Trauma: Group Experiences

Recalling the method for ethnographic observation proposed by Lynch and Dudley, I will now narrate specific experiences of pain and conflict within each of my

[248] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

groups, and demonstrate that inclusivity is the Emerging Church's most deeply held value.

For Grace, Jared recalled that its most 'challenging moment' was a situation that happened about 15 years ago:

> 'We had a challenging moment – this is quite a number of years ago now, maybe 15 years ago – when the vicar of the church left and the associate vicar was in charge and she basically read us the Riot Act. She called two of us around and said, "You won't use any liturgies other than by Canon Law, unless the bishop tells me otherwise". You realise your vulnerability, I suppose. Actually, a new guy came in, and she moved on, but what I did was to get in contact with the bishop about it, and he wrote us a letter giving us permission to use other liturgies. So he backed us… We called her bluff. She said, "Unless you go to the bishop", and I thought, "Okay, we'll go to the bishop. We know the bishop, why not?" That was a difficult moment in the community. We haven't had too many difficult moments.'[249]

Hearing about this 'challenging moment' was very telling about Grace's tension with the Church of England, as intimated by their website. Recalling that Grace is well known for being part of 'alternative worship' and challenging traditional liturgy, their untraditional liturgies are definitive of their identity. In fact, the subtitle to their website is 'Fresh Vital Worship since 1993', further demonstrating this. In this situation, a church official imposed her authority over the very core of Grace's being, which made it a traumatic experience for the group—even after 15 years, it remains its most challenging experience as a group. This reveals the ultimate value of liturgical inclusivity for Grace.

For Moot, there was a period of time that lasted a handful of years until 2015 that caused 'extreme pain', and described by Kate as 'really, really, really bad times' and 'extreme messiness' that the group is 'only just coming out of'.[250] In her words:

> '[W]hat the problem was is we were fearful of authority and suspicious of authority… We're not able to assert authority in our leadership, we have a quite

[249] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[250] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> flat leadership… Also because of [this], we attract screwballs and crazies who have been spat out by the church for legitimate reasons. So we had some screwballs and crazies who were recruited into positions, which was a stupid thing to do, but it was something about, "People are unemployable. Let's employ them, and mentor them, and give them a chance. Give them something good on their CV, and maybe that'll be good." But turned out to be the most destructive thing… Big division, and lots of backbiting, and some very, very serious allegations were made against people, and real manipulation… It was just extremely painful and destructive situation . . . and we had unhealthy leadership, unhealthy relationship with leadership. Unhealthy relationship with the diocese, and they weren't sure what we were all about… The reality [is], we attract people who've got problems, who've got unresolved issues with people in leadership… [We eventually resolved it by having] a day of reconciliation. We got a mediator, [held a] peace and reconciliation [service], and that was really, really good. There is still hurt and anger which I think always comes from it.'[251]

In these traumatic years, though Kate is explicit that these events unfolded because of a 'fear' and 'suspicion' of authority by participants of Moot, which may very well be true, it also sheds light on the ultimate value of inclusion—inclusion even 'to a fault'. Moot wanted to include anyone and everyone who was 'spat out by the church', and, to their own misfortune, at any cost. In Aaron's words,

> 'I think it relied on a number of key people. I think in its desire to be all inclusive and welcoming, it took on people that were actually too needy, it took on projects that were too big, and perhaps didn't have the support from the diocese that it should have done, for example, in setting up a café. And the ideal was that it was going to be a community-run café, and there was going to be a community house, and all those things kind of didn't materialise… So there was probably not enough professional support in terms of a business model, I suppose, and it relied on probably the priest too much to kind of run things and get it all sorted, as well as, I think, a number of individuals who were very destructive, intentionally and unintentionally, to the community. Very needy people, and, actually, again, that's where, in terms of community, Moot made the wrong decision of wanting to include them. Actually, it was damaging to the community, and what perhaps needed to happen was for them to be excluded, because they were with their issues and their problems [and] they were too big a problem for Moot to hold and help… [M]y take would be, actually, just from my experiences, no, actually, Moot even then was too small a community to cope with those very needy people. Yeah, difficulty in relationships and the ramifications or reverberations are still there, they've largely gone and people have actually been very good, and there's been a lot of healing that's taken place

[251] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> within the community, and with those who've left or are much more on the fringe.'[252]

Here, Aaron explicitly points that Moot values inclusivity 'to a fault'. Moot values inclusivity so much that it had become the cause of its own internal traumas.

The Earlsfield Collective's most challenging event was a similar situation in terms of the inclusion of those who are socially rejected. Joe narrates:

> '[O]ne year, a beautiful woman who is a friend and lives next door still, joined our community, and we knew she had mental health issues, and she was very upfront about that. She's a brilliant artist, brilliant . . . so creative. But she was struggling with deep depression, and the community again made a decision, it was a very interesting one, because we always decide these things together, and it's fair to say that part of us, there was a strong conversation saying, "Look, if we take on this woman, that is essentially going to be us done for the year, because she's going to take a lot of our resources, a lot of our time and energy." She was very high maintenance at that point, and you know, it's going to potentially drag us away from what God's putting us to do here. Where is God? And someone, some wise sage just said, just very beautifully and very quietly said, "Maybe she is what is our will of God this year. Maybe she is it, and that is it." And we just went, "You're right, she's it." So she was our mission for the year, and we paid for her to get therapy, we introduced her into a surgery, she got in touch with a brilliant doctor, who then helped her in terms of medicating. She went through that process, she found work, and then went through a gradual process of coming off the medication, and, wow, she's just a different person, and I think we realised in that, that sometimes the one gold coin is really important. It's the one, not the masses, that really matters, and it was a real lesson for us as a community, because sometimes you get these people [and not the] big grander things don't you…? Yes, and that when you look at a person, you need to see them, and not all the kind of great ambitions we have to do – this, that, and the other – but actually, she was who we were meant to love.'[253]

This situation, Joe admits, was much more challenging, perhaps even traumatising, than how the experience in hindsight sounds, during the year that the Earlsfield Collective underwent this endeavour. That being said, it sounds as though the challenge here was the desire to include a social outcast versus choosing to expend resources on 'grander

[252] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[253] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

ambitions'. Their ultimately choosing to support the woman, and even considering this endeavour to begin with, is very telling of the Earlsfield Collective's value of inclusivity.

For St Luke's, Tomlinson says that they have been 'pretty lucky' that they have 'not had any major traumas'[254]. He continues:

> 'We've never had any kind of significant split or a trauma of that nature… Yeah, I do think we've been pretty lucky, really, that we've not had any major traumas. There are, as I say, a couple of relationship things that have caused some pain along the way, but they're not huge, really, they're quite contained… And we've got two couples I can think of immediately, maybe more, who while they've been here have actually broken up and been divorced, where both partners still come to the church and will sit next to each other. And so, I think, "Well that's pretty good going really." Because these things happen, it happens everywhere, and I think it says something about them as people, of course, but it also says something about a community, a church, that can kind of hold that, where people aren't aligned behind one or the other but are supportive to both.'[255]

While Tomlinson could not recall a particularly traumatic event that happened to St Luke's as a whole, even just this anecdote is telling of the group's values. Firstly, it is very well possible that this situation was much more painful to the group than Tomlinson describes. Perhaps not particularly traumatic, but, it is, in fact, the only situation that he discussed. Secondly, as he pointed out, the fact that all parties involved – the individuals in the relationships, as well as the rest of the congregation – did not create factions alongside the separating couples, is telling. The congregation at St Luke's is sensitive to the things that may cause individuals to leave the church, and makes sure to maintain inclusivity despite potentially painful things that may occur.

For the Borough Common, a 'deeply wounding'[256] experience happened in 2013-2014. It was triggered by a group holiday to France, where a handful of participants of the Borough Common went, but the trip was not advertised or shared with the rest of the group. The fact that not everyone was invited hurt a number of participants who voiced

[254] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[255] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[256] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

their pain; while the people that went on the trip argued that the trip was not an official Borough Common trip, but a trip for and by a group of friends who just happened to also be part of the Borough Common. From there, a floodgate opened about the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the Borough Common, debating the boundaries of the group amidst the ultimate value of the group's unofficial slogan of it being 'common property'. In sum, according to Randy,

> '[I]n both ways and for both sides of that story, I think that's the thing, that no one left out of that, no one left that experience a victor. Because, basically there was a bunch of people who were accused by people that they loved, of being manipulative, secretive, and coercive; and there was a bunch of people who felt manipulated, coerced, and excluded; and then they experienced the deep trauma of saying to people, finally getting the bravery to say, "You've excluded me", and then have those people go, "No I didn't, that's not true"; and then you go, "Hang on, that's not great, [that] doesn't do a great job for acknowledging all those deep buried feelings of pain and the genuine hurt"; but, also, like, it's quite painful to be told, for a voluntary group, that you've put as much of your heart into for so long, to then be told "Really, you're a nasty manipulator"; it's like, "Is that why I fucking work every Friday night to sort out your accounts?"'[257]

In this account, it is very clear how painful and damaging this event unfolded. According to Elle,

> 'So I think the idea that there are no leaders and there's no one in charge and we all have equal say is wonderful. It's very difficult to make that happen in practice, particularly when you've got a small group of people who are the founders and who are the ones whose baby it is. So I think just because of how personalities work, some people kind of emerged as more leaders or louder voices than other people. That upset other people because it felt hypocritical, there were a couple of errors made along the way about exposing the leadership group as it was and it was kept secret for a long time. That was really hurtful for a lot of people, but that was a human error.'[258]

In both of these accounts, despite the 'deeply wounding' experience, it is very clear that the Borough Common had the best intentions of making the group as inclusive as possible in all aspects of its functioning. Those that were initially hurt expected this

[257] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[258] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

inclusivity, and were hurt because they were excluded. Those that were accused were not being intentionally exclusive, and only appeared exclusive because of the realities of trying to make an ideal come to life. All that being said, because of this trauma experienced by the Borough Common, the value of inclusivity comes to light.

Considering these experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma, each group, in their own particular way, shed light on the value of inclusivity. For Grace, it was liturgical inclusivity; for Moot, it was inclusivity for those rejected by established Christianity; for the Earlsfield Collective, it was a general social inclusivity; for St Luke's, it was a general inclusivity between congregation members; and for the Borough Common, it was social and ideological inclusivity.

5 Inclusivity through Trauma: Individuals

Turning now to the experiences of the individuals in my ethnography groups, this value of inclusivity also surfaces in individual experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma, while being part of the group.

Jared claims to not have had any personal experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma in Grace, but in explaining this, still points at the group's values:

> 'I think I fit in fine. I feel that I've been able to contribute my ideas fully and they've been heard. I probably have quite a lot of personal power, just by virtue of being part of the community for a long time. I'm not saying that's a good or bad thing but I think if I suggest things, people will listen to them. Over the years, I've just gone back on the leadership team, facilitation team, I haven't been on that for about eight years probably.'[259]

Here, in explaining how he 'fits in' Grace, he puts it in the context of being able to 'contribute his ideas fully' and 'being heard'—all aspects of inclusivity. Keeping in mind that Jared is a well-respected member of the community, this is perhaps why his experience in Grace is that of complete inclusivity. Nevertheless, he also discusses some

[259] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

challenges he has with Grace as being part of the leadership, which also points at the value of inclusivity:

> 'I think one of the challenges is because it's just run by volunteers, we do a once-a-month public event. Actually we do do some other things, so in Lent we meet weekly for meals and have a focus on a theme, more in-depth in terms of discipleship and things. We have one meal or something like that a month as well. But I think sometimes it can feel a bit too light… In terms of, it's quite easy – and this is the postmodern thing, isn't it – to stay on the side-lines, watch the carnival go by, and not get involved. We have people that turn up every few months and they're quite light touch to it I suppose. It can be good for them but you need a certain amount of people for whom they're committed to put the hours in.'[260]

Here, Jared expresses that he ultimately wishes that more people would be more fully involved to Grace, or at least in some of their events. He expresses a desire for more people with the level of commitment as those in the facilitation team—a commitment that comes with feeling inclusivity in Grace. Jared's experience is not explicit about valuing inclusivity, but sheds light on what may be missing in his desire for more commitment.

Kate, like Jared, does not feel particularly alienated in her experience of being in Moot, but acknowledges that 'I'm the minority though. Most people come, like I say, "Heal and then go."'[261] Here, Kate recognises that her experience is unique because she holds a place of authority and longevity in the group—which not everybody may have. She also recognises Moot's place as being a place of healing for people. Recalling what has been said about Moot thus far, it is a place of healing for those who 'have had hard experiences in church'[262]—experiences of exclusion by established Christianity. Furthermore, Kate admits that

> 'I think it's hard to find who we are without defining ourselves in opposition to something else. I would say I'm post-church, what does that mean apart from not

[260] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[261] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[262] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> that, that's not helpful to define yourselves in opposite, it's better to define yourself by this is what I am, I'm not that. So I think we have to be defining who we are…'[263]

In this, Kate reveals a difficulty in identity for those in Moot, because it identifies itself in opposition to established Christianity, as opposed to an entity in itself. Like in Marti and Ganiel's observations in Emerging Church conferences, there is a shared experience of trauma inflicted by established Christianity that brought the participants of Moot together. While Kate is not satisfied with this shared trauma as Moot's identity, it is nevertheless definitive of it. Furthermore, while this does not explicitly shed light on the value of inclusivity in Moot or Kate, it points at, like in Marti and Ganiel's observations, the trauma of social and theological exclusivity from established Christianity, which would lead to seeking healing by way of the experience of inclusivity elsewhere. This shared identity of being in opposition to established Christianity also points at why there is a lack of commitment, or a 'heal and go' culture at Grace and Moot—participants may still be apprehensive about a larger commitment to any community, given their past negative experiences.

Aaron holds a unique position compared to the rest of my informants, because he is officially a transient participant of Moot. Nevertheless, when he first arrived, he did point at the challenge of Moot having 'an element of cliquey-ness':

> 'I think there's an element of cliquey-ness, yes. I think it happens in all churches because once you get familiar with people and the whole thing of welcome is a challenge to newcomers and some people are very god at it but I think we as a community, it's an area that needs to be worked on a little bit more… [A]s a newcomer myself it was interesting who welcomed me when I first came in and how I felt about coming in to the church when I didn't actually know anybody… Well, I was welcomed by a new member herself and we ended up chatting and I was aware . . . people tend to gather on that sofa or that sofa and that's quite a hard group to break into… The sofa group… That's where people tend to gather and also I think… [W]e gathered around the bar. So we gather around the bar or

[263] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> around the sofa. Some people are very good. A lot of us are more introverted and it's harder to go up to somebody strange.'[264]

This perspective was ironic because, compared to the rest of my ethnography groups, Moot is one of the groups that has the experience of being inclusive 'to a fault'. Nevertheless, Aaron's observation, whether it was because of his own experience of feeling alienated, or his responsibility to be aware of Moot's values for the group, points at inclusivity as being its most deeply held value.

Joe, unlike the past three informants, had an experience with the Earlsfield Collective that has become a very formative part of his personal life:

> '[I]n 2009 I was made redundant, when the economy crashed, basically, and I was working for a charity. Of course all the bread and butter contracts were the first thing to go, and I was made redundant. We weren't living here at the time, I wasn't selected for ordination, and we were going to have to leave London… [W]e talked to the community and said, "I think we're going to have to leave London because we can't afford to live here", and my second son was born in the middle of it… We'd been together for three years by that time, four years, sorry – just getting the timeline and the rest of them came back – I mean I had to go and sign on, we were on benefits—very dehumanising, very traumatic. And basically the rest of the community came together and they said, "We don't want you to go, we're going to pay for you to stay here for a year… What we think, then, is that can help you take a year to reorient and retrain towards something else", and that's what I did. I retrained as a childcare worker at the time, and coinciding with that, I was invited to consider this pioneer training pathway for ordination, and got selected for that. And those things came together with, in being selected, my incumbent offered me this house to live in. So it was an amazing set of circumstances… I think that was another step in really embracing this idea – Richard Rohr is a big fan of this – but the liminality of life actually brings real resurrection, rising, and if you don't embrace the suffering, you don't get the rising.'[265]

Here, Joe had a personal hardship of being financially unstable in losing his job, and uncertain about the direction of his vocation in not being selected for ordination. The Earlsfield Collective then gathered together financially in order to keep Joe in his family in London despite all of it. In this, the Earlsfield Collective felt a sense of responsibility

[264] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[265] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

for Joe and his family to stay within the geographical location of their New Monastic community, demonstrating a level of inclusivity that reaches beyond that of just social and theological inclusivity—the Earlsfield Collective values even physical, geographical inclusivity.

For Tomlinson, he describes a 'good challenge' for St Luke's, which points at the value of inclusivity:

> 'I think that there is a challenge that centres around me in that . . . I'm not the best manager in the world and I think we could sometimes be strategically better. I think that just generally we are very . . . and it's surprising this given the people here, but we're surprisingly poor at selling ourselves. I think that in a way our product [of being a broad, generous, inclusive community] is very good. I feel very confident in what we're about and what we've got to give. I think that we're very laid back, and although, funnily enough, we've got so many media people and digital people and all the rest of it, I don't think we're very good at using the things that people have got great talent at. So I think we undersell ourselves. I think that it goes back to the first point I made, really, that I think that trying to hold the tension between something which is a loose network-y relational sort of form of community, holding the tension between that, and being strategic and organised and so on, I think we're constantly wrestling between those two things, and that is a challenge really.'[266]

Here, Tomlinson explicitly states that inclusivity is St Luke's 'product', but is not 'selling' it well. However, in the same breath, he continues by saying,

> 'And I think that also, we are in need of doing something beyond this building, because I think we've hit a ceiling of being sufficiently full in this building. That I think it's difficult then for people to feel they can come and get in and find a place there. So, I think, that, I don't know, people say something like when a building's 80% full, you stop growing. It's something like that, and I think that we've been at our limit for a while, and so that posed the challenge of the whole church planting thing, because the words, "church planting" don't go down well with us. That is associated with a different form of Christian spirituality that we don't really . . . the more driving, evangelistic sort of thing, and I think that we've got to overcome that, and find out "What does church planting mean for us?" because we get a lot of people who… There are new faces all the time, and I think, some people find it hard, as I say, to get a purchase on how to fit into this community, because there are so many people who know each other. It's all there, and I think it is to do with size and the way we are in the building. So, it's difficult in Church of England, because anywhere outside of this immediate parish that you go to plant a church, you're doing it in someone else's parish, and

[266] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> that has implications, and there are lots of tensions in the Church of England about that. Places like Holy Trinity Brompton, they have gotten well into the swing of where they take over a church that's ailing somewhere, and import people in. Well, that's another strategy altogether, but whichever way it is, I think that the part of the future is finding out "How do we continue on a pathway of growth beyond the gathered congregation of its building?' because we've reached the limit there for that… And that's a good challenge but it's a challenge.'[267]

Here, Tomlinson points at the challenge of the congregation of St Luke's outgrowing its church building, which, to me, sounds like St Luke's 'product' is 'selling' very well—almost too well even. That said, regardless of whether or not St Luke's is 'selling' its 'product' well, it is 'selling' the 'product' of inclusivity.

Randy, like Joe with the Earlsfield Collective, had an experience with the Borough Common that has become a very formative part of his personal life:

> 'So my major psychological trauma at [aged] 27 was recovered through Borough Common, and the energy of pulling together around a smaller group, and so for a long time, a lot of my psychological health was tied up in this community that we were creating together. It was the friendships that I most valued, having had some deep damage done to friendships that were outside of that in my 27th year, and really struggling to assimilate those into my life. So I actually think that there was an unhealthy obsession with Borough Common and what it was, and what it was trying to do, and all of that. So, on one level, that's more balanced now…'[268]

Here, Randy explains that the Borough Common was actually part of the healing of his own personal traumas—and, in a way, he used it to heal his past traumas. Considering he is one of the Borough Common's founding and most committed members, the group's values are then highly influenced by these past experiences of Randy. While Randy does not describe here what his past traumas were, recalling what has been revealed about Borough Common already, it is one of the groups in this ethnography, alongside Moot, that values inclusivity even 'to a fault'. In this, Randy's personal experience is

[267] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[268] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

intricately intertwined with what was revealed about the Borough Common's group experience: the healing of trauma through in inclusivity. It is, again, similar to Moot in that it points at the trauma of social and theological exclusivity from established Christianity, which would lead to seeking healing by way of the experience of inclusivity elsewhere.

Considering Elle's experience with the Borough Common, it has already been revealed that she had experienced some tension in its lack of spirituality. Although digging deeper in her overall experience with the Borough Common, Elle admits,

> '[J]ust looking back in the past on Borough Common, I think for the whole first year that I joined, I never felt I fitted in, if I'm really honest. I just felt very much like on the outside, and I felt like I couldn't keep up. I wasn't cool enough, I wasn't hip enough, like there were lots of in jokes. Lots of talk about previous things they'd done, where they'd all just laugh together, that I was just excluded from automatically… They hung out with each other a lot and you'd just hear a lot about their socials, so you always felt like there was a group and you were on the outside. So yeah I did really struggle with it at first and at the beginning…'[269]

Here, Elle admits that she struggled with the Borough Common at the beginning because of the feeling of being alienated from what she felt was a clique. Furthermore, she adds that just prior to founding SOUP,

> 'I was getting a bit disillusioned myself with how it was going. Just, I guess it was a definition of . . . I loved it on paper, but how it was working out on the ground wasn't my . . . it didn't match my idea of what I would want a community to be.'[270]

Elle's 'idea of what she would want a community to be' incorporated more spirituality, which she felt the Borough Common was lacking. In both of these revelations, Elle's experience points at two types of exclusivity: social exclusivity and spiritual exclusivity. It further reveals that, ironically, like Moot, despite the Borough Common's value of inclusivity, they are still excluding other people and aspects of spirituality. Nevertheless,

[269] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[270] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Elle desired both social and spiritual inclusivity in her experience of the Borough Common—which also reveals what SOUP values as well. It was revealed, after all, that SOUP 'was all the things that we felt our hands were tied with in Borough Common'[271].

Considering these experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma, each individual, in varying degrees of explicitness, pointed at the value of inclusivity. These experiences, however, were not as explicit about inclusivity – or any value in particular – as in the previous section, likely because the experiences revealed here were not as particularly wounding as those in the previous section. Nevertheless, they are indeed still revealing in that, compared to any other value, inclusivity is still the one that is most discernible.

6 Conclusion: Informants, 'PTCS', Conflict, and Inclusivity

In this chapter, I introduced my ethnography groups and the individuals which I conducted and in-depth interview with in detail, and explained that many participants in the Emerging Church have a shared background in being excluded or traumatised by established Christianity. I also narrated the major painful, challenging, and traumatic experiences that each of my ethnography groups, as well as individuals in these ethnography groups, endured together, and demonstrate how these experiences reveal the ultimate value of inclusivity among all of them.

For some individuals and groups the experience of exclusivity as the cause of the trauma inflicted by established Christianity was explicit. Others revealed more of a general aversion towards established Christianity. Others demonstrated both. For example, Grace did not explicitly demonstrate any particular traumas from established Christianity, but revealed an aversion to its authoritative and hierarchical elements. For Moot, there are shared 'hard experiences' of exclusivity from established Christianity, as well as a clear aversion towards it. For the Earlsfield Collective, though comfortable in

[271] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

their variation of Christianity, they have experienced some trauma in the form of theological and doctrinal exclusivity in more established Christianity. For St Luke's, there is a general sense that it is a congregation of people who have so many criticisms against established Christianity that, if it were not for Tomlinson's interpretation of Christianity, they would probably not be attending church at all. For the Borough Common, many of its participants have experienced trauma inflicted by established Christianity with respect to theological and doctrinal exclusivity. For SOUP, many of its participants are 'people who have issues with mainstream church'. In all of these positions, all of the groups share a position that challenges established Christianity.

In all of the experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma experienced within the groups, their shared value of inclusivity is revealed very explicitly. For Grace, their experience revealed the ultimate value of liturgical inclusivity. For Moot, their experience revealed the value of inclusivity in general—even 'to a fault'. For the Earlsfield Collective, their experience revealed the ultimate value of social inclusivity. For St Luke's, their experience revealed the value of inclusivity in general. Lastly, for the Borough Common, to a similar extent as Moot, their experience revealed the value of inclusivity in general. In these experiences, inclusivity reveals itself as the Emerging Church's most deeply held value.

In the experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma experienced by individuals within the groups, while not as explicit as the group experiences, the value of inclusivity is also discernible. Understandably so, because the experiences that revealed more vague values were the experiences that were not particularly wounding, as opposed to the experiences the groups endured in the previous section. For Jared, his desire for more commitment from members of Grace only points at the value of inclusivity. For Kate, her desire for an identity for Moot that is independent of its identity with established

Christianity points at the pervasiveness to heal the trauma inflicted by established Christianity through inclusivity. For Aaron, his experience revealed the value of inclusivity in general. For Joe, his experience revealed the value of physical and geographical inclusivity. For Tomlinson, his experience revealed the value of inclusivity the 'product' that St Luke's is 'selling'. For Randy, like for Kate and Moot, his experience points at the pervasiveness to heal the trauma inflicted by established Christianity through inclusivity. Lastly, for Elle, her experience revealed the value of social and spiritual inclusivity. In these experiences, though some are not particularly clear about the values they reveal, inclusivity is still the value that is most apparent.

As the method for ethnographic observation proposed by Lynch and Dudley suggested, these experiences indeed revealed the Emerging Church's most deeply held value of inclusivity. It is definitive of the Emerging Church's identity, and is the value that is held most 'sacred', considering the pain, conflict, and trauma it can cause if not given or acknowledged. Furthermore, with a bit of background information from academic literature, popular literature, and insights of my informants, this value is borne out of the shared experiences of exclusivity from established Christianity. To further this investigation of inclusivity in the Emerging Church, I turn to the experiences of belonging and community in my ethnography groups.

V Inclusivity as Community

1 Introduction

While the last chapter discussed the 'valleys' – experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma – of the Emerging Church, this one will focus more on the 'peaks'. By highlighting the 'valleys', I demonstrated that the most deeply held value in the Emerging Church is inclusivity. This chapter focuses on what the Emerging Church values on a more conscious level. I focus on the experiences that organise and bond individuals among one another—the experiences of belonging and community. By highlighting these 'peak' experiences among the groups and individuals in my ethnography, I intend to demonstrate that the Emerging Church not only values inclusivity, but also creates social identity around this value.

2 'Believing in Belonging'

In 2011, sociologist, Abby Day, published *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World*—a book demonstrating a neo-Durkheimian approach to studying religion beyond the sacred-secular binary. Recalling the great social scientist, Émile Durkheim, Day says:

> 'Durkheim's well-known definition of religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" takes propositional belief as a starting point but moved it into the realm of performance "that is to say, things set apart are forbidden—beliefs and practice which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them". Beliefs were unrelated to supernatural beings but were created through collective, intellectual effort classifying that which was sacred and profane so that people could practice socially cohesive behaviours. By reducing gods to the place of interesting but unnecessary accessories, Durkheim disrupted forces of power, authority, and legitimacy by relocating belief in the social. Belief was therefore not something one acquired through accepting the pre-formed ideas of society, bur rather something that was produced through the performative engagement with others.'[272]

[272] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

She then turns to how Durkheimian ideas have developed since the publication of his *magnum opus*, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912):

> 'Within anthropology and sociology there would emerge two important and different understandings of belief, discussed in this book as the "pre-formed" and "performed". The Durkheimian approach was to argue that beliefs were produced (what I would describe as "performatively") through rituals of belonging rather than interpreting rituals as a mirror or mere performance of already-existing beliefs. Further, what was being worshipped or celebrated was not the entity of "society" but, I suggest, the embodied, emotional experience of belonging.'[273]

Here, she introduces where her ideas depart from Durkheim's, in that she argues that beliefs are 'performed' rather than 'pre-formed', and that, in this performance, what is being 'worshipped or celebrated' is 'the entity of the embodied, emotional experience of belonging' rather than 'society'. Further explained:

> 'A process I termed "performative belief" refers to my neo-Durkheimian construct, where belief is not pre-formed but a lived, embodied performance, brought into being through action and where the object of worship is not an entity such as god or "society", but the experience of belonging.'[274]

Regarding identifying with various social and cultural identities,

> 'People who "believe in belonging" claim social and cultural identities to reinforce a belief in belonging to specific groups of people, particularly those with whom they have affective, adherent relations or those whom they recognise as having legitimate authority. When those beliefs are performed they create and sustain social identities, such as American, or English, or Christian.'[275]

'Believing in belonging' can also be distinguished in two orientations, challenging the sacred-secular binary and notions of the 'unchurched'[276]:

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[273] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.
[274] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 194.
[275] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 194.
[276] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203.

1. 'Anthropocentric orientation': 'best describes people who may or may not describe themselves as Christian and may or may not attend church, but believe that human life is social, with meaning, power, and authority located in the social without a divine origin or authority'[277]
2. 'Theocentric orientation': 'People who . . . believe in a God with whom they have an adherent, emotional, reciprocal relationship. Although some theocentric behaviour might appear to be individualistic, closer examination usually shows a more connected sense of belonging.'

In summary, Day argues:

> '[T]hat many "believe in belonging", sometimes choosing religious identifications to complement other social and emotional experiences of "belongings" and sometimes choosing secular identities. Between the sacred and the secular is "belief", acting performatively like a hinge to allow different identities to swing into the foreground or recede. To understand how belief might operate in this manner requires an analytical exercise that moves belief from a narrow propositional or doctrinal meaning to one that embraces emotion, action, and relationships. To "believe" in this sense is to hold dear and close the people, places, and ideas values that give people their orientation to an otherwise chaotic universe.'[278]

Day's work is highly relevant to this research because, as is already evident thus far, the Emerging Church and its participants fit beyond the sacred-secular binary. In this section, I will demonstrate points in my in-depth interviews where my informants have made passionate claims about 'believing in belonging' from an 'anthropocentric orientation' within the Emerging Church. To this end, pointing at the Emerging Church's 'believing in belonging' has a twofold significance: it further affirms Day's neo-Durkheimian approach, and, more importantly to this research, pointing at 'believing in belonging' in the Emerging Church demonstrates its cohesiveness as a community. It demonstrates that the Emerging Church is a location where those who 'believe and belong' go to 'reinforce a belief in belonging'. Despite being beyond the sacred-secular

[277] Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 203.
[278] Abby Day, "Euro-American Ethnic and Natal Christians: Believing in Belonging," in *Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular*, New edition edition (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 61.

binary, it is still a location where individuals organise, bond, as well as find and create community.

In Grace, Jared explicitly explains that above Christ and even above their beloved alternative liturgies, the ultimate purpose of Grace is community:

> '[T]here was a moment where people were reflecting what Grace was about. I think the focus became more thinking, "Well, actually, it's about a community, and supporting that community in what it means to follow Christ, I suppose." So the worship is part of that, but actually it's about that community… Then we recently had a day away where we thought maybe it's not about a community, maybe it's about changing the world. I was trying to say something about this last night, in that for people to flourish, I think being part of a supportive community helps people do what it is that they want to do to change the world. I lead a pioneer training programme and I find being part of Grace very supportive, it sparks my imagination if that's difficult, I've got friends I can chat to about that. So I think the two are related but it think it's a shift of emphasis I suppose.'[279]

Here, Jared explains that very early on, Grace's ultimate focus was community. Recently, this idea has gone under review, but even if they changed their emphasis to 'changing the world', community remains part of a twofold process. Furthermore, participants of Grace also meet on Tuesday nights 'as a family'[280]. The use of 'family' instead of 'friends' or 'community' here is very telling of the close bonds that participants of Grace form. Grace's emphasis on community and 'family' demonstrates the significance of belonging to this group.

In Moot, and using near perfect terminology to the subject at hand, Kate discusses that 'belonging' and mutual acceptance is much more important than 'believing' or a particular theology to its participants:

> '[W]e never discuss theology. In most churches, it's about belief, and then belong. So you believe what everyone believes, and then you find a sense of belonging. In Moot, it's always trying to be accepting. People come with all their different theologies—and this is all God so why should it bother us? People

[279] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[280] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> believe what they want to believe. We're not here to coerce them into what we believe. Just come and be.'[281]

Here, Kate declares the centrality of the experience of belonging and mutual acceptance in Moot. Moot 'believes' not in particular theologies, but 'believes in belonging'.

As for Kate's personal beliefs, recalling the description of her religious identity in the introductory chapter, she says:

> 'I've grown up in a Christian culture, the framework for the quest of my heart is Christianity, but if I had been in any other country, and if was to move to another country, then I probably would adopt their framework… [In surveys,] [s]ometimes, [I would tick 'Christian'], depending on the day. Probably not because there are a lot of things Christians believe that I don't believe. I don't believe in an interventionist God, I disagree with lots of these concepts of heaven and afterlife. I think that's a big distraction from living well now… It's about your culture. My cultural background is in the Christian culture, but that means I hold very loosely to a lot of the teachings, because I would say that they're not helpful… I think religion is a framework. When the framework becomes the dominant, then it's obstructing… I've been thinking about [whether or not I would seek out a spiritual community if I moved to another country], because my partner is from Australia, and if we moved to Australia, I think I wouldn't seek out a church, because I would assume I had very little in common with them. I don't know. I don't know what would be there, and what would be available. I think it's more important to try and live in a compassionate, loving, and accepting way, and try and get over your ego, and try and be generous. I don't know if I'd be more likely to find that in a Zen Buddhist group, or in a Christian group. I want to be where I find it.'

Here, Kate equates Christianity with culture—not theological teachings or concepts. In this, she 'believes in belonging' from an 'anthropocentric orientation'—she believes in a group of people, and not a particular deity or ideas about the beyond.

Aaron describes Moot as 'a contemplative community, small community, and a home to people who, for various reasons, have not found a home in other parts of the church'[282], emphasising the concepts of 'community' and 'home' for those who might

[281] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[282] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

not otherwise have it. Furthermore, he affirms what Kate has said about Moot, about allowing all people to 'come and be':

> 'I think Moot is a haven and I think that's what the church should be. It has got its faults, but it tries to be a haven, a safe space… I mean it's not without fault, but, yeah, I think it [fulfils that] . . . without the need to, you know, you need to sign up and belong to it and subscribe to this or that way of believing. It's, you know, "We welcome you as you are. This is our style of worship. We like to have silence. These are our social things. Come and join in with."'[283]

Here, Aaron repeats Kate's description that Moot accepts all people 'as they are' despite differing beliefs. As implied in the aforementioned quote, Aaron does have his critiques towards Moot and also says,

> 'I think I see the problem with Moot has been, it has two porous definitions of what it is to belong… So there's that aspiration, but because we have this broad spectrum of people – which is absolutely fair enough – don't want necessarily to commit to a Moot rule of life, or they want to belong, but be on the fringes, or want to come in a bit closer, and then out a bit…'[284]

Here, Aaron exposes his frustrations with Moot's inclusivity. Though a criticism, it is still very telling that Moot's 'porous' definitions of what it means to belong makes it something that it holds dearly, perhaps even 'to a fault'.

Similar to Jared with Grace, Joe describes the Earlsfield Collective as a more like a family than just a community:

> '[S]o you know, we are more like family [than just a community]. The best of that is, we are more like family in the sense that we can annoy the hell out of each other, but we love each other, and we'd go to the wall for each other and the place that we're a part of. And there's a strong, strong cohesive nature to who we are, but we're not . . . not in that kind of sickly way, we all have very strong social networks and friendships beyond each other, so we don't do all our socialising together, and we don't do all our life together, that to us just is not [healthy]…'[285]

[283] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[284] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[285] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Here, not only does Joe describe the Earlsfield Collective as a family, but also points out that there are healthy boundaries around their intimacy with one another. Despite these boundaries, there is a 'strong' – with an emphasis on 'strong' – 'cohesive nature to who they are', pointing at a shared identity among the participants. In this, the sense of family, and having an identity in that, demonstrates its importance to the Earlsfield Collective.

For St Luke's, Tomlinson does not go as far as calling the congregation a 'family', but has a very warm and comfortable way of describing the group as 'friends'. For example, when talking about prayer, he said,

> 'We say that there will be prayers for absent friends at midnight Mass, because I think Christmas is a time when people miss people they've lost, so quite a lot of people who I know from taking funerals come to midnight Mass to light a candle for someone.'[286]

Here, Tomlinson uses the term 'friends' for members of the congregation, as opposed to 'members of the congregation' or 'fellow parishioners' as other churches might. He uses it in such a way that it is a very normalised way of referring to members of the community, despite how large the population of the church may be, or how impersonal a participant of the group might feel. To further this conceptualisation of 'friends' at St Luke's, he describes the congregation as a 'very strongly, a community of friends':

> 'I don't think I would use a label because I think we rather don't fit one… But I think I would say that we are, as very strongly, a community of friends. That we are inclusive in the sense that we try to make space for anybody and everybody, and in the present context, quite a bit of that focuses on sexuality. That we are a place that's welcoming to people in the LGBTQI community, and I think that, most of all, it's a place of spiritual and theological openness really. Where there's no prescribed thing that you have to sign up to.'[287]

[286] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[287] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

This emphasis of the members of the congregation as 'friends' shows just how bonds among the participants of St Luke's is considered very important. Furthermore, Tomlinson boasts St Luke's ability to be extremely inclusive, because:

> 'I think that there is a strong core community of people which enables us to have a big fringe edge. I think churches . . . I believe in having woolly borders or no borders, but that the in and out at the edges, you can't tell. And people may come sometimes, but in order to maintain a broad, generous, inclusive community, I think you need a core of people who are committed to keep that show on the road. So I think we're good at that. We've got a good strong core of that.'[288]

He even extends the 'woolly borders or no borders' to anybody and everybody that uses the church building. For example, this is his attitude towards the various groups that use the church building:

> 'This is the way it is. We are a very, very fluid community here, and in the very best sense, you're part of us by virtue of being here. But on the other hand, you're totally self-organising. It's nothing to do with us.'[289]

Here, despite other groups being self-organising, he still considers them part of St Luke's. These 'woolly borders or no borders' demonstrate just how adamant St Luke's is about the importance of the sense of 'belonging' to the wider group. Recalling a portion of a quote I mentioned in the last chapter, Tomlinsons explains: 'So I think Saint Luke's, actually . . . a high percentage of them probably wouldn't go to another church. They just happen to have found this where they feel they belong.'[290] Total belonging, even for those who might not find it elsewhere, is something that happens at St Luke's because of the extent to which they emphasise inclusivity.

Of all my informants, Randy's personal beliefs as well as experience with the Borough Common is the best example of an individual who 'believes in belonging'. First and foremost, recall his 'religion is in my blood' oration in the introductory chapter:

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[288] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[289] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[290] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> '[W]hen people ask me if I'm religious, I'll say, "Religion's in my blood". That's my phrase at the moment. And I'll always say, "My grandfather's a pastor, he's a vicar, he helped out at the Samaritans in the 1950s, he had four children, two of them became pastors, one of them had a son who became a pastor, and there's my mum, and she gave birth to me", so I'll always be like, "So it's in my blood". So religion's in my blood, it's not like, "Do you believe it?" I'm just like, it's not even worth it; it doesn't feel like a worthwhile conversation – "Do you believe or not?" – because I could say, "What do you mean by believe? What does that entail? Am I attached to [the Bible]? Like, I definitely don't believe that the things written down in an old book are somehow historically perfect in a way that nothing else is that's ever been written down. I just don't think there's some sort of magical nature of this work. It's not that I don't think that the different councils that look to deciding what was on and what was out had this sort of magical influence over the whole of history and the universe"… I think the spiritual life is . . . not seeing Christian tradition as a set of ideas that I either agree with or disagree with, but as a kind of family line…'[291]

Here, like Kate from Moot, he is very explicit that his beliefs are one in the same with his familial lineage. Instead of discussing religious topics such as theology, ethics, or the supernatural when prompted to discuss his religious identity, Randy would rather discuss his belonging to a group of people.

When discussing what the Borough Common is to Randy when it was first founded compared to what it is after its major traumatic experience in 2013-2014, it is clear that what gave the Borough Common a sense of community for him were his closest friends:

> 'I think it's hard now because a bunch of people that I love the most are no longer involved, and so I feel a deep sense of sadness about that, but I think of it more like a group now than a community… It was the friendships that I most valued… I miss the fact that a lot of the people that I love, who I know would benefit from some of what the Borough Common is and does but now, they're choosing not to be part of it, that makes me a bit sad… But then I'm also really enjoying the people who are part of it [now], and I'm enjoying those relationships. But those relationships, it's not like those [are] my best friends, and they're not going to become my best friends. It's a different type of relationship… All my closest friends were there. No one gets to replace [name] in my heart, I just have to be sad all the time that he doesn't come near me anymore, but that's part of being an adult I think, is to accommodate those sadnesses, not to replace them. And when you're a child you go, "That person's gone, I need another best friend", but I think as an adult you go, "Oh my actual best friend doesn't live in the same

[291] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> country anymore. He lives in Wales with his wife and almost two children. And his wife also used to live with me, and was one of my best friends, and now I've lost them both…" Well, there's still friends [at the Borough Common]: [name] is a good friend and he goes, [name] and [name] go, they're my good friends, [name], I think she's really cool and she's going through an interesting . . . just lots of nice people I enjoy being around, but I guess it's less [than before]… [T]hey probably don't have the deep future than some [of my other friends]. It was a peculiar moment, because I still hang around with [names the founding members of the Borough Common and their partners]… These are the people I see for brunch every weekend, so I don't have these gaps in my life. That used to be [the] Borough Common [thing], but actually, we're just hanging out with people that I love the most. And when they left the Borough Common, I realised that I was more attached to them than to the Borough Common. Which I think is psychologically healthy, rather than being pathologically attached to an abstract community, which is just an idea… It's good to be attached to people, and I think most religious communities through time have been that healthy "I am part of this religious community because I'm attached to these people", and the idea that you'd be attached to the religious community in the abstract, is a super weird concept.'[292]

Here, though Randy continues to feel a sense of belonging in the Borough Common, he does not feel the same sense of community in it as he once did when his closest friends were regularly attending their gatherings. This demonstrates that the closer one is to the individuals in a group, the more intimate the sense of belonging and social identity is. Towards the end of this explanation, Randy is more explicit about the idea that a religious community is actually more the experience of belonging among individuals in a group of people, rather than a concept beyond experienced relationships. In this, Randy demonstrates Day's conceptualisation of 'believing in belonging' from an 'anthropocentric orientation'.

As one might imagine, being a fellow participant of the Borough Common, Elle's personal beliefs as well as experience with SOUP are very similar to those of Randy's. Firstly, she, like Randy, correlates her Christianity with a lineage of a group of people:

> 'I think in some contexts, some other Christians might not identify me as Christian. They might say I'm not, and therefore, I then wouldn't know what I am. But to me, my Christian heritage is the heritage I draw on in my religious

[292] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> practices, and they direct me in terms of where I get my inspiration. So, like, in terms of a person where I get my inspiration from, or a kind of figure, it would be Jesus… In terms of a concept of God, it changes all the time, but I suppose that has been my background, so that's probably fed a lot into how I see that. I mean, I guess at some point, I just had to resign myself to embracing that I've been brought up in a particular culture, and that just is where I'm always going to feel most comfortable. Therefore, it almost just feels poncey to not identify myself within that somewhere.'[293]

In this, Elle equates her Christianity with her heritage. While she points at certain beliefs such as 'Jesus' and 'God', the overarching belief here is actually heritage. In this, she 'believes in belonging' from an 'anthropocentric orientation'—she believes in a group of people, from which theological ideas emerge.

Secondly, Elle, though discussing it from a different angle than Randy, expresses the value of community in SOUP:

> 'Yeah [SOUP has] similar types of people, that's true… [A positive thing about SOUP] is that closeness, I think, that stronger bond of community-ness, the close friendships that develop from doing [spiritual] practice… It's much more intimate [than the Borough Common]. Then the kind of the rhythm of doing something regular that has something familiar every week. Even though there's a lot of variation in each week, but there's always one thing that's steady, and that's the liturgy that we work into [it]. That just creates a pattern and rhythm in life as well as . . . I guess it just makes it feel more like this kind of haven, like Tuesday nights are just this… A consistent blocked out thing, and a space for reflection and quiet. In a busy week, that's just really valuable.'[294]

Here, Elle expresses an intimacy in SOUP that is not experienced at the Borough Common. She points that it is the element of spiritual practice in SOUP that allows for a 'closeness', a 'stronger bond of community-ness', and 'strong friendships', among those that participate. In this, though centred on spiritual practice, it is the value of community that truly brings a sense of belonging in SOUP.

In this section, I have demonstrated that participants of the Emerging Church are people who 'believe in belonging'. Of my informants, Kate from Moot, Randy from the

[293] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[294] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Borough Common, and Elle from the Borough Common and SOUP, demonstrate this from an 'anthropocentric orientation', in that they associate their Christianity to belonging to a group of people. In their own words, Kate associates it with her culture, Randy associates it with his familial lineage, and Elle associates it with her heritage. In all of the groups, in various different ways, belonging and social identity in the context of inclusivity is held at a high regard. All of this being considered, the Emerging Church demonstrates its cohesiveness as a social location where individuals organise, bond, as well as find and create community, and, according to Day, go to 'reinforce a belief in belonging'.

3 Inclusivity as Community: Group Qualities

In the next two sections, I focus on the aspects of the groups that my informants pointed were its most positive qualities, as well their most positive experiences of being part of their corresponding groups. In this, I intend to continue to demonstrate the elements of the Emerging Church that create belonging and social identity. I turn now to the first of these.

> The following are the aspects of Grace that Jared likes:
>
> 'I like it because it's relational, it's a community, it's very creative, it's very participative. It values men and women involved equally, as much as possible. I think it's a caring environment; people look out for one another. It's quite theological. A lot of people think, because we never have any sermons, because nobody likes them. But I think it's the most theologically articulate community I've been in, not that there are lots of big words or whatever, but people read and are curious and are interested in what's going on. Actually, in terms of when you're involved in a small group and planning a Grace, often people will be reading some things that inform that… [T]hey're curious, thoughtful, reflective.'[295]

Here, Jared names a number of things, but primarily focuses on two: its inclusivity and its being theological. The first of these is expressed with qualities such as: 'relational',

[295] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

'community', 'participative', 'equal', and 'caring'. The second is its more intellectual qualities, which is not apparently obvious at a superficial glance at Grace—it is something that is observable when participating with more intimate engagement with the group. I will examine this more in the next chapter, but for now, it is important because the Emerging Church is well known by participants for its theological engagement—yet is also highly criticised for this quality. As demonstrated throughout this research already, inclusivity in the Emerging Church is also expressed in theological inclusivity, which is what I take this quality of Grace's as being 'theologically articulate, curious, thoughtful, and reflective' to mean.

Jared continues with the qualities he likes about Grace by explaining:

> 'Another thing I like about it is its pretty flat. It's partly because it's small, so it's easier for organisations that are small, but there is not a hierarchical structure to it. We have a model of leadership where two or three people facilitate, make sure that the community is doing what it's meant to do, at least, but we change that every year. Somebody comes off, somebody on, that group. So it's always changing the leadership and I quite like that. It's kind of unusual, I think.'[296]

Here, Jared discusses, as mentioned earlier, that one of Grace's positive qualities is its egalitarian leadership model. Despite having explicit leadership, the leadership team is on an annual rotation, so that everyone who might want to take on the responsibility can have a chance. In this, Grace expresses a form of organisational inclusivity. All of this being considered, the qualities Jared most likes about Grace is its social inclusivity, theological inclusivity, and organisational inclusivity. These are the aspects of Grace that Jared experiences as bringing belonging and community to the group.

Kate discusses that her favourite thing about Moot is Host Café:

> '[Host Café] is cool in that it blows sacred-secular divides. So this is a holy place, everybody should come in and enjoy it, people should come in… And high quality coffee… [T]he fact that it's a café, but you can come in and bring people from outside, and just sit, it's again holding this space, but that's what

[296] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> moves it quite well, just holding the space. Nothing is asked of you, you don't have to do anything or be anything. Basically, you haven't got to conform… Just sit down and do these things, hopefully, the idea, the best part of Moot is a very gentle holding of the space…'[297]

Here, Kate reveals that the reason Host Café is so important to her is because of its ability to be inclusive of all people into a sacred space, despite their religious affiliation. She continues on, explaining the distinction between 'Mooters' and 'weekday Mooters':

> '[W]e haven't been very good about blending the two communities… People that come in from the café and who use the space, a lot of people come in and just sit in the church, or they come to meditation on a Wednesday lunchtime, or a Serum in the evening, and sometimes they cross over, but largely it's different people that come on a Sunday evening… [S]o [there are] Mooters, who are people who come on a Sunday. And then weekday Mooters—they would never see themselves as part of the community. We see them as part of the community but they don't see themselves that way… Somebody said, and I think it's true, that Mooters are by nature fringe-dwellers. They don't like to get involved or committed because they've had [a] bad experience of church maybe, or with authority, or they don't want to get sucked in… [T]hey don't even get involved in [the] church thing, they want to come along and then go home… Maybe they do it because they're fearful of getting sucked in. It's a fear motivation, rather than an apathy.'[298]

Here, Kate reveals the extent of Moot's inclusivity. Those who may not even know that they are participating in a community – let alone desire it – are considered by the community as being part of the community. Kate's favourite thing about Moot is its inclusivity, expressed in its wide reaches of what is considered part of the community.

As for Aaron, he names a number of his favourite things about Moot:

> 'Well, in no particular order I think this church is fantastic. Both as a building, and as a space, and as a café, and as a holy space, I think it works. Somehow it works. It's got something. So I love the space. I love the community. I think it's been great to be part of something that has had a really tough recent history. It's been hard, and it's small, it's very small, very vulnerable, but I know where Moot is coming from, where people are coming from. And things in terms of worship and liturgical styles, there's things I can contribute, and you'd have to

[297] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[298] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> bring people forward, or move people along. I like our Taizé worship. I like our Eucharist…'[299]

In short, he likes Moot's church building and space, the community, as well as aspects of its liturgy. The first of these is similar to what Kate explained—in addition to the actual building itself, he likes that it can hold a space that is both 'holy' and not. The second of these is its community. While he does not go in detail about the 'really tough recent history', considering what has been revealed about that at this point, it is clear that despite it, he likes its best intentions. Lastly, he points that he likes Moot's existing liturgy, but also the fact that he can contribute something to it—pointing at liturgical inclusivity. These three things considered, Aaron's favourite thing about Moot is its community through inclusivity.

For Joe, he explains that the most positive qualities about the Earlsfield Collective are:

> 'I think there is a "yes we can" attitude, I think there is an extra mile attitude, I think there is a "go into all the world" attitude, I think there's a hospitality charism that lies in the heart of that in its broadest deepest sense, and we love [the idea of] three cycles moving from hostility to hospitality. So I think that's also right in the heart of it, and there's a sort of prophetic charism in that, as well possibility… But I think also we've learned, and are learning, we are inherently a bunch of ragamuffins, and we feel much at home, much more at home as pirates on the open sea. And some of us come from occupied backgrounds, but we have learned to be cute and shrewd and clever about how we relate to institutions. And we've learned that you need that positive tension and steer and interaction in a microcosm. That's really what we're doing with the local parish, and to say, we both matter. And both postures are important…'[300]

Here, Joe points at a number of positive 'attitudes', but at the 'heart' of these, he explains that they are all in the name of hospitality. He reveals that participants of the Earlsfield Collective are comparable to 'ragamuffins' and 'pirates' – pointing at their countercultural ideals – but have since reconciled the more extreme aspects of these

[299] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[300] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

tendencies in the name of mutual coexistence with the aspects of culture that they are critical of. That being said, Joe reveals a community that is hospitable and inclusive to those outside of the Earlsfield Collective.

Tomlinson names one primary positive quality about St Luke's:

> 'I think it's . . . I don't think anyone could or should claim that they're totally inclusive, but I think we inspire to be inclusive on all sorts of levels, and I think we're quite good at that, though with plenty to learn and do. I think that we're a place that people can bring non-Christian, non-religious friends, with total confidence that there will not be any embarrassing, cringe moments. I think that's a positive about it.'[301]

Here, Tomlinson explicitly points that inclusivity is St Luke's best quality. In this, he recognises that there are things about Christianity that are 'embarrassing' and 'cringe' – presumably aspects of Christianity that are exclusive – and boasts St Luke's ability to overcome these. To Tomlinson, the congregation of St Luke's has built its community through the value of inclusivity.

Randy explains that the positive qualities of Borough Common are:

> 'Lack of spiritual coercion, nice people who are kind of interesting people, people with alternative minds, we're a cohort of liberally minded people with ethical dimensions, just people that I really love(d).'[302]

There are three main elements to Randy's description: 'lack of spiritual coercion', the type of people that the Borough Common are, and his relationship to them. The first of these reveals the value of spiritual inclusivity. Here, Randy reveals his value of allowing all participants to express whatever form of spirituality they wish to express. The second of these reveals that participants of the Borough Common are, like at Grace, intellectually engaged, and, like at the Earlsfield Community, people who are countercultural. Lastly, Randy highlights that despite all of this, what he values most is

[301] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[302] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

truly his 'love' for the people at the Borough Common. In this, the Borough Common, like at St Luke's, has built its community through the value of inclusivity.

As for Elle, while 'there might be some overlap'[303], she has a separate list for the Borough Common and SOUP:

> 'So Borough Common, positive attributes is: gives a space and a voice to people who are disillusioned in the church in some way, but not ready to give up on their faith entirely. So it provides a space for those people who would otherwise probably just leave any kind of church or community altogether. So that's really important I think. Another strength is that in a city like London, it provides you with an incredibly wide network of people just almost immediately that you can access, that you can talk to, that you can raise awareness among, that you can get to know and do social stuff with. That's really great. I mean, when I first moved here, and didn't know many people, I found that just engaging with that network gave me so many new contacts and friends, it was great.' [304]

Here, Elle describes two main 'strengths' of the Borough Common: its being a 'space and a voice to people who are disillusioned in the church in some way, but not ready to give up on their faith entirely', and her relationship to its participants. The first of these reiterates the common theme of the Emerging Church being a place for people who have been hurt or traumatised by established Christianity, and providing a place for this. Presumably, considering what has been revealed about the Borough Common and Emerging Church in this research thus far, this is because of its value of inclusivity. The second 'strength' of the Borough Common is its wide network. Elle was able to immediately make many friends and find a community through the Borough Common when she was new to London, and found this to be a positive quality. These things considered, the Borough Common's inclusivity is what has created its being such a strong community.

As for SOUP, as mentioned in the last section, Elle points that one of its most positive qualities:

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[303] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[304] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> '[I]s that closeness, I think, that stronger bond of community-ness, the close friendships that develop from doing [spiritual] practice… It's much more intimate [than the Borough Common]. Then the kind of the rhythm of doing something regular that has something familiar every week. Even though there's a lot of variation in each week, but there's always one thing that's steady, and that's the liturgy that we work into [it]. That just creates a pattern and rhythm in life as well as . . . I guess it just makes it feel more like this kind of haven, like Tuesday nights are just this… A consistent blocked out thing, and a space for reflection and quiet. In a busy week, that's just really valuable.'[305]

Here, Elle reveals that what she likes most about SOUP is its intimacy through spiritual practice. While the Borough Common is also spiritually inclusive, it appears that SOUP brings this value even further, and creates a community through it. Furthermore, Elle adds that:

> 'I like the simplicity of it. I like the fact that we always have soup, bread, and cheese. Although we do have some people who like to throw in lots of other things as well every now and again… I love the simplicity of a simple meal and a set liturgy, and then the variation and spontaneity. You know, the space to allow the people in the group to also form the night and shape it, and to be able to be a bit spontaneous, and just go with it. So I like the combination of those two things, I think there's a nice balance.'[306]

Here, Elle delves a bit deeper on SOUP's spiritual practice. She points that she likes the 'combination' of both a set liturgy as well as spontaneity. The first of these – something set – is something that that the Borough Common does not have, while the 'spontaneity' is what allows space to include other expressions of spirituality. Elle also points at 'simplicity'. In this, she is emphasising the difference between the Borough Common and SOUP: at the Borough Common, every gathering is unpredictable and different, while at SOUP, while there is room for variation, it has a set pattern in which if follows that has not changed since its founding. Despite the differences between the Borough Common and SOUP, however, it is evident that the belonging is created though an inclusive liturgy.

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[305] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[306] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

In this section, I have demonstrated that in describing the positive qualities of each group, my informants repeat the two common themes of various types of inclusivity and community, and how they relate.

4 Inclusivity as Community: Individual Experiences

Turning now to the individual experiences of my informants, this section describes significant events and activities that each group has engaged in. With these experiences, I intend to further point at the value of inclusivity as the key to the Emerging Church's sense of belonging and social identity.

For Jared, at first, he started listing a number of things that Grace has done over the years:

> 'We've done some things over the years in terms of Grace events that I think have been a buzz, I suppose. We've led the communion at [the] Greenbelt festival twice, which is about 20,000 people… [We] recorded an album to do that. We've published a couple of books of our liturgies… Dean and I did one, and then I can't remember who did the other one, me and Steve, maybe, but I can send you those. Actually, last night, that diagram of seeding other things, one of the things I like about Grace is that we have published, whether on blogs or websites, articles, we have sparked a lot of other people's imagination by pushing out our ideas. So that image of seeding, I think we've seeded a lot of other things. You can't necessarily measure it, but I like that about Grace, it feels like a very rich environment for ideas that are given away to other people. So yes, some events that we've done have been good, and we've done things in surprising places, cathedrals and all sorts, festivals and so on. I like some of the slightly crazy creative things that we've done over the years, they've been fun, it's a very creative group.'[307]

Here, Jared discusses how he is very proud of Grace's ability to get their ideas, particularly their services, to a wide audience. However, he paused, and corrected himself:

> '[A]ctually, I think the thing I like the most, maybe, there was a woman who prayed the first prayer last night, [name], I don't know if you spoke to her, she's got a tattoo of a phoenix on her arm… She arrived in Ealing maybe 10 years ago, depressed, really struggling in life, and in fact, lived in that flat up there. She just turned up at Grace one time, with her dog, and we got to know her. And,

[307] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> actually, we shared an allotment with her, and still do… [S]he's become part of the community, been completely changed. She's become the kinship carer for her grandson, because his mum had various mental health issues, and was not able to look after her son. He was in foster care. So we've supported her in that. She comes around every Tuesday night to our house. It's actually why we started doing a Tuesday night thing… [W]e invite some other people around. That's one of my favourite things. Just that she's really changed as a person. She's a wonderful person, and I feel I've learned as much from her, I think, as we've given to her. But it's been a really good friendship.'[308]

By pointing at this particular event, he revealed that what he values most about Grace is not 'pushing out their ideas' after all, but their ability to welcome even social outcasts. This is also reminiscent of Joe's example of the woman that the Earlsfield Collective financially supported for a year. Until this point, most of the examples about Grace thus far have focussed more on their services and their relationship to established Christianity. In this example of Jared's favourite experience at Grace, however, he reveals, like the other groups, their value of social inclusivity as well.

When prompted to speak about what Moot does best, Kate responded, 'I think we're quite good at holding space and being somewhere that doesn't require . . . I think it's just a space without expectations'[309]. In context, Kate explained that 'holding space without expectations' meant that all ideas – whether explicitly Christian, questioning or challenging Christianity, or anything else – is always received with grace and acceptance. This response was short and sweet, but still very much to the point about valuing theological inclusivity, and this being the central aspect of what makes Moot a community.

As for Aaron, he responded in a very similar way. Recalling what was mentioned earlier:

> 'Moot is a haven and I think that's what the church should be. It has got its faults, but it tries to be a haven, a safe space… I mean it's not without fault, but,

[308] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[309] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> yeah, I think it [fulfils that] . . . without the need to, you know, you need to sign up and belong to it and subscribe to this or that way of believing. It's, you know, "We welcome you as you are. This is our style of worship. We like to have silence. These are our social things. Come and join in with."'[310]

Here, Aaron declares that Moot's social as well as theological inclusivity is something that all of Christianity should imitate. In this, he affirms its value of inclusivity as the central aspect of its creation of belonging.

Joe, like Jared, responded that his favourite aspect about the Earlsfield Collective is a particular kind of event that they do: their interactive art installations. However, in his description of these installations, it is clear that they are not mere installations, but express a deeper part of what they are about:

> 'Our installations are pretty good, we do three a year through the high seasons and they are pretty mental… I like them because one of the things we reach for, I think there's a strong sacramental ontology to who we are. And that sacrament as averse to say symbol, has a participatory interface to it, so there is that for us, anyway, that it's not just a sign, it's the participation of something more. And therefore, when you're being sacramental, with these installations, and this huge body of people turn up to participate in that with you, I guess you have these sacred moments, or thin places that happen, where the wonder and the magic and the beauty of God in the kind of here and now, take place that… There is no prior knowledge [required of the sacraments to participate in the installations]. In fact, many times that we've done it, we're really only animating what's already there, but is, people come. I had a woman come up to me, we curated an installation in the field once, and we called it "Something of Wonder". And this woman, you would come into the field in darkness, and there was this candlelit pathway all the way into this place where we'd erected this whole installation with a fire pit and food, and where each person sat, was a nametag with their name. And then on the back, we'd written something to them, and this woman came with her husband, and she just started crying as soon as she arrived. She said to me later, "I didn't want to come here tonight, I really came to support my husband, and I cannot find the words to tell you that, when I walked into this space, the only word I can say to you is that it was magical". And often, we hear that, it was magical, because essentially, there's an encounter. And even the weeping, I think, was a kind of encounter with the love that will not let us go… She just doesn't know how to say it… So they are really wonderfully rewarding moments. They're very moving. They're very holy…'[311]

[310] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[311] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Here, Joe describes that the Earlsfield Collective creates these public interactive art installations for the entire Earlsfield community – not just members of their New Monastic Community – to engage others with spirituality in such a way that is accessible and engaging to people of all backgrounds. In the specific encounter with a woman at the 'Something of Wonder' installation, Joe points at a tangible example of somebody engaging with spirituality, despite not necessarily having the words to describe her experience.

He goes on by giving another example with another installation:

> 'We had one beautiful moment in the "Rooted" installation, where we'd created a pathway of soil right down the aisle of the church up to the altar. And it was the one stage station in the whole thing, that when everybody got it to, because you were invited to take off your feet and walk through the soil as a means of understanding what it means to be rooted and grounded in the kind of holy presence of the soil beneath our feet. And, really, there was a backlog of people who just were buffing up to each other, and wouldn't take their shoes off. It was a really interesting kind of cultural dynamic, of what was uncomfortable for people. And then, this blind guy rocked up, and of course, he can't see it. And so, for him, this is his most favourite moment, because he can touch it and feel it, and so his wife took off his socks for him, and he walked through this soil to this thing that you could do at the end. And the smile on his face just literally, everybody was watching him mesmerised. And a friend turned to me in that moment and said, "It takes a blind man to show us how to see".'[312]

Here, Joe points at something completely different. He points at how a blind man was able to engage others in the 'Rooted' installation in a way that nobody else could—because he was blind. The installation appeared to be 'flawed' at first, considering the lack of full engagement people gave to it. However, what Joe thought was beautiful about it was it was somebody with a disability – someone that is usually an outcast – that was able to fully engage, as well as engage others, with the installation. In this, as well as the example of the woman at the 'Something of Wonder' installation, Joe highlights the kind of wide engagement the Earlsfield Collective has with the neighbourhood. They

[312] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

create interactive art installations that are spiritually inclusive, in order to engage as many people as possible, and create community as widely as possible.

Tomlinson's favourite thing about St Luke's is something rather ordinary:

> 'I think that our regular Sunday morning, I'm proud of. I think that people . . . it's good to feel confident about a place and say . . . and we are a funny blend. Some people come along and say, "Oh, it's a bit more traditional than we thought it was." Other people come and say, "Wow, this is really different." So, you kind of walk a pathway there, but . . . so I do feel proud of that. I think that Vox Holloway, I feel very proud of—the choral community choir, I think is brilliant. I'm very proud of our young people—we've got a great bunch of young people. And I'm proud of the fact that we've got teenagers who, some of them right now are going to be going off to uni, and very proud of the fact that they don't seem to wander away [from church]. They want to be here, they love it, and that's good. I think that the . . . one of the things I said when I took on St Luke's, when I gave my first vision to the church here, I said that I wanted St Luke's to be an effective corner shop church. I don't know what that means to you, but you know, the corner shop is the little shop that basically does a great job of giving you everything you really need, and in a way, I think that's what a Church of England church is. It's sort of . . . I wanted us to be good at doing the basics, well, for the community, and I think that means that what we in the church call "occasional offices", of weddings, baptisms, and funerals, I feel very proud of the way we do those. Lots of people who are regulars on a Sunday morning have come through that, couples I've married or people where I've taken a funeral. And, so yeah, I think we're quite good at being a basic parish church. And it's nice talking to people. I have on more than one occasion, several occasions really, local people have said something to the effect of me, and this exactly, "It's rumoured that good things happen in your church." So, you think, "That's good. That's good."'[313]

While a Sunday service is an 'ordinary' occurrence at any church, what is extraordinary about St Luke's is that it attracts great numbers while also being an Emerging Church. Something I will discuss further in the next chapter is the numbers of the Emerging Church—for something that is widely recognised in Christianity, Emerging Church groups are usually very low in attendance. Furthermore, in the context of everything else that Tomlinson has said thus far, what I take him to mean by his boasting of St Luke's being an effective 'corner shop church' is its ability to cater to all aspects of life to all people. St Luke's is able to cater to the entire parish community, which is not just

[313] David Tomlinson, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

unusual to Emerging Church groups, but also to most parish churches in England. Tomlinson is most proud of St Luke's ability to create community with its value of being inclusive.

Randy, like Jared about Grace, gave an initial answer, then remembered one specific example. The first, like Jared, was a list of events:

> 'Doing [Robes], the homeless project . . . doing the old people's tea party, having done that for six years, being deeply connected to that project, having seen isolated older people every six months for the last six years, having seen the same isolated older people and knowing that their eyes light up when they see us, that they really enjoy our things and that we bring an energy that they don't have available to them very easily. Because most of the volunteers are women, older, and the Borough Common is younger, kind of big mix of genders, and with a different kind of energy. And knowing there's a lot of those old people love that energy and don't get to experience it much… So I think those are the clearest ones, and then loads of little ones, more other ones in the past...'[314]

Here, Randy described two volunteer projects: the Robes Project Sleep Out, and the Contact the Elderly Tea Party. Recalling all of the things that the Borough Common does, mentioned in the last chapter, pointing at the two volunteer projects demonstrates a value in being socially engaged. However, of all the types of things that the Borough Common can get involved in, both of these projects cater to people who are socially isolated, pointing at a value in inclusivity.

The second answer that Randy gave about his favourite experiences at the Borough Common was regarding their services, naming one particular farewell service for two participants:

> 'I love the services, John and Lisa's leaving do… It was so good, and it was the best of the Borough Common, because it was, like, weird. We sang "Atlantic City" by Bruce Springsteen, [singing:] "Because there within dies, baby that's a fact…" And we just sung the chorus five times. We wrote it up, and John Bidgood was playing his [guitar]. It was beautiful because what I loved about it was, we really embraced the sadness of them going. It was a beautiful ritual in the poor sense—it wasn't like "Your lives are going to good!" It was like, "We don't like it that you're going, and it's good, and we accept it, but we don't like

[314] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

> it. And you don't like it that you're going, and you also are deeply inspired by the possibilities." So, I felt it did a really good job of being a proper ritual, because I think it's possible. When you extract, I think . . . 2,000-year-old religions tend to be really good at rituals, and most contemporary rituals tend to be really shallow, and so that was a ritual that had seven years of depth in it, and it felt really good… All the emotions… All the emotions altogether, and it was weird as well, which I think is important and symbolic. And there was an object, and there was candles, and we cut the candles with knives to symbolise their marks that they left on us. It was beautiful. That's a great example.'[315]

A few things are revealed in Randy's naming of this particular service. Firstly, that Borough Common services are actually very special—they are 'weird' and unconventional, and that is what is special about them. Secondly, like Grace, the Borough Common also values liturgical inclusivity. Thirdly, the relationships at Borough Common are very highly valued. This could very well have been an example in the first section of this chapter, for 'believing in belonging'—here, the Borough Common went as far as enacting a ritual not around a deity, but around their friendships. This example of a noteworthy event at the Borough Common is a great example of the value of liturgical inclusivity, and creating community through it.

Further emphasising just how important friendships are at the Borough Common, Elle shared, 'I've enjoyed some of the away trips that they did when we went away, that was really nice.'[316] She enjoyed simply spending quality time with the community, and building upon that, more than anything else. She continued on by explaining the most noteworthy event at SOUP:

> 'I enjoyed the fire pit stuff, I need to get the fire pit out again soon. I enjoyed when we just kind of had a social barbecue, and then opened it up to lots of people, and just all invited our friends, and we all just got together and had a summer barbecue… [W]e just opened it up and just had a Tuesday night barbecue, basically, where we kind of hosted. It was really nice… [B]ut we didn't do a service-y thing… [I]t was just a social on a Tuesday…'[317]

[315] Randy, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[316] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[317] Elle, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

Similar to her answer regarding the Borough Common, Elle points at the purely social events that SOUP hosts. What is interesting about this revelation, however, is that despite how spiritually-focussed SOUP is, especially compared to the Borough Common, Elle's favourite events of SOUP are the gatherings that do not include any spiritual elements in them at all. This reveals that alongside valuing inclusivity, it is the friendships and the sense of belonging that creates social identity.

In this section, I have demonstrated in describing individuals' favourite events and activities with their corresponding groups, that the value of inclusivity is what creates belonging and social identity.

5 Conclusion: 'Believing in Belonging' through Inclusivity

According to Day, belief and social identity are not necessarily restricted to established religious traditions. While I have not yet explicitly addressed the topic of the sacred-secular binary with respect to the Emerging Church, or answered my initial research questions of the Emerging Church's being more Christian or Self-religion, it has certainly revealed cohesiveness as a religious community. Through its experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma, it is revealed that its most 'sacred' value is inclusivity. Through its more conscious, positive experiences within the groups, it is revealed that this value of inclusivity is central to the creation of belonging and social identity.

The Emerging Church has demonstrated to be a location where individuals go to 'reinforce a belief in belonging'. Grace emphasises the term 'family' over any other term for the group, revealing its intimate sense of social cohesion. Moot expresses a deep commitment to mutual acceptance, and maintains 'porous' definitions of belonging. St Luke's offers belonging for those who may not want or have it anywhere else. The Borough Common provides profound friendships that exceeds what a religious deity might offer. SOUP allows for a 'closeness', a 'stronger bond of community-ness', and

'strong friendships' in its focus on spiritual practice. Kate, Randy, and Elle, all display 'believing in belonging' from an 'anthropocentric orientation'. Kate and Elle expresses this independently from their groups, while Randy expresses inseparability between his beliefs and relationships. Nevertheless, in all of these explanations, the Emerging Church has demonstrated to be an intimate space for 'believing in belonging'.

Focussing on the positive qualities of the groups, the Emerging Church demonstrates that the value of inclusivity is central to its experience of community and social identity. For Grace, its social inclusivity, theological inclusivity, and organisational inclusivity all build a sense of belonging. For Moot, its social inclusivity, theological inclusivity, and liturgical inclusivity are highlighted as what creates its social identity. For the Earlsfield Collective, the term 'hospitality' is used to demonstrate a shared value between those in the group, interpreted collectively in a way that integrates them with the rest of society. For St Luke's, inclusivity in general is the very concept that it has built its community and social identity on. For the Borough Common, spiritual inclusivity and theological inclusivity are the keys to the community and its social identity. For SOUP, spiritual inclusivity and liturgical inclusivity is what brings the sense of belonging to the group. In pointing at each group's most positive qualities, the Emerging Church presents itself to be a place for belonging through inclusivity.

Focussing on the positive experiences of individuals in the groups, the Emerging Church further demonstrates that the value of inclusivity is central to its experience of community and social identity. For Jared, he points at a heartening example of social inclusivity as what makes him proud to be part of Grace. For Kate, the simple presence of Moot being an accepting space makes it a place she continues to identify with. For Aaron, Moot's social inclusivity and theological inclusivity makes it an admirable group for Christianity in general. For Joe, the Earlsfield Collective's spiritually inclusive

interactive art installations makes it a place that can boast is helping make the world a better place. For Tomlinson, St Luke's inclusivity makes it the ideal of what a parish church should be. For Randy, his examples of social inclusivity and liturgical inclusivity make the Borough Common an intimate community with a positive social identity. For Elle, its social inclusivity over its spiritual or liturgical inclusivity provides a sense of community and a positive social identity for SOUP. In all of these examples, the Emerging Church continues to affirm the value of inclusivity, in various different forms, as the principal value in the creation of community and social identity.

By pointing that the Emerging Church is a location where individuals go to 'reinforce a belief in belonging' through the value of inclusivity, I have demonstrated that it also has a cohesive social identity. Furthermore, by revealing both the 'peaks and valleys' of the Emerging Church, considering inclusivity as its most 'sacred' value that creates belonging and social identity, I have demonstrated that it is as a social location for sacralising inclusivity.

VI The Boundaries of Inclusivity

1 Introduction: The 'Sacred and Profane' in the Emerging Church

In the first of the three ethnographic chapters of this research, I shed light on the Emerging Church's most 'sacred' value: inclusivity. In the second of the three, I demonstrated that this value is what creates belonging and social identity for its participants. In this last of three ethnographic chapters, I aim to point at the boundaries of the Emerging Church's conceptualisation of 'inclusivity'.

Though I have not yet explicitly pointed at these boundaries, there have already been many instances where they are fairly obvious. For example, at Grace, one might argue that the group is not inclusive of a traditional Church of England service. At Moot, Aaron admitted that for some participants, '"church" is a dirty word'[318]. At the Borough Common, as Elle's personal experience reveals, certain words, such as 'Jesus', and certain actions, such as prayer, might not be welcome. For the Emerging Church, though 'inclusivity' is held as a sacred, there are certainly ideas and behaviours that are 'excluded'. In practice, the Emerging Church's form of 'inclusivity' has its limits.

Recalling Durkheim's definition of religion, he notes that 'sacred things' are 'set apart and surrounded by prohibitions'[319]; wherever there is something held 'sacred', there are also things that are held 'profane'. In this chapter, I will recall at least one gathering for each of my ethnography groups. In them, continuing to follow Lynch and Dudley's method for observation, I sought for moments of conflict and tension—paying attention to the 'sacred' and 'profane' that is revealed in them. In most instances, there were no particular moments of conflict or tension, though they were still able to reveal particular shared assumptions within the group. In the instances of even potential

[318] Aaron, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[319] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 46.

conflict and tension, however, they revealed a few noteworthy things about the group: (1) they further affirmed the value of 'inclusivity', (2) they shed light on how this value of inclusivity is collectively understood, and shed light on the boundaries of 'inclusivity', and (3) presented a process in which this particular form of inclusivity is sustained and socialised among participants.

The last of these brings this research back to the overarching question regarding Self-religion: in the process of sustaining and socialising the value of inclusivity, individuals are prompted – either by others in the group or on their own volition – to use self-authorising language. Like Self-religion, the Emerging Church is commonly understood as doctrinally diffuse, but is actually doctrinally coherent. Also like Self-religion, the 'ethic of self-spirituality' is socialised among participants. Furthermore, like Self-religion, the Emerging Church is commonly understood as having self-authority, when in fact, self-authority is only perceived among multiple nonformative authorities. By observing the gatherings of my ethnography groups, I can argue that the Emerging Church certainly encompasses key elements of Self-religion, as well as demonstrate that it is because of the value of a specific form of inclusivity that self-authorising language is necessary.

2 The Boundaries of Inclusivity

Starting with Grace, the group's primary gathering is a monthly 'alternative worship service', which is a gathering that lasts about two hours in total. These 'services' vary greatly every month, and are planned, facilitated, and led by a number of different people each time. The following service is one called 'Seeds'.

I arrived quietly at around 19:45 for a 20:00 start, with nobody coming to me to greet or welcome me, inside a church building consisting of about five people, prepared extravagantly. There is a huge projector screen covering the altar area, with images

projected upon it. Just in front of the screen, there are pews set up in a circle, surrounding a grand centrepiece consisting of autumnal objects – cornucopias, leaves of all shades, bunches of wheat, fruits and vegetables, and bouquets of flowers – with various seeds sprinkled on the floor alongside index cards with Bible verses written on them. Come 20:00, the number of people rose to around 15 people, two-thirds being women, one-third being men, and the vast majority being middle-aged, with the exception of a handful of children. There were no visible signs of individuals with greater authority in terms of dress – eg, nobody in minister's robes or uniform – only those who presumably set up the church and prepared for the 'service'. The 'service' began promptly with a prayer and some prompts for reflection, projected on the screen, with some focussing on one's personal life, and others focussing on 'Christ'. Each of these prayers and prompts were led by various individuals, again, with no clear sign of any one particular authority. Next, there was a period for private contemplation, where ambient music was played in the background while everyone sat in silence. Next, one individual gave a brief lecture on the topic of 'seeds', which consisted of mostly the science behind seeds and how they are a metaphor for life in general, and with no reference to theology, Christianity, or religion whatsoever. From there, the rest of the 'service' appeared to be more conventional elements of a Christian service, except with vast variations. The lecture was followed by what is presumably 'Prayers of Intercession'—it was a call-and-response, projected on the screen, with the call being particular prepared prayers led by an individual, with a response being 'Gardener God, have mercy on us', said by the rest of the participants. Next, there were four paragraphs projected on the screen, which were reminiscent of the 'Apostles' Creed', that the entire group recited together. This was followed by a 'Peace', which resembled the 'Sign of Peace' that would be observed at a more traditional Christian service. Next, there was

'Communion', which was prayed and administered collectively, continuing the pattern of having no clear individual authorities. After Communion, the seeds and Bible verses in the centrepiece were addressed. Participants were prompted to walk around and read the index cards containing the Bible verses, then either ask to be prayed upon by one of two designated individuals, or pick up a seed to keep as symbolic of one's personal prayer. Lastly, participants were invited to proceed to a separate area of the church after this last prayer for 'Café', which is essentially an informal period of socialising over a small meal.

In this 'service' as well as in the social period, there were no particular instances of conflict or tension. While the value of inclusivity was not particularly obvious, what was obvious was the care it took to plan, facilitate, and lead this service. Not only did it include a number of people to do it, but one could imagine the amount of time and effort it took to conceive of every detail of the 'service': the objects, the prayers, the variations to a traditional Christian service, among countless other details. Observing the details of this 'service' makes its being a monthly event – as opposed to, perhaps, a weekly one – almost a practicality. Another obvious aspect of the 'service' was its lack of any single authority. While it certainly pointed on some traditional authorities, such as Christ, the Bible, and elements traditional services, Grace took great care in dividing ministerial roles among a number of people.

An interesting aspect of the 'service' was the contrast between the lack of theological material in the lecture – which was, presumably, in place of a sermon or homily – compared to the rest of the 'service', which had more explicit theological themes, such as 'Christ', 'Communion', 'God', and 'prayer'. This lecture could be taken out of context and be given to any audience – religious and nonreligious – whereas the rest of the service, though unique, uses very explicitly Christian terms, gestures, patterns,

and symbols. This reveals that Grace understands the 'sermon' or 'homily' to be a teaching for life in general, not a teaching that necessarily has to come from a religious authority of any form. This also reveals that in the more explicitly Christian aspects of the 'service', individuals are left to interpret and understand everything on their own terms. There was lots of space for personal reflection, contemplation, and prayer, and in the spaces where an authority could potentially impose their ideas on others, such as this lecture or even the last prayer where participants were invited to be prayed upon, there was still lots of room to interpret things in a non-religious way or even opt out.

Most people stayed through the entire period of socialising, pointing at this aspect of the gathering as just as significant to Grace as the more formal 'service'. Here, I engaged in conversation with a number of people, and got a sense that the participants of Grace were an established group of people. While they were indeed very friendly and welcoming, I was well aware that I was the only 'new' person there—there were a lot of 'in' conversations happening that was very easy to get lost in if not part of the established group. Considering this, as well as Jared's story of including a social outcast in the group, I gathered that Grace's community life is much more than just the monthly service.

At Grace, in this particular 'alternative worship service', 'inclusivity' seems to be most emphasised in its variations to more traditional Christianity. It is 'inclusive' in that it disseminates ministerial authority among a number of people. It is 'inclusive' in that it is free to make creative variations to a traditional Christian service. It is also 'inclusive' in that individuals are not 'preached to' according to any particular religious authority.

The majority of the participants of Grace all appear to have a Christian background, albeit one with an enthusiasm for creatively interpreting Christian theology. While Grace might be open to all people, it would be a more natural space for those who

have a Christian background, but enjoy variations in its liturgy. It would be a more natural space for individuals who do not have a strong position in traditional Christian doctrine or practice, but enjoy a more personal interpretation of Christianity. Demographically, Grace appears to be exceedingly restricted to those who might belong to 'Generation X'—of those who were not middle-aged, they were the children of those that are, with no other age group represented.

Multiple authorities at Grace are present, although individual interpretation is emphasised in a number of ways. First and foremost, Grace maintains an official relationship with the Church of England, making the Church a significant authority. Despite not having any visible ministers, the structure of the service suggests a minimum liturgical form that the Church may have power over. Ministerial authority is disseminated, and any one authority is indiscernible. Note that the ratio between the 'leaders' versus the rest of the participants was about 1:3—this wide distribution further blurred the boundaries between 'leaders' and the rest of the participants. There is certainly authority given to traditional Christian authorities such as Christ, God, and the Bible, but there is simultaneously authority given to the individual in the presence open spaces for interpretation. There are also many options to engage in certain portions of the 'service' in as much or as little as an individual may desire. Considering how intimate the group appears to be with one another, it can be discerned that its more social gatherings outside of their formal monthly 'service' holds a special place in the group—particularly the weekly Tuesday night gatherings mentioned in the last chapter. Presumably, this would allow for more exchanges in personal positions and opinions, even more so than a formal 'service', because of its informal setting. They would also allow for those who are not necessarily Christian to participate more freely in Grace – as with the example of the once-outcast who is now a part of the community – because it is

outside of the formality of a church building and a 'service'. All of this being said, the value of Grace's version of 'inclusivity', which is centred on a broad and open interpretation of Christianity, is also sustained and socialised in the practice of individual reflection, contemplation, and prayer within its gatherings.

With Moot, the group's primary gathering is a Sunday evening 'service', which is a gathering that lasts about two hours in total. In the *Moot: Parish Profile*, it says:

> 'The main service of the week, which most people try to make, is the evening service on Sunday. We meet at 6pm at St Mary Aldermary for tea, followed by a service at 6.30pm. These rotate through compline [on the first Sunday of the month], contemplative [on the second Sunday of the month], Eucharist [on the third Sunday of the month], and Taizé services [on the fourth Sunday of the month], with a Service of the Word on the fifth week of the month if there is one (for more detail on Sunday services see Appendix D). Our liturgy has developed over a number of years to reflect who we are and how we think. With the exception of the Eucharist and the Service of the Word, the services are planned and run by members of the community. After the service, there is usually a group who go to the pub for a drink; once a month we follow the service with "Pews not Pubs", where Mooters bring and share food and drink in the church.'[320]

On one particular third Sunday of the month, the Eucharist 'service', participants begin to gather informally at around 18:00 at the back of the church building, at Host Café. There, people socialised over tea and snacks, making small talk and catching up on each other's lives, with little to no reference to the event about to take place, nor any references to religion in general. At around 18:20, participants begin to walk towards the front of the church, near the altar, and seat themselves on pews that face one another. This particular 'service', as mentioned above, is one that was planned by Aaron, and not one that was planned and run by 'a member of the community'. It is a very structured gathering that would easily be recognised as a Christian service in many ways. Upon arrival at the pews, participants pick up an 'order of service' – a sheet of paper with detailed instructions on how to participate throughout the gathering – from a stack on a

[320] Moot, "Moot: Parish Profile" (Moot, May 2016).

table near the pews. There are just over 20 people in attendance, two-thirds being women and one-third being men, with the average age ranging at around 30s-40s. Aaron, dressed in a white cassock-alb and a stole, wearing a typical black minister's uniform with a white plastic collar under, walks in at 18:30 sharp, without procession, and sits among the rest of the participants. From there, the group follows along the order of service as written on the sheet of paper in a call-and-response manner, with Aaron speaking independently as the part of a caller, and the rest of the group speaking collectively in the responses. The main sections of the order of service are as follows:

- The Preparation
- The Invocation
- The Welcome
- The Confession
- Absolution
- The Collect
- Readings
- The Gospel
- Homily
- Silence and Chant
- Prayers of Intercession
- The Peace
- Chant
- Eucharistic Prayer
- Gloria
- The Lord's Prayer
- Fraction
- Agnus Dei
- Invitation
- Post-Communion Prayers
- Notices
- The Blessing
- Dismissal

Most of the sections of this order of service can be found in many Church of England services, although Moot would boast uniqueness in their delivery of the Prayers of Intercession through the Invitation. The Prayers of Intercession are an open forum where individuals may say prayers aloud for the group to respond to, however, there were only

a small number of people that actually said a prayer out loud; the majority of participants remained in silence until the set response to each prayer. The Peace was a space where everyone walked around and exchanged greetings, handshakes, and embraces among one another, with each individual making sure that they acknowledged everyone else in the gathering. There were certainly individuals that were more extroverted than others, but I did not get the sense that anybody was pressured to participate in any particular way—it felt more like a polite acknowledgement of one another more than anything. The Eucharistic Prayer through the Invitation was a collective effort, with the entire group standing around the altar together singing, chanting, or praying together, with no clear distinction of Aaron's role. During the Invitation, most people received Communion, though it is noted on the order of service that it is not a compulsory act. Note that this section is called 'invitation' and not 'communion'. The rest of the order of service returned to the call-and-response style that the gathering started with. After this formal 'service', there is further socialising at Host Café for another 20 minutes or so. After this, as mentioned above, a small group of about five people proceeded to a pub for further socialising.

Considering what has been revealed about Moot thus far, it might be surprising that they might gather together in such a traditional way. While Aaron admitted that '"church" is a dirty word' to some participants, it would not be surprising for an observer to witness this entire gathering as nothing but 'church'. The structure of the gathering, the physical objects of the gathering, the motions of the gathering, as well as the terminology used at the gathering, among countless other things, were all elements that are explicitly Christian. The fact that the event was even called a 'service' or 'Eucharist' is telling of its Christianity. Furthermore, Aaron was set apart from the others in ministers' robes and uniform, and was an obvious authority figure at the beginning and

end of the ‘service’. Any one of these elements, let alone the combination of all of them, would be surprising to observe for a group that claims to have such a suspicion towards authority and established Christianity—yet here they are.

However, considering the aspects of the Moot ‘service’ that many participants in the group were proud of, the group tells a different story. Note that this particular ‘service’ only happens once a month, as opposed to, perhaps, a weekly occurrence for traditional churches, which demonstrates that it is of less importance to Moot than to other forms of Christianity. To many of the participants of Moot, the fact that that everything surrounding Communion was done collectively set it apart from a more traditional practice it. Indeed, during these parts of the gathering, apart from Aaron’s robes and initial handling of the bread and wine, his authority was blurred into that of the others present. There was no more call-and-response, but a collective singing, chanting, and praying. While it is arguable that ‘God’s authority’ was present in the Communion, considering that Moot called this section of the ‘service’ the ‘Invitation’, emphasises that receiving it is completely voluntary; that acknowledging God’s presence in the bread and wine, or any other theology understood by it, is not at all compulsory. The Prayers of Intercession and the Peace appeared to be a neutral space in terms of authority as well—individuals were not set apart in particular ways, nor was there pressure to participate in any particular way except for certain motions and responses instructed on the order of service. All of this being said, from an outsider’s perspective, this entire service would still appear Christian. However, it is perceived by its participants as being more ‘inclusive’ than a more traditional Christian service, in its blurring of authority at certain elements of the ‘service’.

As for the aspects of the order of service that demonstrated a traditional authority more explicitly – such as the sections that were more call-and-response, as well as the

Homily – people seemed to happily accept Aaron's role. Later, it was apparent that there was some ambivalence around his authority. Namely, some were politely dismissive of it. For example, oftentimes, I would hear that something that Moot was doing was 'an Aaron thing', acknowledging that Aaron was attempting to assert his authority as chaplain by implementing an event or practice, and while people were happy to accept it, they only participated in the spirit of allowing him to do something that he liked, despite it not being part of the unsaid common practice of Moot. This particular 'service' was 'planned and run' by Aaron, which made many elements of it 'an Aaron thing'. Furthermore, notice in the 'Parish Profile' excerpt above, the minister is not necessarily considered 'a member of the community'—highlighting that there is certainly a role set apart for a minister at Moot. Also recalling Aaron's own feeling of belonging at Moot, there was some ambivalence as well. While it was unclear whether this was because of his own resistance to being completely part of the community, or the group's resistance of him being part of the community, a combination of both, or even other unnamed reasons, it still further demonstrates an ambivalence of the role of a minster at Moot. A minister at Moot is a role that is ambivalent of its place as an authority as well as wholly belonging as part of the community.

It is important to note, however, that like at Grace, Moot maintains an official relationship with the Church of England, making the Church a significant authority. Despite the wide range of the types of gatherings at Moot, there remains this very traditional form of a Christian service—which suggests a minimum liturgical form that the Church may have power over.

During the pre- and post-'service' socialising, as mentioned, there was more of an informal atmosphere. It was here, however, that I noticed where much of the actual belonging and social identity was being formed. Firstly, at any given Sunday, there are

at least three opportunities to gather on a purely social basis – before the 'service' in the church, immediately after the 'service' in the church, and at the pub after the church is locked up – which makes the formal 'service' seem more like an excuse to meet socially rather than the main event. Secondly, it is here that the 'cliques' that Aaron pointed at earlier – the 'sofa group' or the 'bar group' – are most noticeable. Later, I realised the 'cliques' are comprised of people that are long-time participants of Moot, or those that belong in one another's 'mini-Moots'—there is not one particular group at the sofa or the bar, but there indeed always is a group at the sofa or the bar that know each other quite well and speak to each other more intimately as opposed to trying to meet new people. This further demonstrates a 'believing in belonging'—that friendships are what are valued over a particular deity.

That being said, from the pre- and post-'service' socialising, it becomes evident that 'mini-Moots' are at least equally important to the creation of belonging and social identity in Moot than the Sunday gatherings. While Sundays bring a wider group of people in Moot together, it is in the 'mini-Moots' that individuals experience more intimacy. In the 'Parish Profile', 'mini-Moots' are describes as:

> '[S]mall groups of about 5-8 members of the community who mostly meet in homes once a month. We currently have three groups. The pattern is generally eating together, hearing about the lives of the others in the group, then praying together. This depends on the members of the group and what they feel they would like to get from their mini-Moot and how they would benefit most. Some mini-Moots have gone through a book together and regular socials are encouraged.'[321]

In these 'mini-Moots', individuals are able to share each other's personal lives, beliefs, ideas, religious identities, and political opinions. It is here that I was told that individuals shared their stories of being hurt and traumatised by established Christianity, and gained their sense of belonging and social identity because of this shared experience.

[321] Moot, "Moot: Parish Profile" (Moot, May 2016).

In these ‘mini-Moots’, there were also individuals who might not have ever experienced pain or trauma by established Christianity, but participated anyway. However, this position was a minority position. These ‘minorities’ tended to be those who preferred more traditional services and had more politically conservative views than the majority of ‘Mooters’. Nevertheless, they are welcomed by the wider community, and also feel part of it. From the perspective of those who have a differing perspective of Christianity, they are welcomed in the spirit of inclusivity, similar to the toleration of Aaron’s liturgical preferences. From the perspective of these minorities, the sense of belonging in Moot comes more from the spirit of tradition, as being part of the parish and also part of the wider Church of England, sustaining their more traditional view of Christianity.

I was not able to attend any ‘mini-Moots’. While I was not explicitly excluded from attending ‘mini-Moots’, I was not explicitly invited either, nor did I request to attend one. While I did feel any less welcomed by the participants of Moot to attend a ‘mini-Moot’, part of me did not want to intrude on this space that seemed to be held very ‘sacred’; one that was only shared with those who could give a more intimate commitment to the group. From my perspective as a researcher, I drew this boundary as an ethical choice—if I had conducted more than a handful of participant observations at Moot, I would have been more comfortable to attend a ‘mini-Moot’. That said, this was further telling of the boundaries of inclusivity, in that there are such gatherings such as ‘mini-Moots’ that would informally require a certain level of intimacy on both Moot’s as well as newcomers’ ends in order to attend.

As mentioned earlier, there is a further distinction between ‘Mooters’—those who regularly attend the Sunday ‘services’ or are part of a ‘mini-Moot’, and ‘weekday Mooters’—those who participate as little as sitting for a cup of coffee at Host Café. This

distinction demonstrates Moot's ideal of being as welcome and inclusive as possible, while in reality, true belonging and social identity in Moot is formed on the Sundays and 'mini-Moots'.

In observing the group dynamics in their regular gatherings, the boundaries of Moot become clearer. While they are indeed a diverse group in terms of age and political leanings, the majority of participants are middle-aged and left-leaning. The majority of participants are critical against established Christianity, but not enough to be completely uncomfortable with certain elements of a traditional service or even a minister. In fact, the majority of participants might be observed by outsiders as being Christian. Participants of Moot are proud of their conceptualisation of the community having wide boundaries, even if, in reality, not everybody who is considered part of Moot actually identify as being part of Moot. The majority of participants have had experiences of pain and trauma by established Christianity, and find Moot as a space for healing this pain and trauma. These people find this healing in the more social gatherings as well as 'mini-Moots', as opposed to its more traditionally Christian gatherings, where they are free to share their individual thoughts and opinions with no reservation. These social gatherings and 'mini-Moots' are central to the creation belonging and social identity to 'Mooters'.

Inclusivity is the most 'sacred' value at Moot, but shared from a perspective that is inseparable from Christianity. It is a form of 'inclusivity' that comes from what is collectively perceived by its participants as the things that established Christianity is 'exclusive' of. In the example of a Eucharist 'service', it is 'inclusive' in that it shifts authority away from the minister at times, and distributes it among the rest of the participants. Moot is most 'inclusive' of individuals who have been hurt and traumatised by established Christianity. In this, participants of Moot give authority to multiple

authorities: traditional Christian authorities (eg, God, the Church, scripture, a minister); authority of the collective group; as well as the perceived authority of the individual, observable in the significance of social gatherings as well as 'mini-Moots'. Moot is able to sustain and socialise their specific form of 'inclusivity' in focussing on the individual in its social gatherings and 'mini-Moots'.

With the Earlsfield Collective, like Grace's Tuesday night gatherings, as well as Moot's 'mini-Moots', I was limited in my observation of their group gatherings due to their intimate nature and my role as an outside researcher. In the Earlsfield Collective, even more so than Grace and Moot, it is understandable, considering there is even a formal process in becoming a member of this New Monastic community. Nevertheless, I was invited to participate in the public installations that they are so proud of. Namely, an Advent installation called 'The Adtent'.

'The Adtent' was an interactive art installation hosted at the churchyard of the local parish church of the Earlsfield Collective, St Andrew's. It was an installation that was open to the public, 24 hours a day, throughout the entire season of Advent, with massive spotlights shining on it during the darker hours. Very visibly at the front of the church, there was a large sign that said, 'The Earlsfield Advent Calendar: Welcome to The Adtent. Come in and explore' with a number next to it, indicating the particular calendar date. From that sign, there was a footpath that led to a two-person camping tent, with a sign at its entrance saying, 'Many refugees continue to live in dwellings no bigger than this tent, with no access to hot water, proper shelter, food, or other provisions.' Here, it becomes clear that the installation is about the global refugee crisis: raising awareness of the situation, as well as a call for people to become engaged with it. Further along inside the tent, there are a number of other objects representing the refugee crisis: objects that can be found in a typical refugee dwelling, as well as papers hung all

around with more information about the crisis. There was also a stack of scraps of paper, pencils, and pieces of string where people can leave notes and hang them in the tent: prayers, intentions, or just simple comments about the installation. Furthermore, there was a box where individuals could leave a piece of paper with one's personal contact information, if one so 'would like to get involved in the global refugee crisis'.

From this interactive art installation, a number of things are evident. Firstly, the Earlsfield Collective has a close relationship to the parish church. Secondly, they have no issues with their installation or message to be associated with established Christianity. Like Grace and Moot, as mentioned, the Earlsfield Collective is officially recognised by the Church of England. However, unlike the others, it is unclear how much authority the Church has over them with respect to the liturgy. It is possible that this relationship to the parish church is one way the Church exercises its authority over them—but if so, there appears to be a functional working relationship with their ideology. Thirdly, it is clear that the Earlsfield Collective has a sense of social responsibility and commitment to global issues. Besides the name, 'The Adtent', being a play on a Christian concept, 'Ad*vent*', and being hosted by a church, there is nothing else in the installation that makes it particularly Christian, religious, or even spiritual. In this, it is arguable that this installation may be an indirect way for individuals to engage with the parish church. However, churchyards have always been public places that have no requisites for those that sit or walk through them. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the Earlsfield Collective's particular spirituality is inseparable from its sense of social responsibility and commitment to global issues.

The fact that individuals can participate with the interactive art installation without requisites makes it extremely inclusive. However, though the boundaries of the Earlsfield Collective are very open in terms of the work that they do, actually becoming

part of the community has its very explicit boundaries. Despite this, their engagement with the wider neighbourhood demonstrates that they are accessible. While it is difficult to discern authority, belonging, social identity, and socialisation from the observation of this installation, what continues to be observable are the values of the Earlsfield Collective. In this public, accessible, and arguably secular, interactive art installation, the Earlsfield Collective demonstrates that social responsibility and a commitment to global issues is more important than attempting to engage the public in a more explicitly Christian, religious, or even spiritual message. 'The Adtent's' the social message was much more important.

St Luke's primary group gathering is its Sunday morning 'family service', which is a gathering that lasts about two hours in total. I arrived at around 10:45 for an 11:00 start to a vibrant church congregation: people talking and laughing amongst one another, kids running around, and the choir and musicians practicing in the background. The pews – including the choir pews – were arranged in a circle around a number of microphones and the altar at the centre. I found myself an 'order of service' and a seat on a pew, with the people around me immediately introducing themselves and welcoming me. Come 11:00, the building was full of people of all ages, with a fairly even split between women and men, and numbering at approximately 200 people.

The main sections of the order of service are as follows:

- Opening Chant
- Welcome and Introduction
- Children's Spot
- Confession
- Be Forgiven
- Collect
- Old Testament Reading
- Gloria
- Gospel Reading
- Talk
- Anthem

- Prayers
- Eucharistic Prayer
- Communion
- Post Communion Prayer
- Church Notices
- Blessing and Dismissal

The service, as evident in this list, though with quite a number of variations to a traditional service, is quite explicitly Christian. Tomlinson was dressed in minister's robes and was clearly the authority in the group. There were two other people mentioned in the order of service that 'led' the service, one of them being the person that gave the 'talk' – not 'sermon' or 'homily' – and the other being the choir director. Neither of these other two 'leaders' were in minister's robes. At the end of the formal service, about three-quarters of the congregation stayed in the church for socialising over hot drinks and biscuits. At this point, I recognised a couple of people from the Borough Common among the people that stayed to socialise. These two people were apparently regular participants of both St Luke's as well as the Borough Common. After about a half-hour or so of socialising, most of the congregation had left the church building.

Considering this experience, the primary 'family service' at St Luke's is evidently relatively traditional. It followed the Church of England 'Common Worship' Sunday order of service fairly closely, and was led by predictably appropriate Christian ministers. What made it different was the number in attendance: compared to an average Emerging Church in the UK, the number of participants is extremely large, even beyond comparison.[322] In this, St Luke's is exceptional in attracting people to attend a Sunday service, despite its Emerging Church-type of identity.

[322] George Lings, *The Day for Small Things: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church in 21 Dioceses of the Church of England*, Sheffield, UK, Church Army's Research Unit, November 2016, 10–11.

By observing this particular 'family service', I am inclined to agree that St Luke's value of inclusivity is very near to what it conceives itself to be. While it is extremely obvious in its Christianity, I sensed that it is a place that would be comfortable even for those who identified with a different, or even no, religion. It would require an individual to have some sort of curiosity in spirituality, naturally, but I do not imagine anything more would be required. Those who might have more traditional or conservative positionings doctrinally, liturgically, and politically, might not immediately select St Luke's as a first choice, but considering those in the minority at Moot, they would not pose as vehement opponents either. In fact, I would imagine that those who have more pain and trauma with established Christianity might have more difficulty at St Luke's because of its traditional service. However, because of what Tomlinson stands for publically, I imagine this leaves room for a much compromise.

Looking more closely at authority at St Luke's 'family service', most of the traditional authorities are present: the minister, the Church of England, the Bible. However, considering the form of inclusivity discussed in the past chapters, there is certainly room for self-authority. While the socialisation of self-authority is not observable in this particular service, it is evident in Tomlinson's teachings—as mentioned scrupulously already in this research. One might argue that the authority in his teachings is in fact Tomlinson – which is, in fact, true – but he also encourages individuals, in the same way that Self-religion teachers do, to self-authorise. In this, participants of St Luke's recognise multiple authorities, while simultaneously being socialised in the value of inclusivity through Tomlinson's teaching of perceived self-authority.

Also at St Luke's, as mentioned, is a 'service' called Soul Space, which occurs on the second Sunday evening of the month for about two hours. When I was first seeking

out Emerging Church groups in London and discovered that Tomlinson was the vicar at a parish church, I was often pointed towards Soul Space – not the primary Sunday morning 'family service' – which was often described as an Emerging Church, Fresh Expression, or 'alternative worship'-style service. These initial recommendations already highlighted the tendency for people in the United Kingdom to equate the Emerging Church with Fresh Expressions and 'alternative worship'. On the official Soul Space page on the St Luke's website, it is described as an 'Ambient, chill-out worship service. Evocative images, meditative music, creative thinking, and space for contemplation'[323]. The following gathering was one called 'Prayer Without Words'.

I arrived at St Luke's at around 18:45 for a 19:00 start, following signs for Soul Space that pointed towards the church hall—not the main hall. There, I found a handful of people helping Tomlinson set up the space, placing folding chairs facing each other in a circle. People were immediately friendly as I walked in, and encouraged me to help set up the space with them. By 19:00, the house lights were turned off, the hall was candlelit, and there was a screen and projector set up. There were about 15 people total in attendance, with people seated, including Tomlinson, without any particular articles of clothing that resembled that of a minister's, on the chairs in the circle. Of the people, about two-thirds were women, one-third men, and the average age being about 40s-50s. The actual 'service' began with a woman – who I later discovered was Tomlinson's wife – reading a prayer from a book. Then, Tomlinson prompted the group towards an audio-visual presentation, which contained images of nature and some theological excerpts about nature, ending with Tomlinson reading a theological poem about nature. After this presentation, Tomlinson encouraged open sharing—participants were encouraged to

[323] St Luke's, West Holloway, "Soul Space," St Luke's, West Holloway, 2016, http://www.saintlukeschurch.org.uk/breathing-space/soul-space/http://www.saintlukeschurch.org.uk/breathing-space/soul-space/. [Accessed 24 September 2018]

share anything they wanted, whether it was inspired by the presentation, or even just personal thoughts and ideas. This sharing was done in an open-forum style, as with the 'Prayers of Intercession' at Moot, where individuals were free to speak, as they were so inspired. The first few speakers reflected upon the audio-visual presentation, and as more people shared, the topics began to vary more widely. By the end of this period of open sharing, most people were able to speak at least once, with some speaking up to three times. The speakers did not tend to respond to each other, but only shared as an idea came to surface, as the space allowed. The pace was slow, with short gaps of silence in-between each speaker, as well as a sense that everyone was being listened to. When there seemed to be nothing left to share, Tomlinson prompted a period of 'silence or meditation'. At this point, people sat up straight in their chairs, with their hands on their laps, and eyes closed, as if to do a formal style of meditation. While participants sat, Tomlinson set up three 'ritual stations' for the next part of the 'service'. After about ten minutes of the 'silence or meditation' period, he explained the next part of the 'service'. Participants were prompted to visit each of the three 'stations' at will. One 'station' was a table with pencils and index cards, where individuals were to write statements of gratitude—the things in life that the individual was grateful for. Another 'station' was a table with one large, lit, pillar candle, a few tapers, and unlit tea lights surrounding it. Participants were to light tea lights with a taper from the flame of the pillar candle, with each lit tea light representing a prayer for others. A third 'station' was a table that consisted of a bowl with water, and small stones surrounding it. Participants were to place stones in the bowl of water, with each stone representing a personal need. After a period of time, participants sat back down on their seats after having finished their tasks at the 'stations'. Then, Tomlinson, now wearing a stole, with his wife next to him, at a small folding table, announces that the next part of the 'service' is a 'simple

Eucharist'. He mentions that the words he was about say is a 'simplified version' of the Church of England 'Common Worship' Eucharistic prayer, and that everyone was welcome to receive the bread and wine, as they felt comfortable. Tomlinson then prays over the bread and wine, followed their administration to the rest of the participants by both him and his wife. After receiving the Eucharist, everyone sat back on their seats, and after Tomlinson and his wife cleared the table, Tomlinson projects another audio-visual presentation. There is no prompt here, except for the turning on of the projector with lyrics on the screen, and a folk song by a popular artist being played in the background – 'Prayer Without Words' by Mary Gauthier – the namesake of this particular Soul Space 'service'. At the end of the song, Tomlinson slowly and quietly stands up, turns on the house lights, and starts setting up some drinks and snacks at the opposite end of the hall. Slowly, but surely, everyone else starts socialising over the drinks and snacks. After about 20 minutes or so of socialising, about one-third of the people have gone, and the rest of the people remained to tidy up the hall until it is empty.

Compared to the other events and gatherings described thus far, Soul Space was the most intimate. While it numbered the same in the amount of participants as Grace, the space for personal sharing made it feel more intimate. In the other groups mentioned thus far, I was not able to observe their more intimate gatherings, whereas Soul Space is the more intimate offering at St Luke's. That being said, compared to the other groups thus far, St Luke's is the only one that is a community of hundreds of people, while the others are already small groups to begin with—numbering at about 50 active participants at the largest. Thus, comparatively speaking, though Soul Space is the most intimate gathering that I have discussed thus far, it is likely less intimate compared to the smaller group gatherings that I was unable to observe at Grace, Moot, or the Earlsfield Collective.

With the exception of the Eucharist portion of the 'service' and the post-'service' socialising, the entirety of the gathering did not resemble elements of a more traditional Christian gathering. In fact, with the exception of the Eucharist portion of the 'service', nothing in the 'service' particularly resembled Christianity—though, it was certainly 'spiritual'. There were some words in the opening prayer as well as various slides on the screen throughout the evening that included specifically Christian terms – such as 'Jesus' or 'Christ' – but they did not stand in out any particular way compared to other 'spiritual' terms. For instance, during the presentation that included images of nature, 'the ground of being' was often referenced in the place where, perhaps, 'God' would go. Here, nature was also evoked to create parallels to 'the ground of being'. Furthermore, the song played and projected at the end of the 'service', 'Prayer Without Words', contained religious terms such as 'prayer' and 'Hallellujah', although they were used in a stylistic or poetic way that pointed more at a general message about life rather than a theological one. With these less Christian elements of the 'service', I would imagine it was intended to allow for those who had no Christian backgrounds, or those with difficulty with Christianity, to engage more easily. It was an 'inclusive' gathering in this way.

Soul Space, however, might not be a place where an individual who preferred more explicit Christian authority would feel comfortable. However, in the same way that Moot still had members of the congregation that were more on the traditional-conservative end of the theological and political spectrum because of its status as a parish church, Soul Space might still be a 'service' that they could attend. Considering Tomlinson still exercised his authority as a minster, as well as wore a stole, and used official text for the Eucharistic prayer, one could argue that the Eucharist portion of the service was explicitly and traditionally Christian.

That being said, what I found most interesting to observe at Soul Space was the dynamics of authority. It was very clear that Tomlinson was the primary authority at the event: with the exception of participants help with setting and tidying up, and his wife assisting with the opening prayer as well as the administration of the Eucharist, he planned, facilitated, and led the entire 'service'. Despite the lack of explicit Christianity in the other content, more traditional authorities were referenced throughout the service, for instance, the Church of England's authority and the Eucharistic prayer. Despite Tomlinson's lack of ministerial dress, he did still wear a stole during the Eucharist portion of the evening—acknowledging ecclesiastical authority. In the less Christian portions of the 'service', non-traditional authorities were referenced as well, as in the authors of the prayers and poems that were shared, as well as the lyrics of the song that was played. All things considered, a number of authorities – Christian, non-Christian, tradition, and non-traditional – were certainly present throughout the evening.

Perceived self-authority was most certainly encouraged as well, observable during the period of open sharing. While Tomlinson was facilitating this portion of the evening, individuals were encouraged to reflect and give their own opinion. I noticed that in this open sharing period, not a single person referred to a more traditional authority, such as the God, Jesus, or the Church. Instead, individuals gave their opinions as if to teach the rest of the group something, or to affirm one's own ideas to oneself. Note that besides this open sharing, there were no other spaces in the evening that taught the rest of the group a particular message—there was no lecture, sermon, or homily. There was certainly religious content throughout the evening, but individuals were free to interpret and engage on their own terms, and not on particularly prescribed terms. In Soul Space, it is very clear that the 'ethic of self-spirituality' is being socialised among its participants. Considering both Soul Space and the rest of the congregation at St

Luke's, it becomes evident that the 'sacred' value of inclusivity, taught through Tomlinson, is a value that is both sustained and socialised through the encouragement of self-authority.

For the majority of the time that I observed the Borough Common, as mentioned in the third chapter, their primary gathering was weekly on a Sunday night at the basement of the Welsh Congregational Chapel in Borough, London. In 2016, however, the Borough Common started meeting just monthly at the St Giles Centre in Camberwell, London. The content of the gatherings remained relatively the same. However, the number of attendees and the ratio between the sexes of the group certainly changed: in Borough, the number of attendees ranged from about 10-25 people, with a fairly even split between women and men; in Camberwell, the number of attendees averaged at about 10, with the majority being women. The drop in attendance at the weekly gatherings was certainly one of the primary factors of the change to Camberwell. However, another factor was the fact that most of the founding members started getting married, having families, and moving away from London. At first, also mentioned in the third chapter, the Borough Common tried to accommodate for the families by holding the monthly Brunch Church, but even then, the numbers at both venues were dramatically dwindling. This highlights the factor that despite the Borough Common being 'inclusive', the Borough group comprised of mostly an extended group of friends whose places were not getting replenished by newcomers. Today, at the gathering in Camberwell, most of the attendees were not part of the original founding group, but maintain a steady number of people each month. Nevertheless, as mentioned, the content and structure of the gatherings remained the same. Each gathering is different and is organised and facilitated by a handful of different people each week—this is determined by periodic sign-ups.

The following is a description of a gathering at the Borough venue called 'The Nicene Creed: Multimedia'. I arrived at 17:45 for an 18:00 start, and was greeted by a handful of people with tea and biscuits. The space was a bare, cold basement, but was getting set up with a screen, projector, and a number of folding chairs. Most people did not arrive until about 18:20, and by 18:30, we were prompted by a number of people – the ones who were setting up – to start. At this point, there were about 25 people, with their ages ranging from about 25-40, with an even number of women and men. Compared to the other groups thus far, the Borough Common is very young. Without introduction, as everyone found their seats and became quiet, a series of film trailers were projected on the screen. One of the facilitators then described that these trailers had one thing in common: they all expressed different 'beliefs' in popular culture. Next, a 20-minute TED Talk by popular Atheist figure, Alain de Botton, called 'Atheism 2.0' (2011) was shown. This was followed by a survey about beliefs: on a table, there was a 7x6 grid of plastic cups, with seven questions, and each cup representing six potential answers to each question; participants were given seven pieces of candy, and were prompted to answer to each question by placing their piece of candy in the appropriate cup. The following is the chart of the results of this survey, highlighting included, presented to the group immediately after completing it:

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Used To	Don't Care	Would Like To
Do you believe in God?	16	0	1	0	1	1
Do you believe Jesus was God in human form?	7	2	6	3	3	1
Do you believe you are forgiven by God because of Jesus' death?	3	3	5	5	1	0
Do you believe in heaven and hell?	1	9	4	3	1	0
Do you believe in prayer as a way of communicating with God?	12	1	2	1	0	1
Do you believe God loves everyone unconditionally?	14	0	1	0	0	2
Do you believe the bible is the inspired word of God?	1	5	5	3	2	2

After all of this, the group was prompted to split in small groups of 3-4 people to discuss the film trailers, the content of the De Botton talk, and the results of the survey. After about 10 minutes of these discussions, one of the facilitators called the group's attention once again and read a short story from *Life After God* (2002), by popular author, Douglas Coupland. After this reading, another facilitator called the group's attention and read a statement of her own personal beliefs:

> 'I believe that Jesus was a great, great man, but I'm not sure I can fully believe he was God-made-man—I would like to though. God – I used to be sure I believed in God – that I could speak to God, and God would speak to me; that I needed to pray to find out what God wanted for me. Nowadays, I am not sure I believe in a god that I can speak to. I believe in the prospect that there is God. I believe that everyone is loved by God. I don't believe that you have to do or say or believe

> certain things to go to heaven. I don't believe you will go to hell if you don't believe or do or say certain things. I believe in science and evolution, and believe that both have room for faith and God. I believe the bible has some great stories, and inspired teaching on how to live. I don't believe that if you have more faith, then God will make you more prosperous. I believe I am very lucky to be born into my circumstances, and have a very fortunate life. Creation and creativity inspires me to believe more. I think I believe that everyone is loved. I believe in other people; that God has given people great potential and reason. I don't know what I believe happens to your soul or spirit when you die. I believe that certainty in only one truth is misguided.'[324]

After this last statement, this last speaker prompted an open discussion. It was an open space for people to discuss the content of the evening, or just personal reflections that was inspired by the topics of the evening. After about 10 minutes of discussion, everyone was prompted to meet for socialising and drinks at the Libertine Pub, which was just a few blocks away, after tidying up the basement. The majority of the participants of the evening gathering proceeded to the pub, which was more informal chatting – about the content of the evening as well as more personal conversations – which lasted for another hour.

While this particular gathering of the Borough Common did not follow any Christian liturgical form, as was demonstrated by Grace, Moot, as well as both of St Luke's gatherings, it was still very clear that the majority of the participants came from Christian backgrounds. Despite the non-religious elements of the gathering – the film trailers, the De Botton talk, and the Coupland reading – there was an overall understanding of Christian language and culture among the group. The De Botton talk was received with curiosity to the 'beliefs' of Atheists, as opposed to a position that completely affirmed or even challenged what was being shared on the talk. The survey was given without question or reservation, with the assumption that all of the questions and answers required no explanation of the concepts assumed by them. The Coupland

[324] Beth, "The Nicene Creed: Multimedia" (The Borough Common, London, January 22, 2012). Appendix I.

reading, as well as the statement of belief given by one of the facilitators, was received in such a way that prompted a relating to the material—that most people had similar experiences as what was being read out loud to them. The shared Christian culture of this group was one that was questioning and challenging aspects of Christian doctrine—despite, as their survey demonstrates, an overall alignment with particularly Christian ideas.

'Inclusivity' at the Borough Common has a very specific meaning: it is inclusive, mostly, of early middle-aged adults who came from Christian backgrounds and now questioning Christianity. Considering that the Borough Common is a completely independent group that is not affiliated to a parish or church, one would have to know a participant in it to find it, or be specifically seeking a group like it. In my case, I specifically sought Emerging Church groups for my research. In order to be a person that 'seeks out' an independent group that questions or challenges Christianity, one must have a background of Christianity that knows that such groups exist—which would likely be a person with an independent Christian background that is aware of the phenomenon of the Emerging Church. For those who would be more familiar with the parish system, they might just seek out parishes that shared the same ideas as them—like Grace, Moot, or St Luke's. For those who are not religious, the only way they would find the Borough Common would probably be through knowing someone in it. For those who are religious but do not have Christian backgrounds, much of the content may not be relatable to them in the same way as it is to the majority of the group. For children or elderly adults, it may not be a comfortable place because of the lack of diversity in the ages of the people there. Although 'all' people are technically welcomed by participants of the Borough Common, it is highly self-selecting.

In terms of authority at the Borough Common, multiple authorities are certainly recognised, from a wide range of sources, as observed in Soul Space. Though there are no formally ordained ministers in the group, it is evident that the founding members of the group hold a position of authority within the group. The particular facilitators of each gathering are authorities at their particular meeting, who also refer to a wide range of traditional and non-traditional authorities. In this particular gathering, God, Jesus, and the Bible are recognised as authorities, alongside popular figures and writers. At the Borough Common, multiple authorities are recognised, but not any particular one is considered most significant.

Self-authority is certainly one of the authorities recognised at the Borough Common, but not in any particular way that stands out more than the others. During both periods of discussion, I observed individuals reflecting at a variety of authorities, and not just their own. For example, some people referred to God as a given, while others gave more matter-of-fact statements about one's personal ideas. In the statement shared out loud by one of the facilitators, the word 'I' indicated a very strong sense of self-authority. Considering this particular gathering was titled 'The Nicene Creed', this statement of belief became even more telling of the self-authority being proclaimed in it, as a statement of a personal creed. Furthermore, the conversations at the pub did not differ much in terms of the content of the more open discussions—various statements pointing at other authorities as well as self-authority continued being shared among participants.

Considering the Borough Common's value of inclusivity, despite its being self-selecting, centres on the shared practice of challenging Christianity. This is sustained and socialised by the recognition of multiple authorities, as well as maintaining self-authority amidst it.

A SOUP gathering differs in structure to the Sunday evening gatherings of the Borough Common, but, in many ways, is still more similar to the Borough Common than the other groups that I observed. Considering the more intimate groups of Grace, Moot, and the Earlsfield Friary that I was unable to observe, SOUP might be considered one of the more intimate gatherings of the Borough Common.

A typical SOUP gathering lasts about two hours in total. It is usually on Tuesday evenings, held at Elle's house, and begins with a simple shared meal of soup, bread, cheese, prepared by Elle, and any additional side dishes and drinks that other participants might want to share, for about a half-hour. Very rarely, if Elle is unable to host a SOUP meeting, others in the group might volunteer their home for the gathering—although sometimes, if nobody is available to host, there might not be a SOUP gathering at all. The meal is followed by the set Evening Prayer written by the Northumbria Community – an Ecumenical religious community of both lay and ordained people based in the northeast of England – which takes about 15 minutes to go through. There is an informal rota – that is, individuals can sign-up on the SOUP's Facebook group, or simply announce at some point that they have something planned for a particular gathering – for individuals to prepare, facilitate, and lead an activity for the group for up to an hour. This activity, if somebody has something prepared, is usually incorporated in-between the Evening Prayer, or just after it. Sometimes, nobody has prepared or signed up to prepare, facilitate, and lead an activity—at which point, the group moves on to the next part of the evening. After the activity, the individuals might informally share particular difficulties that they are dealing with in their lives, where some might ask for prayers. This asking for prayer might consist of a simple gesture to ask, or an actual request for a group prayer, or extemporary prayer. After this period for prayer, the group transitions to a period of more casual socialising, which might last for about another half-hour.

Sometimes, the period for prayer usually blurred into the period for socialising. With the exception of the meal and the set Evening Prayer, the entire duration of a SOUP gathering is generally informal, shifting between periods of formal activity, prayer, and socialising.

One particular SOUP gathering that I attended was led by a woman named Cheryl—a regular participant of SOUP who does *not* also attend the Borough Common Sunday gatherings. I arrived at 18:45 for a 19:00 start to realise that I was the first person to arrive. At which point, I helped set up the food, buffet-style at a designated table in the living room. By 19:00, most people had arrived, and casually started socialising and serving themselves. After about a half-hour of eating, Cheryl then prompted the group to gather together and begin the set Evening Prayer. At this point, there was a total of about ten people in attendance, which was about the usual number of a SOUP gathering, with all of the attendees being around their mid-30s, with two-thirds being women, and one-third men. Everyone was given a copy of the Evening Prayer to follow along with, which were reused every week for the gatherings. In each of the photocopies, I noticed that certain words throughout the document were crossed out and replaced with more 'inclusive language'. For example, in one of two locations where it says 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit', it says 'In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of the World'. Another part was the 'Blessing' at the end of the Evening Prayer—where it originally said, 'good men', it was replaced with 'good folk'. At this particular gathering, Cheryl prompted the group to read through the entire Evening Prayer, so that the activity she prepared could be done separately after. Cheryl started by sharing excerpts from a book she just started reading – *Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator* (2003), by Raniero Cantalamessa, a Franciscan monk who has been serving as the Preacher to the Papal

Household since 1980 – and reflecting on them. She introduced this book by saying that she originally saw Cantalamessa speak at Holy Trinity Brompton, commonly known as 'HTB', a popular Charismatic-Evangelical Church of England megachurch in London. She shared how 'surprised' she was by 'a Catholic being so open', which is what prompted her purchasing the book.[325] In sum, Cheryl's talk was about 'being more expectant of the Holy Spirit'[326]. She explains how some churches are 'alienating', with people who say, 'the Holy Spirit is telling me' or 'the Holy Spirit is speaking to me'.[327] She continues and says that these types of statements are 'alienating' because, 'Why isn't the Holy Spirit talking to me like that?'[328] She says that 'I usually ask for the Holy Spirit to come, but I don't actually expect it to. Or, I dictate how the Holy Spirit is allowed to come to me'.[329] Ultimately, she says that reading this book allowed her to live with more open expectation. After all of this, Cheryl prompted an open discussion. In the discussion, like at the Borough Common, there was a wide variety of the types of comments being shared. Some were completely personal, giving personal reflections with no reference to anything but one's own experience. Some pointed at other figures – religious, spiritual, secular, popular, liberal, and conservative – and made connections to Cheryl's talk. At no point did anyone critique anyone else in the group, although there was a bit of critiquing towards some of the figures that were named—for example, Pope Benedict XVI. In general, it was a lively and pleasant discussion, with everyone sharing their thoughts at least once. In this gathering, there was a breaking point for prayer or

[325] Cheryl, "Reflections on 'Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator' by Raniero Cantalamessa." Appendix I.
[326] Cheryl, "Reflections on 'Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator' by Raniero Cantalamessa." Appendix I.
[327] Cheryl, "Reflections on 'Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator' by Raniero Cantalamessa." Appendix I.
[328] Cheryl, "Reflections on 'Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator' by Raniero Cantalamessa." Appendix I.
[329] Cheryl, "Reflections on 'Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator' by Raniero Cantalamessa." Appendix I.

prayer requests, nor any formal transition to a more social, non-spiritual period of the evening. The open discussion organically transitioned from being more explicitly about Cheryl's talk, to unrelated topics, and from the large group listening to one another, to individual conversations. Finally, by 21:00, individuals started excusing themselves, helped tidy up a bit, and said their farewells.

As described in this research so far, one of the distinct differences between a SOUP gathering and the primary Borough Common gathering is the spiritual content. While neither called their gatherings 'services', the fact that SOUP prayed a set liturgy together was something that might only be seen on occasion at a Borough Common gathering. Furthermore, most of the discussions, with the exception of the discussions during the meal and towards the end of the gathering, were focussed on the topic of religion and spirituality. That being said, Cheryl, who I mentioned attends only SOUP and not the Borough Common, mentioned that upon going to one (and only) Borough Common Sunday gathering, she thought, in shock, 'Is this even Christian?' revealing her identity as Christian and preference for an explicitly Christian group.[330] She also revealed that she sometimes attends events at HTB—something that might be unheard of for most 'regulars' at the Borough Common, or even any of my other ethnography groups. In fact, I often heard criticisms towards HTB throughout my observations in all my ethnography groups. Furthermore, by Cheryl revealing how 'surprised' she was that 'a Catholic could be so open' demonstrates a distance from Roman Catholicism. Cheryl, unlike many of the informants I have mentioned in this research, appears more traditionally Evangelical. However, in her sharing of her feeling of 'alienation' at some Evangelical churches, she reveals one of the key shared experiences that most of my

[330] Cheryl, Informal Conversation by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix I.

informants have: a particular feeling of 'exclusion' by established Christianity, and particularly Evangelical Christianity.

SOUP is similar to the observations I made of Grace, Moot, and Soul Space, in that they all incorporated a variation of a set liturgy. While SOUP did not incorporate 'Communion' or 'Eucharist', the use of a set liturgy made it more explicitly Christian. Furthermore, even the content of Cheryl's talk and the discussion following it required knowledge of Christian culture. Another interesting detail was the use of inclusive language in the set Evening Prayer by the Northumbria Community. On the one hand, this would prompt more traditional Christians to observe SOUP as a very progressive group, not only by using a prayer by a group that is already known as progressive, but altering the words to represent an even more progressive position. The criticism against Pope Benedict XVI might be seen as both a criticism against traditional Christianity, as well as Roman Catholicism. On the other hand, observing the content of this gathering as a whole, despite being 'inclusive' and progressive, SOUP might be a gathering that could be alienating to non-Christians, and even non-Evangelicals. It might also be alienating to more traditional Christians from across the traditional-progressive theological spectrum.

Like the Borough Common and the rest of my ethnography groups, SOUP demonstrates recognition of multiple authorities. Cheryl was an authority, in that she prepared, facilitated, and led the primary activity of the day. The group as a whole also acknowledged religious figures, like Cantalamessa, McLaren, and Pope John Paul II. A couple of traditional authorities that were mentioned were the Holy Spirit and the Church. Throughout the discussion, some other authorities acknowledged were: personal experience, other individuals in the group, other religious traditions, and an esoteric spiritual system called the Enneagram. One interesting detail was during many

critiques, the person speaking would begin or end their opinion with 'I think' or 'I believe', shedding light on a deferral to one's authority during potentially controversial opinions. Even in Cheryl's talk, instead of actually giving a particular authoritative message, she gave a lecture about her own personal experience and her own understanding, inspired by an authority. During the open discussions at SOUP, then, despite acknowledging and recognising some very traditional authorities, self-authorising language is evidently used to maintain their particular form of 'inclusivity'.

In this section, through the observation of each of my ethnography groups' primary gatherings, I aimed to demonstrate the limits to the Emerging Church's value of 'inclusivity' in context, and how it is sustained and socialised through the recognition of self-authority. The latter of this observation was most observable during more intimate gatherings such as Soul Space, the Borough Common, and SOUP, particularly during periods of open discussion. The other groups – Grace and Moot – were more formal gatherings, but not without a longer period of socialising. Both of these groups also had smaller gatherings during the week – comparable to SOUP with the Borough Common – which evidently were venues for the types of open discussion that I observed in Soul Space, the Borough Common, and SOUP. The Earlsfield Collective was an exception in this observation by nature, considering they are a residential New Monastic community, I was unable to observe the group gatherings as these were inseparable from their private lives. However, considering my observation of their most precious work during the year, what is observable is a commitment to a message of social responsibility and making this message accessible to as many people possible.

In terms of the particular boundaries of 'inclusivity' in the Emerging Church, all of the groups assumed a particular understanding of Christian culture in some way, were mostly middle-aged, and had mostly women with men in leadership. Participants,

though there were some exceptions, were predominantly in the age range of 20s-50s; there were rarely children or elderly. This reflects a consistency with the demographic of the Emerging Church in general, which consists of mostly those of 'Generation X' onwards. Most of the groups, though again, there were some exceptions, had more women participants, however, men held most of the leadership positions. This reflects a consistency with Christianity in general. With the exception of St Luke's 'family service' and the Earlsfield Collective's installation, most of the gatherings were small, and ranged from 10-25 people. This reflects a consistency with the demographic of the Emerging Church in general, when considering more explicit Emerging Church groups. The particular understanding of Christianity in all of my ethnography groups always made variations to its more traditional understandings. This was demonstrated by performing variations of traditional liturgy, to assuming an Ecumenical understanding of Christianity, to questioning, challenging, and rejecting particular theologies. This, too, reflects a consistency with the Emerging Church in general.

Of all of these similarities, it is this last shared assumption that is consistent, with no exception, to all of my ethnography groups and the rest of the Emerging Church. They all require an understanding of Christian culture, which usually comes from some sort of personal experience of Christian culture. They also all require an interest in spirituality, because, as opposed to merely having an intellectual interest in critiquing Christianity, all of the groups that I observed engaged its participants in either some sort spiritual practice or an intellectual understanding of other religions or spiritualties. Therefore, through these observations, I argue that the Emerging Church's most basic prerequisite is a critical position towards Christianity, with an interest in spirituality.

In the next section, I will discuss my findings about the boundaries of the Emerging Church's 'inclusivity' in more detail, with respect to one of its most common

criticisms on this topic. I also intend to respond to this criticism with respect to what can be understood by the Emerging Church thus far.

3 Conclusion: The Sacralisation of Inclusivity

Considering what has been revealed about the Emerging Church thus far, it is evident that inclusivity is a deeply shared value. However, valuing inclusivity – at least in the case of the Emerging Church – does not mean that diversity is necessarily reflected in practice: there are rarely children or elderly in Emerging Church gatherings; there is not an even distribution between the sexes in leadership, nor even a representative distribution of the sexes in leadership; there is an assumption of liberal-leaning political positions and progressive-leaning theological positions; and an assumption of the knowledge of Christian culture. The majority of participants were white and presumably educated, considering the presence of literacy regarding theological topics—although the topics of ethnic and class diversity were not investigated in this research. Furthermore, as mentioned, one must have some sort of critical position towards established Christianity and a basic interest in spirituality. This sheds light on one of the most common assumptions – or criticisms – about the Emerging Church: that it is hypocritical in its value of 'inclusivity' because diversity is not reflected among its participants.

Considering the context of the concept of inclusivity in the Emerging Church, one can argue that diversity can be mutually exclusive. As revealed by many of the informants of this research, many of the participants' valuing of inclusivity comes from the direct experience of being hurt or traumatised by established Christianity. To these people, the Emerging Church is a place to be able to continue to engage with spirituality in some way without the direct relationship with the aspects of the institution that hurt them. To this end, this might not necessarily require a diversity of participants, but only finding a group with the shared experiences of being hurt and traumatised by the church.

Others might simply question or challenge aspects of established Christianity. To these people, in the same way that individuals who were hurt by established Christianity simply required a group to be able support their shared experiences, they simple require a group that they can openly express their position. In this, perhaps some aspects of the Emerging Church is in fact 'hypocritical' in its not being diverse, but it still certainty holds a function for those who were hurt and traumatised by, as well as simply question or challenge, established Christianity. At the very least, the Emerging Church may be 'aspirational' of diversity in its valuing of inclusivity.

In a study based in the United States, however, this very topic was addressed by political scientists, Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe in their article, 'Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church' (2014). In a study comparing 'leaders' from churches that identify as part of the Emerging Church, versus ministers from established and mainline churches that do not, they found that, particularly on the topics of theological positioning, political positioning, and sexual distribution among leadership, the Emerging Church is in fact more 'inclusive' than their counterparts. Regarding theological positions, Burge and Djupe asked questions based on the following theological topics: 'belief in Adam and Eve, biblical inerrancy, that there is only one way to salvation, and whether Jesus will return to earth one day'.[331] Regarding political positions, they asked questions based on controversial political topics, such as: gay marriage, the environment, abortion, and international affairs.[332] In both cases, they found that while Emerging Church 'leaders' are certainly more theologically progressive and politically liberal than their established and mainline

[331] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 644, https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12129.

[332] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2014), 638–40.

counterparts, their theological and political positions are actually more diverse and spread out along both ideological spectrums.[333] Regarding sexual distribution among leadership, Burge and Djupe found that Emerging Church 'leaders' 'are twice as likely to be female (20 percent compared to 10 among nonemergents)'[334]. Lastly, in general, Emerging Churches had a higher population in urban areas, as well as areas where populations are more diverse, and religious attendance is lower, than established and mainline churches.[335] To this end, Emerging Churches are more diverse in terms of the geographical locations that they serve. Considering all of these factors, in this research, Burge and Djupe demonstrate that 'emerging clergy are what they say they are—diverse and inclusive'[336].

In 'Emergent Church Practices in America: Inclusion and Deliberation in American Congregations' (2014), an article published earlier in the same year by Burge and Djupe, they discuss the factor of class in the Emerging Church. They point that 'it does not appear that emerging churches are merely upper class debating societies, but are actually full of a mix of people'[337]. Burge and Djupe argue, again, that the Emerging Churches 'are what they say they are. They are inclusive, non-dogmatic, and committed to discussion… [T]hey are committed to a general Christian belief system, but it appears

[333] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2014), 644, 649.
[334] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2014), 644.
[335] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2014), 644.
[336] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Truly Inclusive or Uniformly Liberal? An Analysis of the Politics of the Emerging Church," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2014), 636.
[337] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Emergent Church Practices in America: Inclusion and Deliberation in American Congregations," *Review of Religious Research*, March 27, 2014, 18, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-014-0157-2.

that anything else is on the table, able to be discussed and debated, discarded, or adopted by its members'[338].

While these two studies by Burge and Djupe focus on the Emerging Church in the United States, I am compelled to make a similar claim for the United Kingdom based on what can be discerned about Christianity in the United Kingdom. First of all, consider the well-known trend that established Christianity in the United Kingdom is in decline. In fact, recent research by Abby Day demonstrates that this decline is 'indisputable' to the extent that she is 'less optimistic that the church can reverse such trend'.[339] In 'The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen: The Last Active Anglican Generation' (2017), she discusses that the majority of the active participants of the Church of England are elderly, and, compared to the population that do not attend church, they are 'not simply divided by an age gap, but by significant values and practices'[340]. Day bases her entire research on the fact that the Church of England is in severe lack of diversity—thus, compared to the Emerging Church, while not absolutely diverse, it is still more diverse than established Christianity in the United Kingdom as a whole.

To summarise this last of the ethnographic chapters, the Emerging Church's most deeply held value is inclusivity, and demonstrates a consistency in their practice of this value compared to established and mainline Christianity. This value was first revealed in the third chapter of this research, during the experiences of pain, conflict, and trauma among participants of the Emerging Church. It is also the value that creates the sense of

[338] Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe, "Emergent Church Practices in America: Inclusion and Deliberation in American Congregations," *Review of Religious Research*, March 27, 2014, 18.
[339] Abby Day, *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen: The Last Active Anglican Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.
[340] Abby Day, *The Religious Lives of Older Laywomen: The Last Active Anglican Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

belonging and social identity among its participants, as demonstrated in the last chapter in the context of each individual and group's most positive experiences. In this chapter, in addition to pointing and responding to the boundaries of 'inclusivity', I demonstrated that this value is sustained and socialised though the deferral to self-authority. All this considered, I argue that the Emerging Church can be understood as a religious phenomenon that sacralises a specific form of inclusivity.

VII Discussion: Responses to Common Criticisms

1 Introduction: Common Criticisms of the Emerging Church

In this chapter, I briefly turn to the Emerging Church's most common criticisms: consumerist, armchair activist, apathetic, spiritual escapist, narcissistic, shallow, heretical, ungrounded, insignificant, reactionary. I also respond to them with respect to everything that is now revealed about the Emerging Church.

2 Consumerist

One of the most common criticisms of the Emerging Church is its being a 'consumerist' practice. There are, however, various interpretations of 'consumerism' when using it as an argument against the Emerging Church and Self-religion in general. It is used to mean a number of other, related, sub-arguments, namely: uncontributing to society, apathy, narcissism, a lack of depth, and ungroundedness. As scholar of religion, Paul Heelas, points out in his book, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (2008), it is a concept contextualised in a culture of capitalism, consumption, and individualism, which are often given negative value judgements that are sociologically unconstructive and unsubstantiated.[341] Missiologist, Stefan Paas, in his article, 'Mission Among Individual Consumers' (2012), in an effort to clarify 'consumerism' arguments, offers two definitions to distinguish the difference between 'consumption' and 'consumerism':

- 'Consumption is simply the acknowledgement in Western cultures that contemporary people are "choosing" creatures.'[342]
- 'Consumerism, however, is an ethical category—it describes efforts at fulfilment through materialism, experiences, and ephemeral wants and desires'.[343]

[341] Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*, 1 edition (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 4, 14.
[342] Stefan Paas, "Mission Among Individual Consumers," in *The Gospel after Christendom: New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), xxxv.

That being said, oftentimes, the 'consumerism' arguments against the Emerging Church are ethical arguments, and not necessarily socially scientific ones. 'Consuming' is simply a natural human behaviour. With this in mind, I turn now to some specific arguments regarding 'consumerism' and respond to them using a more social scientific lens.

Considering, first, the cultural landscape of capitalism, consumption, and individualism that Heelas points out, this is a topic that was addressed in the introductory chapter of this research. In the social context of increasing self-authority, individuals are able to consume from an infinite range of options and construct a '*religion bricolage*' for themselves. This leads to sociological theories of religion such as Rational Choice Theory, or the 'supply-side of religious markets theory', coined by Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, which essentially claims that the more religious options there are, then the more individuals will consume religion and religious goods.[344] This subject is of little relevance to this research, but is important to mention for the purposes of recognising the value-neutral position of religious individualism and consumption in the social context of capitalism. Consuming religion is not necessarily a negative behaviour, and, in fact, for those arguing for religiosity, it might even be good for it.

3 Armchair Activist

Now, considering the ethical judgements, or, simply, what is intended by certain value judgements of 'consumerism', one argument is that the Emerging Church is full of 'armchair activists' that are all talk and no action; that it is so involved in discussing

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[343] Stefan Paas, "Mission Among Individual Consumers," in *The Gospel after Christendom: New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), xxxv.

[344] James Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167–71; Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: SAGE, 2007), 67–88; McGuire, *Religion*, 295–98.

what needs to be done in society and Christianity, that it actually lacks a proper contribution to it. This criticism was voiced even by one of my interview informants, mentioned briefly in the second chapter, who expressed a criticism towards the Emerging Church despite being inspired by it:

> 'I think there was not necessarily all healthy, but particularly for some, a weariness with language. I don't know if you felt this, but particularly, and we've all had great experiences of . . . the emergent culture [but it] just bored us to death in the end because we just said, "For fuck's sake, do something, stop talking about it and do it."'[345]

Despite these types of criticism, however, there was not one group in my research that had individuals who were not socially engaged in some way. In fact, oftentimes, they were socially engaged together as a group. For example, as mentioned in the fourth chapter, at Grace, Jared said that, in a recent discussion, the group was considering that

> '[M]aybe [Grace is] about changing the world. I was trying to say something about this last night, in that for people to flourish, I think being part of a supportive community helps people do what it is that they want to do to change the world. I lead a pioneer training programme and I find being part of Grace very supportive, it sparks my imagination. If that's difficult, I've got friends I can chat to about that…' [346]

He then continued by explaining that Grace holds an integral part in supporting its participants in being engaged in meaningful work in the world:

> 'I think what we were saying was that the worship services in the community serves to support that transformation in the world, whatever people are involved in. We have people who are involved in charities, or involved in their work as architects, or deputy head teachers, or whatever we see as valuable in and of itself. I don't think any more we think the point is the church, we're doing church differently, it's how it enables you to live in the world.'[347]

For Moot and St Luke's, as evident in their calendar of events, the group in involved in a number of volunteer projects together. For the Earlsfield Collective, in addition to their

[345] Joe, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[346] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[347] Jared, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.

interactive art installations that demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility and engagement with global issues, they are involved in a number of projects that help and support the less fortunate of their neighbourhood. For the Borough Common, as mentioned in the third chapter, they have a long-standing relationship volunteering at Contact the Elderly and the Robes Project, with some participants getting involved even more deeply than at the group service events. There is also the aforementioned Cross Currents group, which is more focussed on activism, and regularly organises participants of the Borough Common to participate in marches and protests around London. For SOUP, a number of individuals work full-time in charitable organisations; work which they share back to the group in order to engage and educate them in their corresponding passions. In just my ethnography groups alone, it is unquestionable that being socially engaged is not only present, but a commitment to many of its participants. While there might certainly be groups in the Emerging Church that are not at all socially engaged, these groups seem to be few and far-between. In observing the dynamics of certain group gatherings, and even reading some popular Emerging Church literature. However, the assumption of the lack of social engagement might be an easy one to make, because of the prevalence of intellectualising many social concepts. Recalling the first decade of the Emerging Church's presence, many people called the milieu 'the emerging/emergent *conversation*'—not a particular phenomenon that involved being socially active group or with the rest of society. This practice of intellectualising, however, should be distinguished from actual social engagement, as it certainly does not seem to be stopping participants from getting involved.

4 Apathetic

Another, related criticism is that participants of the Emerging Church are 'apathetic'—apathetic to Christianity, and apathetic to society. The former of these is

often a judgement on participants of the Emerging Church in terms of their attitudes towards more traditional practices of Christianity, that is, traditional ways of engaging with Christianity. In *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (1998), theologian Michael Riddell devotes an entire chapter on apathy, in the context of 'A common epithet to the church in contemporary society' being 'boring'.[348] Considering my observations of the Emerging Church, this attitude of seeing traditional Christianity as 'boring' it is not so much because they are apathetic to spiritual engagement in general, but because they are not compelled by the current teachings and practices of traditional Christianity. There is more of an interest in exploring a wider range of spiritualties from a variety of authorities, rather than just one that is prescribed to them. Theologian, Kenda Dean in *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (2010) discusses how young people's attitudes towards Christianity is simultaneously positive, but generally 'blasé'[349], or what she calls a spirituality of 'benign whatever-ism'[350], or 'the cult of nice'[351]. While she speaks specifically of young people here, it is relevant to the Emerging Church because it is comprised mostly of 'Generation X' onwards, and discusses a type of ideology called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), originally coined by sociologist Christian Smith, to denote the accommodating religious attitudes of younger generations.[352] Again, perhaps, looking at traditional engagements with Christianity alone, attitudes may seem

[348] Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West*, London, SPCK Publishing, 1998, 62–64.
[349] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.
[350] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.
[351] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25.
[352] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious And Spiritual Lives Of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118–71; Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

'apathetic' but looking at spirituality in general, interest is ever present. On the topic of apathy, one of my interview informants discussed it from the perspective of pain or trauma from established Christianity:

> 'Somebody said, and I think it's true, that Mooters are by nature fringe-dwellers. They don't like to get involved or committed, because they've had bad experience of church, maybe, or with authority, or they don't want to get sucked in… Or they don't even get involved in [the] church thing. They want to come along [to the service], and then go home… [I]t depends why. Maybe they do it because they're fearful of getting sucked in. It's a fear motivation rather than an apathy.'[353]

Here, Kate reveals that there are individuals who might appear 'apathetic' to spiritualty because their involvement is limited to just attending a 'service'. However, considering some individuals may have had negative experiences with being more deeply involved in a religious community, it is understandably why their involvement might be limited. Thus, the 'apathy' here does not come from an individual's lack of spiritual interest or engagement, but the lack of a traditional form of engagement as might be expected by established Christianity.

The latter type of 'apathy' – social apathy – has already been addressed in the topic of social engagement—it is evident that participants of the Emerging Church are far from being apathetic to society. However, ecclesiologist, Martyn Percy, in his article, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions' (2008), points out that despite the apparent social engagement that participants have, 'the investment in the complex relationship between spiritual and social capital will often be lacking (for example, paying church quotas that support a vast and complex ecclesial infrastructure—parish coverage, sector ministry, education, prison ministry, and so on)'[354]. Based on

[353] Kate, Interview by S Francesca Po in London. Appendix III.
[354] Martyn Percy, "Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church : Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England* (Canterbury Press, 2008), 33.

Jared's response above, at least for participants at Grace, this is not true. While some of them may not be making financial contributions to the Church of England, there is certainly a relationship between participating in Grace (ie, 'spiritual capital') and social engagement (ie, 'social capital'). At Moot, while the financial relationship between the group and the Church of England was not revealed to me, their volunteer projects as a group demonstrate the link between 'spiritual and social capital'. They also had Host Café, which generated an income, as well as passively recruited new participants to the group and its ideas. For the Earlsfield Collective, their 'spiritual and social capital' were so intricately intertwined that their entire lives – from their identity as a group, to their spiritual practice, to their families, to their homes, to their own occupations as well as the work they do for the Earlsfield neighbourhood – are one in the same. For St Luke's, the criticism is not applicable even in a traditional sense, because they operate as a fully-functioning parish church. For the Borough Common, in addition to their shared volunteer projects, they have a group bank account that participants pay regularly into by bank standing order. These funds then financially supports the group, as well as supports charitable organisations that the group collectively decides on a periodic basis. In this, the Emerging Church not only maintains 'the complex relationship between spiritual and social capital' in a traditional sense, but also in ways that they individually and collectively decide.

5 Spiritual Escapist

Related to the Emerging Church's tendency to highly intellectualise concepts alongside appearing 'apathetic' because of their interest in new ways of engaging with spirituality, is a criticism for being an 'escapist spirituality'; a place where people 'escape' to coddle their spiritual needs, without actually engaging with the rest of the world. Percy explains:

> '[T]he fresh expressions movement may lead to "over-specialisation" in the "faith sector". "Quasi-therapeutic blandness" sets in, which cannot resist "the competition [with] more vigorous forms of radical religious individualism, with their dramatic claims of self-realisation, or the resurgent religious conservatism that spells out clear if simple, answers in an increasingly bewildering world". Put another way, the fresh expressions movement may represent a conservative, therapeutic, and individualist *retreat* from the world, while cloaked in a rhetoric that emphasises the very opposite of this: namely "cutting edge", "radical", and so forth.'[355]

To this end, I would argue that the Emerging Church's social engagement, which is inseparable from their spiritual engagement, as explained in just the previous response, demonstrates that they do not fall in the trap of 'spiritual escapism'. In fact, the Emerging Church might actually also be very critical about 'spiritual escapism'. In Lynch's book, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-first Century* (2007), where he explores the more 'progressive' branches of religious traditions, he argues:

> 'Some advocates of progressive spirituality are highly critical of what they see as the narcissism, apolitical detachment and implicit patriarchy of New Age thought. New Age beliefs and practices are only consonant with progressive spiritualty when they involve a recognition of the sacred nature of material existence, understand the divine as something greater than an aspect of human consciousness, and engage in various forms of activism in support of the divine tendency toward health, justice, sustainability, and complexity.'[356]

Though the Emerging Church may have a stronger focus on self-authority than established Christianity, this does not mean they lose their connection to the wider, tangible world. In fact, many make the conscious effort to maintain it.

6 Narcissistic

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[355] Martyn Percy, "Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church : Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England* (Canterbury Press, 2008), 33.
[356] Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*, London, I B Tauris, 2007, 65.

The term 'narcissistic', as mentioned above, is often used to criticise the Emerging Church and Self-religion in general, with respect to Self-religion and the culture of 'consumerism' in general. This critique permeates the landscape of individualism, with even popular authors going as far as saying it is an epidemic in individualist societies, namely, Christopher Lasch in his book *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979). Here, he argues

> 'This book . . . describes a way of life that is dying—the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self.'[357]

From the perspective of the ideal of interdependence, implied by the value of inclusivity and diversity, theologian, Bruce Reed in *The Dynamics of Religion: Process and Movement in Christian Churches* (1978) warns, 'Interdependence is a powerful fantasy because it inspires hope, and we all need our share of it. But interdependence . . . is self-regarding or narcissistic when each member is homogenous with the other.'[358] To this end, I agree with Marti and Ganiel's response:

> '[I]t is important to emphasise that the individualised self is not inevitably narcissistic or egoistic… [T]he individual is inherently social, and this produces "a specific type of social life of which the personhood of every individual is constitutive."
> 'It is not a pure egoism but a *moral individualism*. It remains connected to sympathy for human misery and notions of the rights and dignity of human beings.'[359]

In this, in the same way that Matthew Wood, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, re-contextualised 'self-authority' to truly mean a mere *perceived* self-authority amidst

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[357] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, New Ed edition (New York: Norton, 1979), xv.
[358] Bruce Reed, *The Dynamics of Religion: Process and Movement in Christian Churches* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 110.
[359] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 186.

multiple nonformative authorities, Marti and Ganiel re-contextualise individualism back to the rudimentary tenets of sociology: humans are social beings. Just because participants of the Emerging Church are individualising, does not mean they do not have a sense of compassion for those around them. It is important to note that narcissism was also used as a criticism against the Emerging Church's predecessors, Nondenominational Christianity. Donald Miller explains:

> '[T]hey have incorporated aspects of therapeutic, individualistic, and anti-establishment values into congregational life, but they have simultaneously rejected the narcissism of these countercultural orientations. They are in the business of rebuilding marriages; caring for children, not ignoring them to pursue personal goals; and providing viable alternatives to the perceived violence of contemporary culture.'[360]

That said, individualism does not necessarily lead to narcissism. Furthermore, Tony Jones argues that, for participants of the Emerging Church, 'the "relation between the individual and the collective is blurred"… Instead of being exclusively focussed on group identity and group action, [the Emerging Church] stress[es] that the behaviour of individuals is important to the success of the movement'[361]. He continues:

> '[E]mergent churches highly emphasise the personal choices of their congregants. Among the eight congregations surveyed herein, these activities have occurred: a day for the women of the congregation to discuss the use of anti-depressants, growing an organic garden on the church property, debating the importance of childhood vaccinations, and encouraging members to purchase produce from community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms.'[362]

Ironically, a focus on the individual gives more personalised care to each individual. Rather than being narcissistic, it is actually very accommodating to others' individual needs. There is not one example in my ethnography where I can say that there are

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[360] Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1997, 22.
[361] Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis, MN: Jopa Productions, LLC, 2011), 15.
[362] Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis, MN: Jopa Productions, LLC, 2011), 16.

individuals, or even groups, that did not care for others. In fact, in the way that they demonstrated their intimacy in their relationships, their attention to those traumatised by established Christianity, as well as their care for society and the world as a whole, 'narcissism' would be the last word I would use to describe the Emerging Church.

7 Shallow

Another persistent criticism against the Emerging Church that is related to 'consumerism' is that its theology or ideology is 'watered down' or 'shallow'. In Percy's words:

> 'Is this movement the new highway to mission, or rather a series of new intricate cul-de-sacs? For example, what is fresh expressions doing when it designates its leader "Abbot", and key or core members as "Guardians"? Can it really be much more than hubris that such a dense and traditioned concept as "Abbot" is appropriated for what is still a new, thin, and rather untested group? The danger is that we are all too easily immersed in a semi-detached and sacred meaning-making enclave within consumerist culture. Left to its own devices, the fresh expressions movement may actually be deeply collusive with consumerism, offering alternatives and affirmations simultaneously (but note, not critiques). A Jackson Lears notes in *Fables of Abundance*, "under certain circumstances [the marketplace holds] out a vision of transcendence, however fleeting."'[363]

Here, Percy points at the 'danger' of 'appropriating' certain Christian concepts without the history, context, and background from which these concepts come. With respect to Christian concepts, I do not believe that what the Emerging Church is doing is appropriation at all, but a recalling and reviving concepts that were already part of their culture to begin with; they are in fact *re*-appropriating and *re*-contextualising concepts into a *continuous* history. For the individuals or groups that do not completely reject Christianity – which are, realistically, all of them – the spirit in which the Emerging Church is creatively reusing Christian concepts is one that is hopeful and prideful of the

[363] Martyn Percy, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions' in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church : Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, Canterbury Press, 2008, 34–35.

offerings already existing in their tradition. With respect to incorporating aspects of other traditions – religious or not – this could certainly be argued as appropriation. If by 'dangerous', Percy means the concepts are not used in the way that they were intended – with no continuous history, context, nor background – this may very well be true. However, in the context of appropriating certain terms *alongside* a pre-existing Christian culture, what the Emerging Church is essentially doing is good old-fashioned syncretism. The argument here, therefore, is not against a 'watered down' or 'shallow' spirituality, but one that is evolving alongside the presence of other influences. While this is not a project that delves into the complexity of syncretism, it is well understood that religions are able to maintain an identity while simultaneously appropriating or incorporating foreign concepts into it. To this end, the Emerging Church appears to be a form of Christianity that, on the more traditional end of the spectrum, is recalling and reviving concepts from its own culture; and on the less traditional end of the spectrum, is appropriating and incorporating foreign concepts and further complexifying its own culture.

On a similar vein, by Dean's description of young people's spiritualities as 'a blasé religiosity of a watered-down gospel'[364], 'benign whatever-ism', or 'the cult of nice', she means that its 'superficial pleasantness pales beside Christian teaching on hospitality and compassion.'[365] She continues with the theology behind this:

> 'In the practice of hospitality, God sends me to strangers in the name of Jesus Christ, who calls me to recognise God's image in them and, because we share divine parentage, to acknowledge them – in all their glorious strangeness – as my brothers and sisters. The Bible has much to say about kindness and compassion but says nothing at all about being nice. In Judeo-Christian teaching, God is far less concerned with religion than with identity and relationship: Do we know ourselves to belong to the One who made us, who loves us too much to lose us,

[364] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 12.
[365] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 33.

> and do we live as though this matters? The God of Abraham and Mary is personally and morally concerned about creation and desires not just our obedience but our love. As we discover the God who came among us but is also radically "other" than us, we learn that we are God's beloved, "other" than God and adored as such. For this reason, Jews and Christians have always viewed faith as a way of life born out of love for God, rather than as a set of religious propositions to which we subscribe.'[366]

Furthermore, she says:

> 'The fruit of a consequential Christian faith is holiness, not niceness, which is not a course for the faint of heart. If the Bible is any indication, holy people make us uncomfortable. They take sacrificial risks on behalf of others; they are disarmingly wise and, often, disconcertingly weird… "[B]enign whatever-ism" is a far cry from holiness.'[367]

To this end, I do not think the Emerging Church would disagree. I think they would argue that their valuing of inclusivity is in an extension of Christian hospitality and compassion, and their engagement with the Emerging Church is proof that despite the pain and trauma that they have experienced through Christianity – and amongst one another – they remain willing to take the 'sacrificial risks' required for this value. Its accommodating nature, as explained by Jones earlier in this section is further evidence of this. I think they would also argue that their value of inclusivity, while inspired by Christianity, is not monopolised by Christians either, but shared by all of humanity. In this, the Emerging Church is not 'watered down' or 'shallow' but even extends and deepens Christian values to a wider audience.

8 Heretical

On another end of the theological spectrum, there are indeed critics of the Emerging Church that consider it heretical to Christianity. Marti and Ganiel explain:

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[366] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 33–34.
[367] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 38.

> 'Fuelled by images of heresy in their religious imagination, many conservative Christians very much fear the ECM because of a perception that its adherence to "sound doctrine" is softening (like the virgin birth) or because of its rejection of "orthodox" Christian rituals (like "closed" communion/Eucharist).'[368]

In this, the Emerging Church's predecessors, namely, the House Church Movement, was also criticised for teaching heretical theology, indicating a pattern of shared criticism with its predecessors.[369] Early critics of the Emerging Church in the United States, Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, referenced in the introductory chapter, were concerned that the Emerging Church 'need[s] to see and talk about the problems of over-tolerance'[370]. In the United Kingdom, Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, also referenced in the introductory chapter, '[use] St Paul's Epistles to show how unbiblical the *Mission-shaped Church* account of the Church has become in its desire to underplay the corporeal and participatory aspects of ecclesiology.'[371] While these, and countless others, are very much valid theological arguments against the Emerging Church, this research is not poised to make such arguments. Instead, from a social scientific point of view, I can say that the Emerging Church comprises of its own theologians that can argue for its validity as authentically Christian—which was revealed in the introductory chapter. However, as demonstrated, these theological debates are that of 'apples and oranges' as their basic assumptions regarding how broadly Christianity can be interpreted are completely different. In this, perhaps the Emerging Church is in fact heretical to some Christians—but it does not affect the Emerging Church's continuing to identify itself as Christian.

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[368] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 22.
[369] Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985., 36.
[370] Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 247.
[371] Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), viii.

9 Ungrounded

Related to theological arguments is the argument of the Emerging Church being 'ungrounded', or, from a sociological perspective, at risk of losing its 'chain of memory'. Percy explains:

> '[A]s Bellah notes, multiple-choice ("niche spirituality") "suggests the possibility of million[s of] American religions—one for each of us". So does the fresh expressions movement collude with pluralism and individualism—while cloaked in the rhetoric of "alternative", "new", and "fresh" forms of church? If it does, then the survival of the "community of memory" is at risk—replaced by "empathetic sharing" by loosely associated individuals. Faith is privatised; it becomes the property of a sect that sees itself as engaged with but apart from society.'[372]

'Chain of memory' or 'community of memory' is a concept coined by sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger in her renowned work, 'Religion as a Chain of Memory' (2000). Here, she defines religion as 'an ideological, practical, and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed, and controlled'[373]; or, a 'chain of memory'. In the Emerging Church's practice of 'multiple-choice', 'Sheilaism', or '*religion bricolage*', mentioned in the introductory chapter, Percy argues, this 'chain of memory' will be lost. I would be compelled to agree with this. However, similar to my response to the criticism of the Emerging Church's being 'watered down' or 'shallow' with respect to 'appropriation', some individuals in the Emerging Church maintain their Christian identity or culture, and despite taking it in a direction that may be different from established or mainline traditions, it continues to add to the 'chain of memory' that is authentically Christian in its own right. Furthermore, even for those who do not

[372] Martyn Percy, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions' in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church : Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, Canterbury Press, 2008, 32–33.

[373] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Rutgers University Press, 2000, 82.

maintain an engagement for established Christianity, as explained in the introductory chapter, 'multiple-choice', 'Sheilaism', or '*religion bricolage*' actually have cohesive doctrines that are a 'chain of memory' in themselves.

In the case for those individuals in the Emerging Church that do not maintain their Christian identity or culture, I point to the work of sociologist Courtney Bender in her book, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (2010). Here, she offers a unique visioning of practitioners of '*religion bricolage*' as 'new metaphysicals' or 'new mystics'[374]. In this book, one of her primary inquiries was to determine how, if at all, the 'chain of memory' is created for these 'new metaphysicals': 'How is a tradition felt and carried when its very practice and theology claim a different reading of history and the past than what we generally understand to be carried in traditions?'[375] At the end of the book, she answers this question thusly:

> '[I]t is . . . difficult for us to imagine modern people living in a world where the divine is felt and apprehended, where selves are porous, and where enchantments are inescapably present. Yet this is precisely what many metaphysical practices compel us to consider. We find that the genre memories various practices, embedded within numerous social fields, continue to reproduce (and work on) social life, unevenly making and shaping religious experience, and allowing metaphysicals to find themselves living in worlds that are thoroughly enchanted and populated by spirits, immanently known and unknown. To say the least, these practices seem to run counter to what some argue is secularism's demands for conscious belief that comes in the wake of disenchantment.'[376]

For practitioners of '*religion bricolage*' or 'new metaphysicals', a 'chain of memory', like institutional boundaries, is just as permeable. One must look beyond traditional ways in which this 'chain of memory' is formed, and recognise that despite stretching beyond traditional boundaries, a 'chain of memory' is still being formed. In this, a

[374] Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 7.
[375] Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 4–5.
[376] Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 185–86.

'chain of memory' can also be individualised. It can also still continue to be shared by certain groups, granted a shared tracing of a 'chain of memory'.

In these new ways of viewing the 'chain of memory', it is much more complex, but not lost. Considering what is now known about self-authority, it is only ever truly perceived, amidst multiple authorities. In this, traditional authorities, or what Hervieu-Léger calls 'custodians of memory', always remain, in that they are always recognised, alongside the self, in the creation of a '*religion bricolage*'. This is also reminiscent of sociologist Grace Davie's concept of 'vicarious religion' in her renowned work, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (2000), where, despite a vast number of European people not attending church, they are dependent on the 'custodians of memory'.[377] Furthermore, this 'chain of memory' is one that can continuously 'mutate' in the presence of the diversifying population.[378] In this, the Emerging Church, even for its participants that may not maintain Christianity as its primary identity or culture, will still create a 'chain of memory' with Christianity as part of it.

10 Insignificant

Moving away from the arguments relating to 'consumerism', another criticism towards the Emerging Church, related to the loss of the 'chain of memory', is that it is a 'small' and 'weak' religious milieu, and, therefore, insignificant from the wider perspective of Christianity or religion. However, the actual research determining the size of the Emerging Church is immensely variable. According to missiologist Eddie Gibbs and anthropologist Ryan Bolger in 2005, using very strict criteria, there are only about 200 Emerging Church communities globally, with most of them being in the United

[377] Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, 177–80.
[378] Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, 176–94.

Kingdom and the United States.[379] By contrast, according to anthropologist James Bielo in 2011, in just the United States alone, there are over 700 Emerging Church communities.[380] According to Ryan Burge and Paul Djupe in 2014, 'seven percent of . . . clergy [in the United States] classify themselves as emergent', which 'is not an insignificant number, especially for such a recent movement'.[381] In 2016, Geoge Lings published that up to 9.8 percent of all church attendees go to a Fresh Expressions.[382] Keeping in mind, however, that not all Fresh Expressions can be considered Emerging Church, and that not all Emerging Church participants in the United Kingdom would say that they 'attend church', this figure might reflect an accurate number. Considering the most generous figures of the Emerging Church, though they are still small, as Burge and Djupe mention, they are most certainly not insignificant. Furthermore, these do not take into account the permeability or the wide reaches of the boundaries of the Emerging Church, when considering the broadness of the milieu. It also does not incorporate the impact it has made to the Christian landscape in both the United States and the United Kingdom since its inception, as mentioned in the second chapter of this research. I point at this particularly in the third of six directions that the Emerging Church has evolved into in the past decade, where I discuss individuals and churches that have always been explicitly Christian, but have integrated the teachings and characteristics of the Emerging Church. In my ethnography, an example of this might be St Luke's, which is a highly

[379] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.
[380] James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 10.
[381] Ryan Burge & Paul Djupe, 'Emergent Church Practices in America: Inclusion and Deliberation in American Congregations', in *Review of Religious Research*, , 2014, 1–23, 18.
[382] George Lings, *The Day for Small Things: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church in 21 Dioceses of the Church of England*, Sheffield, UK, Church Army's Research Unit, November 2016, 10–11.

populated and vibrant congregation, demonstrating just how well the value of inclusivity as taught by the Emerging Church resonates with people.

11 Reactionary

Finally, and related to the criticism that the Emerging Church is 'small' and 'weak', the last common criticism towards it is that it is a 'reactionary' phenomenon that will be short-lived if not already 'dead'[383]. In many ways, I have already responded to this, particularly in the second chapter, responding to certain sentiments about the Emerging Church being 'a young movement grown old very quickly'[384], or the questioning about whether or not Fresh Expressions is 'still fresh'[385]. Firstly, on the topic of the Emerging Church being 'reactionary', while there is no doubt that the Emerging Church, especially in its earliest incarnation, is defined by its stance against established Christianity, through time, it has become observable that the Emerging Church did not maintain a trajectory of aversion: some went towards the Missional Church direction, others went the 'new wave emerging' direction; some went to established churches that incorporated the values of the Emerging Church, others went the direction of more established Christianity. Secondly, for those that maintain an aversion towards established Christianity, as demonstrated in my ethnography, this comes not from a purely malicious space but from one of pain and trauma inflicted by established Christianity itself. To this end, the Emerging Church has served as a safe place that allowed for these individuals to heal this injury—as demonstrated by a number of my informants. For others, perhaps this injury was never healed, or, perhaps, even if it was, Christianity no longer served as a location that they felt they could go back to. To

[383] Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 174.
[384] Leonard Sweet, "A Response to Recent Misunderstandings," 2007. [Accesed 17 August 2018]
[385] John Walker, *Testing Fresh Expressions: Identity and Transformation*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2014, 1.

this end, the ‘custodians of memory’ will remain present for them to ‘vicariously’ live through, as Christianity will always remain as part of their own personal history. Going back to my ethnography, considering how ‘reactionary’ and ‘short-lived’ the Emerging Church is criticised to be, it is important to note that in the duration of the seven years of this research, seven years that would be considered the downward trajectory of the Emerging Church’s momentum, not a single one of my ethnography groups has folded. Today, the Emerging Church might no longer be a fashionable concept. Nevertheless, its impact continues to resonate and remain.

* * *

Any remaining common criticisms against the Emerging Church have to do with its relationship to the wider landscape of religion in contemporary society—the focus of this research. I turn now to a final conclusion, recalling my original inquiries, and intending to shed light on the things that can be learned from this research from a wider lens.

VIII Conclusion: Healing Christian Trauma

1 Introduction

Recalling the discussions referenced in the introductory chapter of this research, many critics of the Emerging Church criticised it for not being 'authentically church', and therefore criticising its authenticity as part of Christianity. While this is indeed a fair position, oftentimes, in these criticisms, there is little empathetic understanding of the actual participants of the Emerging Church, and why individuals might be attracted to it. The Emerging Church is evaluated from a theological, ideological, or theoretical perspective, and not as individuals making sincere and meaningful choices for themselves. Through this ethnography, I was able to shed this more empathetic light on the participants of the Emerging Church—and while some of them might be averse to being considered Christian, oftentimes, it is by Christianity's very rejection of them that pushed them to feeling that way. Many in the Emerging Church, in all sincerity, care deeply for their Christian faith and identity—and therefore should be considered authentically Christian . . . though perhaps a new kind.

In this chapter, I summarise my findings and offer a more detailed description of the Emerging Church based on its most deeply held value: inclusivity. I then respond to each of my initial research questions and detail the extent to which the Emerging Church is Christian and Self-religion. With this, I set out the implications of these findings for religion in contemporary society: it is relevant to Christianity because it demonstrates some of the reasons why some people stop attending church; it is also relevant to Self-religion as it demonstrates that it is not a milieu that is restricted to alternative religion, and that the 'nones' are not necessarily unreligious.

2 The Sacralisation of Inclusivity: A Summary

Recalling all of the observations and interviews as a whole from each of my ethnography groups, while they all are distinct from one another, they all display the characteristics of the sacralisation of inclusivity.

Grace is the globally recognised ‘alternative worship’ and Fresh Expressions group that primarily meets at St Mary’s Church of England parish church in South Ealing, London, on Sunday evenings, with a more intimate, informal, gathering at a private residence on Thursday evenings. When investigating the ‘valleys’ of experience at Grace, one could observe a certain difficulty with their relationship to established Christianity. This was further confirmed with their noteworthy ‘challenging moment’ as a group. This was a time when a member of St Mary’s leadership instructed them to follow Canon Law with respect to their liturgies, as opposed to their own. This event revealed the value of liturgical inclusivity in Grace. Furthermore, Jared’s personal experience sheds light on a form of suspicion to traditional structures of authority in established Christianity. When investigating the ‘peaks’ of experience at Grace, ‘community’ was pointed as a shared priority to the group, demonstrating the presence of belonging and social identity at Grace. Jared also discussed positive qualities such as thoughtfulness among participants, as well as its egalitarian leadership model. Furthermore, one noteworthy event was a story about the inclusion of a particular social outcast into the group. All of these experiences, seen together, demonstrate a valuing of social as well as theological inclusivity in Grace. Lastly, upon observing one of Grace’s primary ‘services’, which was a variation of a traditional service, but without any one clear authority, one can discern how these values of theological inclusivity are sustained and socialised. While I was not able to observe a Thursday evening gathering, I would guess these would reflect a similar dynamic as the more intimate gatherings I observed at

Soul Space, the Borough Common, and SOUP, where self-authority is summoned in order to maintain and socialise both a socially and theologically inclusive environment.

Moot is best known as a New Monastic, Emerging Church, and Fresh Expressions group that primarily meets at Wren Church, St Mary Aldermary, a Church of England parish church in the City of London, with more intimate, informal, 'mini-moot' gatherings in a private residence on an evening during the week. When investigating the 'valleys' of experience at Moot, it was clear that many participants of Moot have been hurt and traumatised by established Christianity, to the point that despite being participants of Moot, they would not identify as Christian. They experienced a period of 'extreme pain' and 'extreme messiness' as a group as a result of being socially inclusive 'to a fault'—they allowed for individuals who were not competent leaders to hold positions of authority, and suffered for it. Observed together, these 'really, really, really bad times' shed light on an extreme value of social inclusivity at Moot, which was likely a result of an extreme experience of alienation inflicted by established Christianity. When investigating the 'peaks' of experience at Moot, it was highly emphasised that the outward presence of inclusivity was a much higher priority than particular theological positions. This was further emphasised in the distinction of 'weekday Mooters', which essentially distinguished any individual who came into the church building as being part of the group, as well as many examples of Moot's care for individuals to feel safe and comfortable in the group. Without question, by the way both Kate and Aaron talked about Moot, as well as its experiences as a group, it is clear that they value social as well as theological inclusivity and create belonging and social identity centred on these values. Moot's primary Sunday 'service', which was a variation of a traditional liturgy, demonstrated how theological inclusivity was sustained and socialised. However, as with Grace, I was unable to observe their more intimate 'mini-moot' gatherings. Despite

this, and especially because of how utterly important inclusivity is to the group, I would imagine that social and theological inclusivity is sustained at the 'mini-moots' in the same way that Soul Space, the Borough Common, and SOUP did, in their deferring to self-authority during discussions. Nevertheless, it was already observable to a lesser extent during the periods of socialising before and after the primary 'service'.

The Earlsfield Collective, formerly the Earlsfield Friary, is best known as one of the most popular and 'successful' New Monastic and Fresh Expressions groups based in the Earlsfield neighbourhood in London. When investigating the 'valleys' of experience at the Earlsfield Collective, it was revealed that many participants of the group have had experiences of pain and trauma inflicted by the theological rigidity of Christianity, which resulted in the group's collectively conceived theology of a 'mutual Christ'. As a group, they collectively had a difficult time trying to support a social outcast, which eventually resulted positively with this person now being an active member of the group. This highlights a deep commitment to social inclusivity by the group—despite being a very intimate community, they are willing to welcome even social outcasts to become members. At this point, belonging and social identity within the group is already very discernable. However, when investigating the 'peaks' of experience at the Earlsfield Collective, this was further affirmed in Joe's description of the group as being 'more like a family', and their collective commitment to hospitality. This hospitality, then, extends to the spiritual and social messages that are invoked in their interactive art installations that they periodically present to the public. Upon observing one of these installations – 'The Adtent' – I was able to observe the broad reaches of their spiritual and social commitment. In all of this, their values of social and theological inclusivity are evidently being sustained and socialised, from as intimately as opening their home to social

outcasts, to as broadly as holding public events that are accessible to people of all backgrounds.

St Luke's Church of England parish church in West Holloway, London, is well-known throughout the United Kingdom, not so much because it is an Emerging Church group, though it could be considered as such, but because it is the community led by Tomlinson of House Church Movement, Holy Joes, and 'post-Evangelical' fame. Their primary gathering is a Sunday morning 'family service', with an 'alternative worship'-style gathering on the second Sunday evening of the month. When investigating the 'valleys' of experience at St Luke's, it can be discerned that many members of the congregation at St Luke's, despite participating at events there, find being associated with established Christianity very challenging. While there were no particularly trying moments shared by the community as a whole, it was mentioned that during moments of difficulty, members of the congregation made efforts to keep the community intact. One particular challenge that Tomlinson voices, however, is the challenge of having too small a building for the number of people and events that occur at St Luke's. He continues by saying this is a 'good challenge' because people are attracted to St Luke's 'product': inclusivity. Tomlinson is highly aware and explicit about St Luke's inclusivity being at the centre of everything that St Luke's represents. In mentioning how its participants find established Christianity challenging, how individuals respond to difficulties in general, and naming this 'product', it becomes evident that the adamant promotion of inclusivity is related to the adversity towards established Christianity. When investigating the 'peaks' of experience at St Luke's, the congregation is described as 'very strongly, a community of friends', amidst the value of inclusivity continuing to be pressed. The Sunday 'family service' is also mentioned as a highlight of the group, particularly because it effectively creates belonging and social identity in this value of

inclusivity. When observing this 'family service', I would say that the event certainly has a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. However, because of the number of people present, it would take more than just attending one 'service' to gauge how St Luke's value of inclusivity was being sustained and socialised. Fortunately, I was able to observe Soul Space, where the atmosphere was equally friendly and welcoming, but with much more intimacy. At Soul Space, while also being primarily led by Tomlinson, the 'service' had much more room for personal reflection and interpretation, which certainly demonstrated one of the many ways in which the value of inclusivity was being sustained and socialised at St Luke's.

The Borough Common is best known as the Emerging Church group in London that is independently managed and not at all connected to an established institutional church. Until recently, their primary gathering was on Sunday evenings in Borough, London, but is now on the first Sunday of the month in Camberwell, London. When investigating the 'valleys' of experience at the Borough Common, one of the most repeated themes about participants of the Borough Common is that many of them have been hurt or traumatised by established Christianity. Based on Randy's experience, the Borough Common was a way for him to heal his personal traumas—although he was not explicit about these traumas being from established Christianity, it is implied. Later in the group's history, they collectively encountered a deeply wounding experience, which essentially questioned the integrity of the group's value of social inclusivity. With this, it becomes evident that the Borough Common is a place to heal for those have been hurt or traumatised by established Christianity, through valuing inclusivity. When investigating the 'peaks' of experience at the Borough Common, the theme that was constantly repeated was the fact that the Borough Common is an intimate group of friends. It is also a group of friends that are broad- and open-minded, who create a sense

of belonging and social identity around theological and social inclusivity with these qualities. Upon observing the Borough Common's primary Sunday evening gathering, like at Grace, there was a group of people that shared the responsibility of facilitating and leading the evening's events. Like Soul Space, there was also lots of space to be able to share one's personal reflections with the rest of the group. In observing this intimate gathering and all the elements in it, one is able to discern that self-authority among individuals is encouraged and affirmed, which is what sustains and socialises theological and social inclusivity among the group.

Through the years, there have been various smaller, more intimate, Borough Common gatherings that met on an evening during the week, but none of them were more resilient than the Spirituality Group, or SOUP. SOUP meets every Tuesday evening at a private residence, and can even be argued to be an independent group from Borough Common. When investigating the 'valleys' of experience at SOUP, while its participants are, like the Borough Common, comprised of individuals 'who have issues with mainstream church', they are not so critical of it that they are averse to discuss God or pray. In some ways, SOUP is a reaction to the Borough Common. However, its founding was more an organic occurrence rather than a situation of grave difficulty. In terms of the most traumatic experience that participants of SOUP have experienced collectively, they would respond with the same trauma that was experienced with the Borough Common. Generally speaking, SOUP is a group that is similar to the Borough Common in every way, except for that it is slightly more comfortably with Christianity than the overall feel that the Borough Common exudes. It is a place for individuals to gather in inclusivity in a way that they did not experience it in established Christianity. When investigating the 'peaks' of experience at SOUP, it was its depth of intimacy that was most boasted. Likely because its distinguishing characteristic from the Borough

Common is its engagement with spiritual practice, it was also explained that it was this practice that made it as intimate as it was. That being said, SOUP also boasted events that were not spiritual at all, but purely social, because they are able open SOUP up to individuals who might not participate with it otherwise. To this end, it is evident that SOUP creates belonging and social identity with its value of inclusivity. Upon observing a SOUP gathering, like Soul Space and the Borough Common, there was certainly lots of space for personal reflection and interpretation. Throughout the conversations, self-authority was constantly being summoned, particularly in moments where individuals gave more critical opinions. In this, SOUP is a space where social and theological inclusivity is sustained and socialised.

All of these groups, regardless of their own particular variation, value inclusivity, create belonging and social identity with it, and sustain and socialise this value among its participants. In this, I argue that the defining feature of the Emerging Church is its sacralisation of inclusivity.

3 Implications

The original research questions for this project, set forth in the introductory chapter were:

- To what extent is the Emerging Church Christian?
- To what extent is the Emerging Church Self-religion?
- What does it mean for the Emerging Church to be Christian or Self-religion?

Regarding the first question, the way in which I measure the Emerging Church's being Christian is with its ability to sustain an engagement with the wider tradition. Through my ethnography, I can argue that all of my groups have sustained a steady engagement with the wider Christian tradition. Most of the groups, in fact, were and continue to be officially recognised as part of the Church of England: Grace, Moot, the Earlsfield Collective, and St Luke's. The last of these, St Luke's, in fact, functions as

parish church, as opposed to having a special status such as 'Fresh Expressions'. Some of their participants who hold a leadership position, in fact, are ordained ministers in the Church of England. They also all maintained an engagement with Christian liturgy and other forms of Christian authority, albeit with added variations. One – or arguably two – of my observation groups, the Borough Common and SOUP, have and continue to function completely independently from established Christianity, yet have participants that continue to engage with the Christian tradition in various ways. Randy, who was the primary interview informant for the Borough Common, was adamant about identifying with Christianity to an extent that he cannot separate himself from it—Christianity is his 'blood'. Elle, who was the primary interview informant for SOUP, not only founded and hosts most of the SOUP gatherings, but also regularly attends St Luke's. In fact, both Randy and Elle, in time, demonstrated a closer relationship with Christianity through the time that I observed their group, than moving away from it. In both the Borough Common and SOUP, Christian language, authority, and culture permeated their behaviour, so much that it was obvious that despite how participants might identify with Christianity, most of them came from Christian backgrounds. While there were no ordained participants in the Borough Common or SOUP, there were many, in the course of my observing them, who have been in the official discernment process towards ordained ministry. Considering my observations, it would be more absurd to say that the Emerging Church is not Christian than saying it is. The Emerging Church, despite all its variations and criticisms towards established Christianity, sustains an active engagement with the wider Christian tradition, and therefore can be argued to be part of the wider Christian tradition.

Regarding the second question, the way in which I measure the Emerging Church's being Self-religion is by observing the extent to which the doctrine of self-

authority is being socialised. To this end, though not immediately observable in some of the groups, it could be argued that the Emerging Church socialises the doctrine of self-authority. In Grace, while I was unable to observe their more informal Tuesday night gathering, from observing 'Café', I got the sense that the sense of belonging and social identity in the value of inclusivity was created in these more intimate social gatherings. In Moot, like Grace, I was unable to observe their more intimate 'mini-Moot' gatherings, but it was a bit clearer, based on the description from the 'Parish Profile' as well as my informants' description of it, that these were a space where individuals socialised the doctrine of self-authority. In the introductory chapter, recall that I referenced Kate's description of her personal spirituality as an example of how self-authority is present in her own understand of herself. Seen along with the other Moot gatherings, one can make the connection and come to a reasonable conclusion that the doctrine of self-authority is in fact being socialised at Moot. The doctrine of self-authority was least observable at the Earlsfield Collective, but it was still visible in some ways. Considering their ideology of a 'mutual Christ', this implies that every individual in the group has their own personal understanding and interpretation of the concept, 'Christ', and yet, they mutually support it. Their interactive art installations, too, are created to be accessible to anyone in the public, left to be interpreted by individuals at their own devices. In this, the priority of the Earlsfield Collective is for individuals to connect to spirituality and social engagement on their own terms, not based on their particular teachings. In this, it appears that the Earlsfield Collective certainly socialise the doctrine of self-authority not only within their groups, but also in their neighbourhood. At St Luke's, the doctrine of self-authority was most observable at Soul Space, as it presented many opportunities for personal reflection and sharing. Individuals were prompted to voice their opinions on seemingly any topic that they wished, which were not met with any form of rejection. St

Luke's was also very adamant in its promotion of the value of inclusivity, which was socialised in the encouragement of individual, personal opinion. At the Borough Common, the socialisation of self-authority was very clearly present, considering how much personal sharing was involved among participants and co-facilitators. Each facilitator shared personal ideas as well as other ideas that were personally interesting to them, and each participant was encouraged to do the same during the times for open discussion. At SOUP, there were also many opportunities to share one's own opinions. At times where certain opinions might be controversial, self-authority was even emphasised, shedding light on the practice of this socialisation of self-authority: self-authority functions as a tool for avoiding potential conflict, and for maintaining a mutual respect for differing opinions. Therefore, the socialisation of self-authority is particularly observable in the context of open discussions, where individuals are either prompted to invoke self-authority, or simply defer to it on their own volition. With respect to the value of inclusivity for the Emerging Church, self-authority was invoked in order to avoid making anyone feel alienated in their potentially differing personal opinions.

In this qualitative research, I was able to determine that the Emerging Church is *both* Christianity and Self-religion. Despite its position of constantly critiquing established Christianity, in doctrine and practice, it actually sustains a steady engagement with it. On the topic of Self-religion, however, it is important to recognise the extent of the role of self-authority. Recalling Matthew Wood's re-conceptualisation of self-authority, he points that it is present amidst multiple nonformative authorities. 'Nonformative', here, is the key term. In a group that practices Self-religion, Wood observes, there should be no single authority that completely dominates an individual. In the case of the Emerging Church, because of its sustained engagement with Christianity

– however critical – it actually still consistently recognises the Christian authority over others. While there very well may be individuals in the Emerging Church that put Christianity on level ground with other authorities, the fact that the Emerging Church as a whole maintains an engagement with it, actually makes Christianity a formative – though perhaps not a particularly strong – authority. To this end, while the Emerging Church is both Christianity and Self-religion, compared to other Self-religions, it is evidently more Christian.

Now, connecting these findings to the rest of the contemporary religious landscape, I turn first to the phenomenon of the 'nones'. Currently, while it is understood that individuals who identify with 'no religion' might be engaged in spirituality in some way, the extent to which they are engaged remains a vast mystery. This research supports this understanding, and further challenges a couple of general assumptions. Firstly, that religious identification is inseparable from religious belief and behaviour. This could not be more false by the findings of this research. Here, it is evident that while some participants of the Emerging Church might identify with 'no religion' in a survey, the group that they find belonging and social identity with can still be an established religious tradition. Secondly, and related to the first, that those who identify with 'no religion' in a survey are automatically nonreligious in belief and behaviour—which then must be proven otherwise. Why is there not an assumption that 'nones' are completely religious in belief and behaviour? This research demonstrates that this can most certainly be the case. This research demonstrates that 'nones' can be as religious in action and behaviour as anyone who might identify with an established religious tradition. All of this being said, despite my initial interest in the 'nones', this research eventually took a direction that only skims the surface in terms of how deep research on the 'nones' could be. It is my hope that in challenging these two

assumptions at this level, more, deeper research can be conducted on this ever mysterious demographic.

Regarding Self-religion in the wider contemporary religious landscape, this research demonstrates a couple of things. Firstly, that Self-religion is not restricted to alternative religion. Most literature on Self-religion is restricted to alternative religion, and because of this, research on established religious traditions are limited in their tools to be able to understand its dynamics. The method in which to analyse Self-religion the Emerging Church as presented in this research – that is, in observing for the socialisation of self-authority amidst other, formative and nonformative, authorities – is something that can be applied in many social contexts. Furthermore, it would be interesting for this method to be applied in a number of other religious and nonreligious contexts.

Secondly, observing for Self-religion sheds light on the dynamics of diversity and pluralisation. Early theorists of secularisation, particularly sociologist, Peter Berger, in his renowned work, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1969), once made the claim that in the context of diversity and pluralisation, '*ipso facto* plunges religion into a crisis of credibility'[386]; that the more religious options there are, the more individuals are compelled to not be religious at all. Ideas about the landscape of diversity and religion has since developed since this assertion, and, to be fair, Berger has since revoked this position of his. However, this assumption has remained—evident in the aforementioned assumptions about the 'nones'. In the process of observing for Self-religion, it becomes evident that choosing 'no religion' might actually be a stance for multiple religious positions, and not against all religions in general. 'No religion' can mean that an individual simply has no preference for any *one* religion, and, simultaneously, can actually identify with multiple religious traditions. Take, for

[386] Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Garden City, NY, Anchor Books, 1969, 151.

example, an account from Dean's work, about two friends of differing religious traditions:

> 'Listen to this conversation in the back seat of my car last week, between my thirteen-year-old daughter, Shannon, and her Hindu friend, Lali:
> 'Shannon: So how many gods do you have?
> 'Lali: [Laughing] A lot! But—it's complicated. They take different forms.
> 'Shannon: Like a cow. You don't eat a cow because it could be God.
> 'Lali: No, everybody thinks that. The god rides on the cow. He doesn't become a cow.
> 'Shannon: [Relieved] That would be bad, to eat your God. I think all religions' gods are part of the same god.
> 'Lali: Yeah, we need a lot of gods. One religion can't do everything.
> 'You can appreciate the motivation behind such slippery theology. The purpose of this conversation was not doctrinal fidelity, but establishing common ground between friends… The resolution is not a mutual understanding of Shannon and Lali's respective religions, but a blurring of the boundaries between them.'[387]

In this account, Dean explains, the 'experience of religion is homogenising, not polarising'.[388] Here, one can observe that self-authority is invoked – 'I think all religions' gods are part of the same god' – which is what brings the two potentially opposing positions into a mutual understanding. It also demonstrates that religion does not get rejected or disappear, but actually, is 'homogenised'. I would actually argue that the two religions here are complexified—while the two came to a mutual understanding, my understanding is that they both retained their own respective religious identities alongside potentially incorporating this new piece of information into their worldviews. In other words, Shannon did not lose her Christianity, Lali did not lose her Hinduism, and they did not combine their religions to create one new one; what actually happened was: Shannon revised her Christianity, Lali revised her Hinduism, and they both recognise the other's religion as also being part of their newly revised worldview. For participants of the Emerging Church, and anybody practicing Self-religion, ideas are

[387] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 31.
[388] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 30.

constantly being complexified amidst the presence of diversity and pluralisation. Individuals are choosing 'no religion' because one single religion is no longer representative of the complexity of diversity and pluralisation. That said, the subject of diversity and pluralisation are two vast subjects that are only being addressed in this paragraph in this research. It would be interesting to see more research done on the subject of diversity and pluralisation in the context of Self-religion.

Lastly, regarding Christianity in the wider contemporary religious landscape, this research demonstrates a number of things. Firstly, it demonstrates one significant reason why some people might dissociate from Christianity: it can be painfully alienating. It was revealed numerous times by informants that many of the Emerging Church's participants were seeking refuge from the traumas that they experienced from established Christianity. Considering they can be considered a 'reactionary' group, they are 'reacting' to their negative experiences of alienation—evident in their deep valuing of inclusivity, and sometimes even to the extent of overcompensating. Dean, actually, understood this trend, and said, 'I sympathise with Christians who default to [a diluted faith] because they deem it better than religious bigotry that can make the gospel seem like anything but good news.'[389] However, presses the criticism of 'diluted faith': '[One fallacy] is to think that the only alternative to [a diluted faith] is religious bigotry, and that the only alternative to religious bigotry is diluted faith.'[390] If genuinely empathising with the pain and trauma that many participants of the Emerging Church have experienced, to call their ideology 'watered down', 'shallow', or, as mentioned here, 'diluted', invalidates this experience and would likely further alienate these wounded individuals and groups. To many of them, Christian terms and concepts – like, as

[389] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 189.
[390] Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, 190.

mentioned by my informants, 'Jesus', 'church', or 'prayer' – are difficult because they are saturated with negative and painful experiences. That said, their exploration of 'untainted' concepts in Christianity or even concepts from other traditions comes from their persistence to live out their Christian values in an environment that was not constantly triggering their traumas. This latter point is also not insignificant—the fact that participants continue to engage with Christianity despite their traumas attest to the fact that they care about Christianity enough to maintain some sort of engagement, albeit critical. In time, as I was able to observe in a number of my interview informants as well as groups, these traumas were eventually healed in this environment of sacralised inclusivity. To this end, Christianity can learn from the Emerging Church as to how to better care for their own and not push them away.

From another perspective, and already mentioned briefly earlier, some people are dissociating from Christianity and exploring other traditions because certain aspects of Christianity are simply not meeting the spiritual needs of people in the contemporary religious landscape. While this is sometimes criticised as a form of 'diluted faith' from the perspective of Christianity, those that are doing the exploring are actually doing it in the spirit of deepening their faith. As illuminated by Bender earlier about 'new metaphysicals', 'modern people' are now 'living in a world where the divine is felt and apprehended, where selves are porous, and where enchantments are inescapably present'.[391] In this, 'the divine' is omnipresent, not restricted by an institution, and there becomes no more need for traditional boundaries. As demonstrated in the example of Shannon and Lali, there is also a need for the support of this new way of complexifying one's worldview amidst diversity and pluralisation, which can be found in Self-religion. Theologian, John Drane, in *The McDonaldisation of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity,*

[391] Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2010, 185.

and the Future of the Church (2000), observes that for some people, 'leaving the Church is actually a way of maintaining their faith'[392]. They often have attitudes of boredom with Christian teachings, and 'leaving the Church often seems to be a consequence of people dealing with issues of personal maturity and growth in their lives'; that 'leaving the Church' is actually a step towards maturity and growth.[393] Furthermore, when encountering these people now engaging in practices of Self-religion, Drane says, 'I know that mostly of the people now attracted by what would once have been regarded as wacky ideas are exactly the people who, a generation or two ago, would have been pillars of their local churches'.[394] To this end, perhaps Christianity can learn from the Emerging Church as to how to deepen and engage people in spirituality in a way that is relevant to a social landscape of diversity and pluralisation.

In defence of the Church, particularly the Church of England and the Methodist Church, they acknowledge and support Fresh Expressions. However, this does not take away from the fact that there are still those individuals and groups who have been hurt and traumatised by the Church. This suggests that despite established Christianity's support of Emerging Church groups, there remains much work to do on the institutional end.

A critical response Christianity might have to these suggestions is something that Percy has voiced:

> '[T]he local church is under severe pressure from both outside and inside the church. Ironically, the proliferation of the fresh expressions movement may threaten the relationship between religious and social capital. But if the fresh expressions movement turns out to be an expression of post-associationalism, there may be serious trouble ahead. The lack of "thick" connection between a

[392] John Drane, *The McDonaldisation of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity, and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2000), 5.
[393] John Drane, *The McDonaldisation of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity, and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2000), 5.
[394] John Drane, *The McDonaldisation of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity, and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2000), 12.

> fresh expression and local commitment (duty, obligation, and so on) may diminish social capital, despite many claims to the contrary.'[395]

In this, Percy acknowledges that the purpose of the Fresh Expressions initiative – and the Emerging Church, to an extent – is to engage with people in ways that is relevant to contemporary society, with the intent to eventually acquire the 'social capital' that established Christianity is very rapidly losing. However, he also recognises that this is a risk, because, considering what is known about Self-religion, participants are no longer bound by traditional forms of organisation.

Established Christianity needs to sincerely reflect on its function in people's lives. Based on what has been revealed by the Emerging Church in this research, people are not dissociating from Christianity because they are 'consumerists' who are 'apathetic' and 'narcissistic', replacing their spirituality with one that is 'diluted' and 'ungrounded'. They are dissociating from Christianity because it is currently functioning as a place that alienates and causes serious injury. People are also dissociating from it because it refuses to recognise ways to engage people amidst an ever complexifying world. People are actively seeking a radical form of inclusivity that continues to deepen them in a world that is diverse and saturated with the divine. Does Christianity want to take this opportunity, or let it slip away, as it has been, in its determination to retain a particular form of organisation? Indeed, it may be a risk, but for the sake of those who are sincere about their Christianity, is it not worth it?

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[395] Martyn Percy, 'Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions' in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church : Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, Canterbury Press, 2008, pp. 27–39, 32.

Appendix I: Ethnography Group Details

Grace

St Mary's Church
St Mary's Road
Ealing
London
W5 5RH
www.freshworship.org

Primary Meeting: 'Service', second Saturday of each month at 8pm

Primary Informant: 'Jared'

Points of Contact
- Participant Observation: One (1) Saturday – 10 September 2016
- In-depth Interview: 'Jared' – 11 September 2016

Moot

Wren Church, St Mary Aldermary
Watling Street
London
EC4M 9BW
www.moot.uk.net

Primary Meeting: 'Sunday Service', Sundays at 6pm

Primary Informants
- 'Aaron'
- 'Kate'

Points of Contact
- Participant Observations
  - One (1) 'Meditation Group: Stressed in the City', Wednesdays at 6.30pm – 26 October 2011
  - Two (2) 'Contemplative Prayer', Thursdays at 6.30pm – 15 September 2016, 29 September 2016
  - One (1) 'Sunday Service', Sundays at 6pm – 18 September 2016
- In-depth Interviews
  - 'Aaron' – 29 September 2016
  - 'Kate' – 29 September 2016

The Earlsfield Collective

Earlsfield
London
SW18

Primary Meeting: Ongoing

Primary Informant: 'Joe'

Points of Contact
- Participant Observation: One (1) Installation – 17 December 2016
- In-depth Interview: 'Joe' – 13 September 2016

St Luke's, West Holloway

St Luke's Church
Hillmarton Road
London
N7 9JE
www.saintlukeschurch.org.uk

Primary Meetings
- 'Family Communion', Sundays at 11am (parish-wide)
- 'Soul Space', second Sunday of each month at 7pm (Emerging Church)

Primary Informant: Dave Tomlinson

Points of Contact
- Participant Observations
  - One (1) 'Family Communion' – 25 September 2016
  - One (1) 'Soul Space' – 11 September 2016
- In-depth Interview: Dave Tomlinson – 20 September 2016

The Borough Common

2006-2016 The Borough Welsh Congregational Chapel
90 Southwark Bridge Road
London
SE1 0EX

2016-Present St Giles Centre
Camberwell Church Street
Camberwell
London
SE5 8RB

www.facebook.com/groups/boroughcommon

Primary Meetings
- 2006-2016: 'Service', Sundays at 6pm
- 2016-Present: 'Service', first Sundays of the month at 11.30am

Primary Informant: 'Randy'

Points of Contact

- Participant Observations
  - 2011-2013 all meetings
  - 2016: One (1) 'Service' – 2 October 2016
- In-depth Interview: 'Randy' – 15 September 2016

The Borough Common: Spirituality Group (SOUP)

Walworth
London
SE17
www.facebook.com/groups/586876191389668

Primary Meeting: Tuesdays at 7pm

Primary Informant: 'Elle'

Points of Contact
- Participant Observations
  - Four (4) Tuesday meetings – 6 September 2016, 13 September 2016, 20 September 2016, 27 September 2016
- In-depth Interview: 'Elle' – 20 September 2016

Appendix II: In-depth Interview Questions

- What are some positive qualities that you have to say about [group name]? Explain.
- What are some positive experiences you have had in [group name]? Explain.
- What are some negative qualities you have to say about [group name]? Explain.
- What are some negative experiences you have had in [group name]? Explain.
- In what ways do you feel you fit in [group name]? Why? Is this important? Why?
- In what ways do you feel you don't fit in [group name]? Why? Is this important? Why?
- Do you like being part of [group name]? Why?
- In as much or as little detail as you like, how would you describe your religious identity—if you have one?

Appendix III: Interview Transcripts

'Jared' (Grace)

Int : If you could say your name and the community that you're involved in?

R : Jared, involved in Grace.

Int: The service last night, would you describe that as a typical service or gathering? Would you call it a service?

R: Yes, service is fine. That's the kind of service we would do occasionally, probably once a term or maybe twice a year we would do a communion service. We tend to write our own liturgies related to that. I can send you, if you want, an introduction to a book Dan and I wrote which explains why we justify that within the Anglican Church.

Int: That would be great if you could do that.

R: It all depends how you read these things but the Church likes to police things like liturgy in relation to communion, so we're unusual in writing our own prayers in that way. We always have someone who is ordained who presides, so Anna who presided last night was ordained. She used to be involved in the church here but she's the vicar of a church in Southwark but she likes coming along because she quite likes the more relaxed, creative vibe.

So yes, we would do a service like that quite often. I guess what was typical is it was fairly relaxed. We often would have something interactive, something visual, like there was a central installation last night all hanging around an idea. A bit of liturgy. There were probably more words last night that were like a structured liturgy. Sometimes you might not have that at all, so it does vary.

Int: Last night I would say aligns very much to a standard liturgy where you had something that was a piece, there was a creed, there was… yes.

R: Yes and that's probably the first time we've had a creed for a few years.

Int: Oh really, I was lucky.

R: Well yes, depends if you like it.

Int: That was just a side question. It's not necessarily what I expected but obviously it's still within the realm of things that can happen at Grace?

R: Yes.

Int: How would you describe what Grace is to a general audience? Whether religious or non-religious, maybe say a different thing depending on who you're talking to, how would you describe it?

R: I think I'd often use the word community. We're a community of people who are seeking to work out what it means to follow Christ together in today's world, and that has changed over the years. I think our focus as a group has changed, so I think when we began we would've called it alternative worship. That's fine as a term but I think we were very focused on the construction of worship that was different, that was going to change the church, because it was so different connecting the postmodern culture, and we put a lot of effort into that.

Then I think probably 10 years on from that we thought well, that's fine, that's been good, it hasn't changed everything but it's kept us alive.

Int: So the alternate worship moniker started from the beginning, you would say, for the first 10 years?

R: Yes and I think after about 10 years, there was a moment where people were reflecting what Grace was about. I think the focus became more thinking, well actually it's about a community and supporting that community in what it means to follow Christ, I suppose. So the worship is part of that but actually it's about that community.

Then we recently had a day away where we thought maybe it's not about a community, maybe it's about changing the world. I was trying to say something about this last night, in that for people to flourish, I think being part of a supportive community helps people do what it is that they want to do to change the world. I lead a pioneer training programme and I find being part of Grace very supportive, it sparks my imagination if that's difficult, I've got friends I can chat to about that. So I think the two are related but it think it's a shift of emphasis I suppose.

So yes, we had a day away together in June and I think that emphasis very much came to the fore in a new way, so that I think what we were saying was that the worship services in the community serves to support that transformation in the world, whatever people are involved in. We have people who are involved in charities or involved in their work as architects or deputy head teachers or whatever, that we see as valuable in and of itself. I don't think any more we think the point is the church, we're doing church differently, it's how it enables you to live in the world. Does that make sense?

Int: Yes, it does make sense. So it feeds you to be able to do everything else on the outside?

R: Yes, hopefully.

Int: Does anybody else go to other services on top of this?

R: Some people do, yes.

Int: Or is that the primary community people go to?

R: There was a woman, Rebecca, who was there last night and she goes to a Methodist church in town as well. Partly she loves singing in a choir. Just in terms of example of what people do, she's on the board of Amnesty International, she's involved in that. So some people do go to other churches as well. Some people who have

younger kids go to something where there is something for them. Anna is the vicar of another church. Maybe half the people go somewhere else as well.

Int: About half that's their thing and then the other half maybe… okay.

R: Yes. Maybe slightly more than half that's their thing, maybe two thirds.

Int: Would you say that there has been a transition in terms of people calling Grace a church or a community, or was there ever a time when using more specifically Christian terms was something that people shied away from or was it always quite explicit?

R: I think that's always been fine. I think partly it started out of a church, so originally we didn't even call it a church, I think it was just a new worship service. I wasn't around when it started but Mike, who is the only guy around who was involved then, I think he would say that they started it to survive, because it was just difficult in the church as it was, but I don't think there was ever an issue about being associated with being Christian or church, I don't think that's been an issue for them.

Int: I'm going to go through a list of questions, those are just to give a sense of what Grace is. Some positive qualities that you would say about Grace?

R: I like it because it's relational, it's a community, it's very creative, it's very participative. It values men and women involved equality, as much as possible. I think it's a caring environment, people look out for one another. It's quite theological. A lot of people think, because we never have any sermons, because nobody likes them. But I think it's the most theologically articulate community I've been in, not that there are lots of big words or whatever but people read and are curious and are interested in what's going on. Actually in terms of when you're involved in a small group and planning a Grace, often people will be reading some things that inform that.

Int: People are personally theological, they have it in their own lives?

R: Yes, they're curious, thoughtful, reflective. Another thing I like about it is its pretty flat, it's partly because it's small so it's easier for organisations that are small but there is not a hierarchical structure to it, we have a model of leadership where two or three people facilitate, make sure that the community is doing what it's meant to do at least, but we change that every year, somebody comes off, somebody on that group. So it's always changing the leadership and I quite like that. It's kind of unusual, I think.

Int: It wasn't explicit who were leaders necessarily. We had a variety of different people speaking, I didn't know who was ordained or not, I didn't know if there was anybody ordained at all. That was explicit I think, [unclear 0:09:49]. Some criticism that you may have or negative qualities, or things it could use for growth?

R: I think one of the challenges is because it's just run by volunteers, we do once a month public event. Actually we do do some other things, so in Lent we meet weekly for meals and have a focus on a theme, more in-depth in terms of discipleship and things. We have one meal or something like that a month as well. But I think sometimes it can feel a bit too light.

Int: Too light?

R: In terms of, it's quite easy – and this is the postmodern thing, isn't it – to stay on the sidelines, watch the carnival go by and not get involved. We have people that turn up every few months and they're quite light touch to it I suppose. It can be good for them but you need a certain amount of people for whom they're committed to put the hours in.

Int: They have an ownership to the group?

R: Yes, to put the energy in to make the thing work, I suppose. What else don't I like. I think the other challenge, I would say – and this is partly because I'm focused in terms of my job, we're teaching on this – is I think sometimes it can be challenging to

focus outwards, which I think a lot of church communities struggle with. So we talk about that from time to time.

Int: That whole thing that you're saying about being able to be good out in the world and not just the community side?

R: Yes. I think one of the challenges in relation to that sometimes I'm terms of the church is one thinks about getting involved in mission, you think about, right let's do a little project in Ealing that is mission, whatever that might be, and we all join in with something together but actually the reality is people are deputy heads, director of charities, busy people so it's quite hard to do that. So I think what we've concluded is that actually the mission is what people are doing by way of their work and supporting that is supporting them, rather than we all suddenly get involved in Ealing Transition Towns or whatever it is, although I think that's good, I do go to that from time to time. So I think that's sort of what we've concluded. Sometimes it would be nice if there was a bit more time or energy to do more in the local community.

Int: As a group together?

R: Yes, as a group, I think that would be good but people are just time poor, I suppose.

Int: Like you were saying, they're involved in a lot of those charitable things on their own anyway, whether it's their actual job or connected to another group.

R: Yes. On the whole I like more than I don't like. For me it's been a good space anyway over the years.

Int: That's just because I'm asking the question. How about some of your favourite things that have happened, proper experiences or events?

R: We've done some things over the years in terms of Grace events that I think have been a buzz, I suppose. We've led the communion at Green Belt Festival twice, which is about 20,000 people.

Int: The big one?

R: Yes, recorded an album to do that. We've published a couple of books of our liturgies.

Int: You and Dan did that?

R: Yes, Dan and I did one and then I can't remember who did the other one, me and Steve maybe, but I can send you those. Actually last night, that diagram of seeding other things, one of the things I like about Grace is that we have published, whether on blogs or websites, articles, we have sparked a lot of other people's imagination by pushing out our ideas. So that image of seeding, I think we've seeded a lot of other things. You can't necessarily measure it but I like that about Grace, it feels like a very rich environment for ideas that are given away to other people.

So yes, some events that we've done have been good and we've done things in surprising places, cathedrals and all sorts, festivals and so on. I like some of the slightly crazy creative things that we've done over the years, they've been fun, it's a very creative the group. But actually I think the thing I like the most maybe, there was a woman who prayed the first prayer last night, Lynda, I don't know if you spoke to her, she's got a tattoo of a phoenix on her arm.

Int: I don't know if I saw the tattoo but I remember who said the first.

R: She arrived in Ealing maybe 10 years ago depressed, really struggling in life and in fact lived in that flat up there. She just turned up at Grace one time with her dog and we got to know her and actually we shared an allotment with her and still do.

Int: She wasn't even originally a churchy person, she just stopped on by?

R: Yes and she's become part of the community, been completely changed. She's become the kinship carer for her grandson because his mum had various mental health issues and was not able to look after her son, he was in foster care. So we've supported her in that. She comes around every Tuesday night to our house, it's actually why we started doing a Tuesday night thing.

Int: You said you have the communion thing?

R: Yes, we invite some other people around. That's one of my favourite things, just that she's really changed as a person. She's a wonderful person and I feel I've learned as much from her I think as we've given to her but it's been a really good friendship.

Int: That's developed since you've started coming in and she's well part of the community, so there is genuine growth and development and friendships there?

R: Yes, and it was great, now she would be part of a small team putting together ideas, leading them. 10 years ago that was unthinkable, I think.

Int: Now she's a carer too on top of that?

R: Yes. That would be one of my favourite things.

Int: A very inspirational story. The other side of that, have there been any major conflicts that have happened within the community that maybe shook the community?

R: We've had a couple of difficult moments, not necessarily within the community but we are part of the Church of England, which is fine and the Church of England has actually been quite a good space for some creative things around the edges of the church. At least in most cases given permission in a good way.

We had a challenging moment – this is quite a number of years ago now, maybe 15 years ago – when the vicar of the church left and the associate vicar was in charge and she basically read us the riot act. She called two of us around and said, you won't use any liturgies other than by canon law unless the bishop tells me otherwise. You realise

your vulnerability I suppose. Actually a new guy came in and she moved on, but what I did was to get in contact with the bishop about it and he wrote us a letter giving us permission to use other liturgies. So he backed us.

Int: You guys went directly to the bishop?

R: Yes, we called her bluff. She said, unless you go to the bishop, and I thought okay, we'll go to the bishop. We know the bishop, why not. That was as difficult moment in the community.

We haven't had too many difficult moments. Like a lot of communities ebbed and flowed. Another difficult season was when about six people moved and they didn't move because they were upset, they moved because housing is expensive or they'd had kids and needed to find somewhere to live or jobs had changed. When you're a community of about 20 or 30, whatever we were at the time, when six people move out, particularly if they've been key people, it's quite painful. So that was difficult and I think in some ways we've only just recovered from that. That was a couple of years ago.

Int: Would you say it's about 20-30 people on the wider number?

R: Yes.

Int: Then in any given Saturday night, it's about that size that came last night?

R: It might be. How many were there last night, I don't know, 15?

Int: 16.

R: Yes, I'd say that's pretty low but that's fine, it's not usually much smaller than that. We knew a number of people were away yesterday. Maybe 2-30, often not more than 30, sometimes 40.

Int: So most people do come then, if the wider community is about 40?

R: Yes but there are a whole load of people who just drop into these things from time to time.

Int: So the core, if you would call it a core?

R: Yes. When we had a weekend away, which would be people who are interested in the overall, we had a dozen people at that with about three or four who couldn't make it. So I guess the people that were interested in that level of it, it's probably 16 to 20. I need to go and count them.

Int: How do people usually find out about Grace?

R: We've got quite a good online presence. Because we've done some stuff at festivals that helps. Anna, who led the communion last night, she first came to something that we did at Green Belt Festival and then she was training to be ordained at the time, she contacted St Mary's Church and asked if she could do a placement as a curate here so that she could get involved, which they were open to. So that's how she came across us.

Because I'm involved in training other things and other places and I write a blog that quite a few people read, I think I'm quite a good advert for us.

Int: You're a bit of a C of E celebrity?

R: I don't know about that. There is another guy, Steve, who was there last night, who runs a number of websites as well, although they're less active than they used to be, so he likewise was pushing a lot out.

Int: So some festivals and just everyone doing their own work, people found out about Grace, online presence as well?

R: Yes, the internet is deceptive I think, particularly where people visit from overseas. I think they expect something big and impressive. My favourite one of those was… I don't think they came in the end but I got contacted by some Americans that were visiting London to look at a few things and they asked if they could visit Grace

Cathedral and meet the staff team. I sent a reply saying, there is no cathedral and no staff, but you can come.

Int: It's probably the Americans, since we're used to everything so big every time, big and massive. Now shifting towards how you fit in, in what ways do you think you fit in or don't fit in Grace as a community? You personally, because you obviously have your own faith and other things that you're involved in.

R: I think I fit in fine. I feel that I've been able to contribute my ideas fully and they've been heard. I probably have quite a lot of personal power, just by virtue of being part of the community for a long time. I'm not saying that's a good or bad thing but I think if I suggest things, people will listen to them. Over the years, I've just gone back on the leadership team, facilitation team, I haven't been on that for about eight years probably.

Int: There's a rotation of every four years?

R: There's a rotation, somebody comes on that, somebody off that each year. There will be only be two or three people that do that, but they'll be the people that meet and say right, buzz an email around, we need someone to lead who is around, that sort of thing. So I've gone back on that. I feel like there are seasons where I've put a lot of energy into it, particularly actually the last seven years, I set up this new training programme with CMS and that was extremely demanding. I couldn't have done it when I had young kids, for example, in terms of the amount of evenings and so on that I was having to work. So I was happy to not be leading in Grace during that season but I felt like it was a good time to step back into that and could do with some energy and I'm happy to bring some energy into that.

Int: You've never really had issues with feeling not quite your community or not being able to feed every aspect of your faith?

R: It's small and voluntary so I don't think it feeds every aspect of my faith but as I say, we meet as a family on a Tuesday night. I actually think a faith community should feed every aspect of people's faith. People need to take responsibility for their faith. Personally I see a spiritual director four times a year. I'm connected into CMS, which sparks particularly thinking around mission and with other people, So I do have other spaces I guess.

Int: It doesn't attempt to try to get every part of your faith anyway, is what you're saying, it's not the goal of Grace?

R: I think I'd be disappointed probably because it's voluntary and we don't meet every week even, so I think that would be quite hard. But yes, I feel like if I'm disappointed with it then I'm disappointed with myself because it's only what we make it. Actually, I've got two sons, they're aged 26 and 24 and they've grown up with Grace as very much part of their lives but there were no other children their ages, but it's been brilliant for them. One of them is a graphic designer, I'm sure the creativity around Grace has been very significant for him. The other one is a poet. I think their instincts in terms of faith are great, they're not really business as usual kind of Christians.

Int: They do identify as Christians and they're involved in some ways?

R: Yes, I think so. Yes, they do.

Int: Have they ever brought in other people, like their friends?

R: Yes, they have. They've both been involved. They're not living in this part of London now so less so, but if they were around I think they'd still come along, they enjoy meeting people, they would feel they know most of the people involved.

Int: It's part of their upbringing so it's kind of a homecoming, I would imagine, it's part of being home?

R: Yes and like a lot of communities r friendships a lot of stuff happens, parties around people's houses, barbecues and whatever, so they've just been around a lot of that as well.

Int: Yes, exposure to the same people?

R: Yes, it's fine.

Int: How would you describe your faith or your religion, you're spirituality? Again, general audience. Your religious identity?

R: I would definitely say I seek to follow in the way of Christ. For me, I've reflected on that pretty hard. I've actually ended up thinking, if somehow somebody were to prove that it was all fraudulent, I've ended up thinking that following in the way of Christ, I wouldn't be disappointed because I think in terms of a way to live, it's as good as there is on offer.

Int: If anybody was to say that Christianity as an institution was fraudulent, just being a follower of Christ still holds?

R: Yes, I think so. I think living a life that seeks to give away on behalf of others, to invest in the healing of Creation in whatever way, to care for those who are at the edges, the margins, to live a generous life, thoughtful life, life in community – it's all good, I think. So following the way of Christ.

In terms of spirituality, yes that's a good question. I think I've been most helped, I'm 51 now so in the latter years of my life by the contemplative side of faith. Particularly some of the religious communities like the Jesuits or St Ignatius spirituality or communities that have learned the ways of the soul I suppose, but they've very much about silence and attentiveness, but also about changing the world. I'm drawn to those communities.

Every year I tend to go on a silent retreat somewhere. My favourite places that I've been have been run by Jesuits, although they're Catholic rather than Church of England but that's fine, it's all good.

In terms of spirituality, one of the things I really have liked the most about alternative worship as a movement is that the location of where God is, is the wider culture rather than the church. Church is fine to support people but I think a lot of church… actually I think this is true of fresh expressions of church, that they make the mistake of getting too obsessed with church so it ends up just being about church, whereas the thing I've loved, certainly in the early years of alternative worship, was that all of the music, the visuals, the art was stuff from the wider culture. It wasn't from a Christian subculture. So there was a sense in which you were celebrating the way that God is present in all of life. So I think in terms of my own spirituality, I'm very at home in the world, in popular culture and want a spirituality that enables me to be present in that space rather than to withdraw or retreat from that, because somehow I see it as…

Int: Having a clear division between what church is and what's not church, what's Christian and what's not Christian?

R: Yes and it's easy to forget, I think, how unusual that is. For St Mary's Church here, where Grace is, I preach for them about three times a year. I say I'm happy to do that, which they seem to like. I preached on Easter Sunday and I showed David Bowie's video, Lazarus, have you seen that where he's sort of wrapped up.

Int: I've seen that. Right before he passed away, he finished this great masterpiece.

R: I thought this is a great video for Easter because it's exploring ideas of death and he goes into this cupboard at the end which I think represents death. I showed this video at the church but it freaked half the church out. I just forgot, they don't watch, they're not engaged in culture.

Int: Is it a middle of the road church?

R: Yes, it's just a middle of the road church. Half the people loved it, but you just forget that's unusual. So I think for me in terms of spirituality, it's very much finding out how to pray, how to articulate faith in and with the culture, not away from it.

Int: Yes, not having this deep division between…

R: I think I would describe it… this wouldn't necessary be Grace's language around this, I'm very interested in what I think of as a mission spiritualty. In other words, a spirituality that fuels a life lived in the world rather than a spiritualty that's all about paying attention to the interior and withdrawing, without then enabling you to transform the world. So I think that of that as a mission, spirituality.

Int: But that's more like a you thing as opposed to necessarily a Grace thing?

R: Yes, although the culture stuff I think is a Grace thing.

Int: Do you think there's room for other traditions in Grace or even people who are not… your example of Lynda, she's not of any faith at all, starting off, so in terms of different services or the sharing that happens or different talks that happen within a service, is there room for other traditions besides Christianity?

R: I think the instinct of a lot of people like us, like Grace, is one of openness and welcome, that's a basic instinct and I think non-judgment. So those would be key values. So I think if somebody came along and wanted to be part of it, we would welcome them, welcome their contribution to conversation and participation. I think Grace is a part of the Church of England, we are seeking to do worship in and out of the Christian tradition.

Int: So there is a rootedness in that?

R: Yes, it's rooted in that, we improvise out of that. So I guess it would depend what people wanted to do.

Int: Have you ever had someone in the leadership team that was like, oh let's appropriate this, or not even use that word but just an appropriation from another tradition, incorporated within…

R: I don't think I'd have a problem with appropriation. I think we're probably doing that. Not at Grace but I remember being in Canada and conference, there was an optional smudging ritual at the start which was sort of pulling down smoke, which was a Native American, Indian, the first nations people would be, the Canadian politically correct term for it.

Int: First Nations, you've got it.

R: I liked that, I thought it was very prayerified. I've have no problem praying to the Great Spirit, it seems to me that connects with the Creator. So I think there would be an openness to that. In terms of missions, because I work for a missions organisation, I'd definitely be on the left field in terms of what known as insider movements. I think for example, where Christ met with the woman at the well in Samaria, he would've spent two days with the Samaritans and clearly some sort of faith developed, but in developed in the Samaritan religion. He didn't say come and be Jewish, he didn't invite them to Jerusalem and actually as far as the Jews were concerned, Samaritan religion was heretical. They had slightly different scriptures, a monotheistic religion that had morphed out of it. So in some ways you could say there is a parallel with that and Islam, I think.

Int: Yes, they're experiencing themselves…

R: Yes, so there are mission movements where people are following Christ whilst remaining followers of Eser, but whilst going to the mosque. So they will not leave the cultural way of being Muslim but they will seek to follow Christ within that and don't find too much tension, because Allah is the name for God in the Arabic Bible. So I think

there are these really interesting questions in relation to faith. I'm very open to all of that and probably on the left field. What I suppose I'm not that keen on is pretending that everything is the same, because I think that does a disservice to everybody, because clearly they're not the same.

Int: But there are definitely distinctions between each…

R: Yes, so I think you've got to have a dialogue to talk about what you mean and what you're doing if you're going to get into some of that sort of area. Interestingly, that's never really arisen, we've never had anyone land asking to do something. I don't think people have been phased by anything, to be honest, we would just talk about it and see what the consensus was around something, I think.

Int: And it wouldn't necessarily be like a hard challenge, everyone discuss it as moving in that way?

R: Yes, there is a book, I don't know if you've come across it, you probably have for your reading list, by Michael Perryman & Mary Grey Reeves called The Hospitality of God?

Int: I don't know about that.

R: They research emergent, they call them, churches in America, in the UK, in their language, the sacramental tradition. What they end up saying is that the thing that seems to unite these communities is hospitality. That there is a welcome around the table for everyone and things are worked out, out of that sitting around the table together, rather than right, you've got to sort these things out, become a member and then we talk about things. It's all the other way around, it's all come and join and let's work it out as we go along.

Int: I really like that, I'd probably add that to my reading list, to be honest. It goes alongside the direction I'm going in.

R: They end up suggesting at the end – which I don't think the Church of England is ready to do, they're both bishops – that maybe in these communities the order of baptism and communion has been reversed. In other words, people find welcome around the table first and then they get baptised later when they decide to follow in the way of Christ.

Int: You have some Christian traditions that are like that anyway, right?

R: Yes, but Michael Perryman said to me that he spoke to Rowan Williams, who was Archbishop, about that very idea and he wasn't that keen on it. So I think it could upset a few people.

Int: Potentially controversial. I'll definitely look that up. Do you have any final things you want to add from anything that we've discussed?

R: No, don't think so.

‘Aaron’ (Moot)

Int : Can you just say your name and the group that you’re involved with, the community that you’re involved with?

R : Aaron. The Moot community.

Int: How long have you been in the community?

R: I have been chaplain to the community since September 2015. Just over a year.

Int: Oh, yeah, that is [inaudible 00:00:27]. How would you describe Moot to a general audience, like people say, “Oh, what is Moot?”

R: I would say it’s a contemplative community, small community and a home to people who, for various reasons, have not found a home in other parts of the church.

Int: Would you change that description depending on if somebody had a different religious affiliation, if they were Christian or if they were non-religious, if they were from another faith tradition?

R: No. No, I don’t think I would actually.

Int: Yeah, so that’s a general statement and it’s pretty brief.

R: Yes, I mean probably most people understand what contemplative is and that may be the issue but in terms of it’s a church for people who’ve not found home elsewhere in the church.

Int: I mean you call it a community. I know there’s been some changes in calling it [inaudible 00:01:33] or even just using the term ‘church’, would people be comfortable using the term church for community? Is it a church or is that something that, depending on who you’re talking to, depending [inaudible 00:01:44]?

R: Yeah, I think it depends a bit on who you’re talking to and for some of our community church is a dirty word and so people wouldn’t regard it as a church and I think there is a little bit of, for some, being in a church, in a church building and having

responsibilities for running a church building, it's a little bit difficult. Well, there's a bit of tension there but we as a community have decided to stay here in the last year and engage with the church, both the Anglican church, both with the diocese, both with the church in the city.

Int: Right. I mean you're ordained and you were assigned here.

R: Indeed. I think that wasn't a community appointment. The community, the mute community is sponsored and supported by the diocese of London, financially, over the last few years.

Int: As a fresh expression.

R: As a fresh expression, yeah, and indeed in given the responsibility of looking after this place with a view of mission and of outreach, of making this place a place of hospitality, hence the café and welcome and to serving the people who work around here, of which that's happened in different forms over the last few years that Moot has been here, but underpinning it is the Diocese of London. Without the Diocese of London's support, financial and otherwise, Moot in its present form would not exist.

Int: Uh huh, so there has to be that mutual relationship in that sense.

R: Yes.

Int: So from the diocese perspective, there is a kind of a missional thing happening.

R: Yes. Part of the diocese agreeing to support Moot is that there is a focus on mission, of outward looking-ness.

Int: Is there tension with that relationship, with an established church with the community of Moot?

R: Yeah, I think there is for some. For most I think it's okay. There is a tension there and there's a recognition that we actually have …

Int: It's explicit.

R: Yes, it's here. I mean this is a fantastic place to have. So, yeah, I think the community is engaged with that recognising but there is that link.

Int: But there's obviously acceptance because it's explicitly there, you're getting funding.

R: Yes.

Int: What about you? So how did you come about being assigned to Moot? How did you find Moot?

R: Well, mine was, in a sense, a diocese appointment so I was hoisted onto Moot because the priest in charge left earlier on last year, in the summer last year, and there was going to be a period, as there is with normal parish churches, an interregnum and I was appointed to both do the kind of sacramental side of things and to do the vicarey bits, but also to provide some support, guidance for particularly church wardens and the GCC and the kind of day to day … well, no, not day to day because I'm not here day to day but the weekly running of the place.

Int: You're full time though?

R: No, I'm two days a week.

Int: It's part time but you're not [inaudible 00:05:17].

R: I am not employed by the diocese, I'm employed by Moot directly.

Int: Oh, okay.

R: Because it's a temporary, part time role.

Int: Did you have a particular interest in Moot? Did you know about Moot before coming here?

R: Yes, yes, I did. Yes, I've known about Moot for years and I've been in London for 14 years so I've known about it at least 10 or 12 years. Yes.

Int: Did you get involved in any way before coming here?

R: No. No, I knew the previous priest here when Moot was at St. Matthews, Westminster, 10 years ago, so I knew about it but I was involved elsewhere at the time.

Int: Okay.

R: So I never came.

Int: You never came, but you've done … I guess a good direct question would be what is your particular churchmanship? How would you describe your own spirituality, religious affiliation? How do you describe personally?

R: I'm catholic with a small 'c', and by that I mean I've experienced and benefitted from the range of church traditions. My background is, kind of, middle of the road, liberal progressive catholic. As a student I've gone evangelical charismatic. The parishes I've worked in have been largely middle of the road parish, Eucharist parishes and more laterally at an Anglo-Catholic parish in London. In terms of spirituality, what's influenced me laterally has been the kind of contemplative tradition. It's been lovely to be part of Moot because if something like Moot had existed when I was a student I would have been very attracted to it.

Int: Oh really? Yeah.

R: But there wasn't.

Int: But there wasn't so you went Evangelical charismatic instead.

R: Yes, that was my route. So an emphasis on the contemplative monastic tradition, an interest in social action and indeed of radical living. I think that would have appealed to me. So it's nice to be involved with it at a later stage, but the contemplative stuff and silence and mediation, all that I'm very into.

Int: You do that anyway.

R: I do that anyway, yes.

Int: Besides … despite the affiliation.

R: Yes. So I'm happy, as we've done on a Thursday service, sitting in silence, leading in [inaudible 00:08:12] as well as dressing up with all the choir and [inaudible 00:08:17].

Int: Oh, you've done that too?

R: I do that too in my other church.

Int: Can you do it here too? I mean if you were an Anglo-Catholic of course but [inaudible 00:08:25].

R: There used to be an Anglo-Catholic church so there's all the paraphernalia here.

Int: Everything's still here.

R: All the vestments and the incense.

Int: All the lace.

R: Yes. Not much lace, fortunately. So the Anglo-Catholic church is [inaudible 00:08:40], it has a strong musical tradition and is what I would call sensible Anglican, like it isn't about the lace.

Int: It's not about the lace. You know my college, I'm at [inaudible 00:08:55], you know that, right?

R: Ah.

Int: So we've got the lace.

R: I didn't know you were at [inaudible 00:08:59]. Okay. Well, our vicar went to St. Stephen's and I have a good friend who's a [inaudible 00:09:04] man.

Int: Oh, really? Yeah, it's quirky.

R: Yes. My goodness.

Int: Oh, cool, okay. This is a question I would typically ask other people but because you are a chaplain you would probably tick the Christian box inner senses, I would assume, or is that tricky for you?

R: In terms of my faith and religion?

Int: Yeah, actual religious affiliation.

R: I'll go for Christian, yes.

Int: Yes, straightforward, no questions. So, what about the rest of the congregation or rest of the community members? Is that a tension there too, would you say?

R: I don't think … there is a difference.

Int: There is a difference, okay.

R: There are differing views, but I think that's part of how Moot sees itself.

Int: It's Christian rooted.

R: It is a broad, inclusive, Catholic [inaudible 00:09:52] community. So there are people who are really struggling with the person of Jesus or with the holy spirit or with the trinity or with the bible and how to interpret it or with the church and its liturgy and historic tradition, or with patriarchalism. So I think in the community there's a lot of difference.

Int: But in general it is Christian rooted?

R: In general, well no, and specifically it is because it's not just a bunch of nice people who want to kind of contemplate, and it is a dioecism, i.e. Church of England. Church of England therefore Christian.

Int: Yeah, Christian. Church of England is Christian.

R: It's Christian. We make that assumption but allows for a welcome and an inclusivity, recognising that we're all at different stages in our faith journey and our understanding so it's not a professional community in that sense, although I think that actually brings into conflict the whole new monastic understanding because monastic communities are professional communities, i.e. in the sense you profess and confess any faith and have certain rules of life and in a Christian institution that comes out of certain

things. I would actually say that's where new monasticism is not part of the Moot community now. It may have been past.

Int: Okay, yeah, I mean that's something that changed.

R: Yes, I think that's something that's changed. It was developed by a core number of people who are part of the community and they took it somewhere and created this new monasticism but they've left. The people who have remained have not fully endorsed or understood what that rhythm and rule of life is. That's my take.

Int: Okay.

R: I think coming in I was surprised that people were actually fairly ignorant of …

Int: So when you came in about a year ago, people still use the new monastic tongue but they didn't really know what it meant?

R: Yeah.

Int: Oh, okay.

R: And it's all over the website. I was expecting people to know what it meant and I read about it then I came here and thought, "Oh my god. I think I know more about it than you do."

Int: I see.

R: We've settled on contemplative over this last year. Yes.

Int: Okay. So that's a discussion that's been happening in the past year.

R: Yes. Yeah. That actually the new monastic stuff is a great ideal to have but we're not there. What we do is, yes, contemplative stuff in terms of our worship and understanding who we are and we do silence, so that's where people are at.

Int: It's not necessarily trying to move to more explicit new monasticism?

R: I think that's in the offing. I think that's a potential.

Int: Okay.

R: And I would say that some members of the community still want to go in that direction, but it is how we frame it. I think I see the problem with Moot has been it has two porous definitions of what it is to belong and I think if you're a monastic community, whether you're new or otherwise, you have to sign up to do certain things and to turn up and to have a rule of life. Certainly Mooters are not the ones now, I mean a lot of them do have spiritual [inaudible 00:13:33] and a discipline, but we as a community don't have a shared discipline.

Int: I see, yeah.

R: So there's that aspiration, but because we have this broad spectrum of people, people, which is absolutely fair enough, don't want necessarily to commit to a Moot rule of life or they want to belong but be on the fringes or want to come in a bit closer and then out a bit, and that's been …

Int: It might still take some time and work if it needs to get to that, that exact [inaudible 00:14:12].

R: Yeah and it may not happen and it may happen.

Int: It may or may not, okay, but it's kind of in the history of Moot so it's …

R: Very much so, yeah. Yes.

Int: Do you have people coming in that are from [inaudible 00:14:28] tradition or from other faith traditions that have eventually become part of the community? I guess it is explicitly Christian and it is Christian routed, but what about … and it takes pride in that, kind of, openness?

R: No. I mean I'd say no, not in the year that I've been here.

Int: Okay, just not within the year. Well, there's like the meditation people, right?

R: Yeah. Oh, yes.

Int: I guess you would count them. People are saying there's, like, weekend Moot and day Moot and meditation [inaudible 00:15:00].

R: Yes, I mean the meditation, that makes a case in point really, that the people who come to a Wednesday meditation are, yeah, not part of Moot but [inaudible 00:15:10].

Int: They're not part of Moot?

R: No.

Int: Ah.

R: No.

Int: But some people might say that they are. Like they might not think they are but then they say, "Oh, we count them as Moot too if they [inaudible 00:15:19]."

R: Yeah, I mean and that is a very relevant issue, is what is Moot? We are predominately a Sunday evening community.

Int: So the Sunday is, like, the explicit Moot.

R: Yeah, but those Mooters don't come in during the week, so although the meditation on Wednesday is led by Mooter, and indeed the Serum meeting that happens, yes, every so often is led by Mooters and has a small group of regular-ish people who are questioning. So that's part of the outreach, I think, that we would see. Part of our mission is reaching out, but the question whether those people have moved in to be part of Moot, I don't think there are any.

Int: To become, like, a Sunday goer, you mean?

R: Yes, to make, yeah.

Int: To make it to the Sunday.

R: To come in. It's still, yeah, there hasn't [inaudible 00:16:22].

Int: They might just stay at meditation and just stay at Serum.

R: I suspect so. I can't think of anybody who's come that route and become a fully-fledged Moot member, not so I know of [inaudible 00:16:34].

Int: Assuming the fully-fledged member is the Sunday congregation.

R: Yes. Yeah.

Int: Because depending how … some people define it in other ways, maybe. Like, if someone only went to the meditation or only went to Serum, would that count them as …? Do you think some of those people that only went to Serum and not the Sundays would count themselves as a Moot member?

R: No.

Int: No.

R: I haven't asked but I would suspect not. It would be interesting to ask Laura who arranges it.

Int: Or even, like, the meditations. There's some regular goers in the mediations that don't go to Sundays, would they consider themselves Moot?

R: I suspect not.

Int: No, also. Okay.

R: I mean they come because they enjoy meditation and it's provided by, but they don't [inaudible 00:17:18].

Int: It's provided by, right, okay. The identification part of it is a different issue.

R: Yes. Yeah, and the same, you know, we have a lady who does meditation on a Monday and Friday lunchtime. She gets two or three people, it's quite a small thing. Those are office workers, you know, they don't come to the city at the weekend, that's the other thing. We do Taize on a Wednesday morning and a Friday morning and, again, those attendees are not people who come on a Sunday.

Int: Okay and would they consider themselves Moot, Taize people, [inaudible 00:17:52]?

R: The people who lead it, yes, although they are fringe people and, again, they don't … well, some of them do come on a Sunday but some of them don't.

Int: Okay, but the ones that only go to Taize?

R: I don't think they'd consider themselves Mooters, no.

Int: They wouldn't. So really just so the Mooters, that self-identifies, are the Sunday goers.

R: Yeah.

Int: Ah, so everything else is, like, Moot provides it but we just come and be like …

R: Yeah and it is one of the issues.

Int: Ah.

R: So the Thursday service that we do is an attempt to break that Sunday evening mould that we worship together on a day of the week, not at the weekend, which [inaudible 00:18:33]. That in itself and it's not yet happening, is an opportunity for people to come in and worship with us and, you know, for an accessible service that if you work here, you know, that you could stay after work.

Int: You know that, "Oh, you can have something like this on a Sunday too and vice versa."

R: But not with the intention of, "Come on Sunday," because people won't. I've met a number of people who, you know, if you're working in the city, you come to the city Monday to Friday, you're in the suburbs at home for the weekend. You're not going to come into the city on a Sunday night when you're coming into the city on a Monday morning.

Int: Yeah, that's true. Yeah, it's the weekend.

R: So we're looking to build up, in a sense, potentially, a Moot community around a Thursday evening.

Int: So people that identify as Moot that come on Thursdays.

R: Yes, they can come on a Thursday.

Int: Even if that's the only day of the week that they can.

R: Yeah.

Int: Yeah. Oh, cool.

R: So that is part of our mission of reaching out.

Int: The mission. I remember the first day I was here everyone saying, "Yeah, it's a transition for the week day and weekend."

R: Yes.

Int: A lot of that conversation.

R: Yeah and it's ongoing. I mean people have supported it. I think it's a tall order to get people to come during the week.

Int: How's it been going so far? I mean I've come to three, two?

R: Yeah. I kind of said, when we talked about it, I said I think we need to be reaching double figures every week to make it sustainable and we haven't quite. We're kind of doing eight.

Int: Okay, just under.

R: Some eight, yes.

Int: And it's the Sunday goers that are coming?

R: Yes.

Int: It's not new weekend people? I mean new people.

R: No, although having said that, the lady who does the meditation on Monday to Friday, I think she's meant to be coming this evening, so that's great.

Int: It's early days though.

R: It's early days, yeah. It's early days and we've got to do more with the advertising. There's one person I need to follow up who works in the city who would come but can't come at the weekend. So there are potentially people who would come.

Int: Yeah. It's only been one month.

R: It's only one month, but I want it to … well, you've seen [inaudible 00:20:51]. I do [inaudible 00:20:52]. It's been a joint effort and I want it to be a community led service that doesn't require too much work or preparation, so different members can take part in it, so we can all take part in it.

Int: Right. Yeah, it's a good set up.

R: So it's not just a leader leading it and so we will be testing that out next Thursday because I won't be here next Thursday.

Int: Hopefully you've been here enough Thursday for [inaudible 00:21:24].

R: Yes, so maybe nobody will turn up.

Int: Would you assign someone though? Or is just going to …?

R: No, I need some people to take …

Int: Like a first and a backup.

R: Yeah. I think Tim will be around so I think … yeah.

Int: Okay. So in your year here, what's been your favourite things about Moot? What do you think are the positive things that Moot does?

R: Well, in no particular order I think this church is fantastic. Both as a building and as a space and as a café and as a holy space I think it works. Somehow it works. It's got something. So I love the space. I love the community. I think it's been great to be part of something that has had a really tough recent history. It's been hard and it's small, it's very small, very vulnerable, but I know where Moot is coming from, where people are

coming from and things in terms of worship and liturgical styles, there's things I can contribute and you'd have to bring people forward or move people along. I like our Taize worship. I like our Eucharist

Int: Yeah.

R: I think that's great.

Int: That droney chant thing is awesome.

R: Well that was my predecessors, kind of, creation.

Int: Oh, yeah [inaudible 00:23:21].

R: He did a recording of it for me on the phone [inaudible 00:23:26], but he missed a couple of bits out so we've had to [inaudible 00:23:33]. I mean that's a really good thing to do, to sing a Eucharist [inaudible 00:23:35] together I think is great, and even to sing a hymn. Well, yes, you were there. Innovation.

Int: Reuben had something to say about it that day. That's not a Moot thing to do. It's like the first time anyone ever sang.

R: I think so.

Int: As Moot, at least.

R: As Moot, yes. I mean because I think when I mentioned it there was a kind of sharp intake of breath. I said, "We are going to sing a hymn." But I think, again, it's one of the things that is really important to do in community, as well as holding silence and learning to recite the psalms in that meditative way, and singing, using our bodies to worship god together. I think that's really important. My sense, and that's partly because I've gone through a Catholic tradition, is there is too much sitting down in Moot in our worship. When you're sitting down, I mean I can fall asleep. I lose the will to focus. So to stand for the Magnificat as the church has done for 2000 years, as indeed the Jewish tradition has done, and sang psalms in that way, we're entering into a tradition

that's been around a long time and that's another Moot thing. What do they call it? Ancient future, you know, drawing on the tradition and infusing it with a different twist or an alternative [inaudible 00:25:14].

Int: Or even fresh eyes, even if it's the exact same thing.

R: Yeah.

Int: Okay.

R: So that's been quite exciting to engage with that.

Int: Ah, that's interesting. That's new for you too, I guess, certain things.

R: Yeah. I find the Church of England's Daily Office fairly tiresome. Fine if you're in community, it's fine at college. Well, bit wordy. No, it is far too wordy, so I don't use it. I mean I use a shorter version and I don't use it all the time, I meditate. I use the offices for seasons and I use other stuff and Mooters are wanting to not have too many words and I think that's a valid point, but also allowing words just to wash over you and not get too stuff on the meaning, I think that's part of worship and certainly part of the …

Int: [inaudible 00:26:19] tradition.

R: Yeah and [inaudible 00:26:21], you know, the psalms are great because they're just so varied but you have to be careful and I think part of [inaudible 00:26:35] is about having a lightness of touch but being faithful and I think community [inaudible 00:26:41] and indeed a rule of life is about being faithful, turning up, saying your prayers, whatever you choose it to be but it's that rhythm. You do it and you do when you're not feeling, "Yeah, skip it," but it's a commitment you make and in community you support one another, both by prayer and in worship. I think we still have that slight individualistic, evangelical response to community and indeed scripture.

Int: Oh okay, so the individualistic would be more from the evangelical [inaudible 00:27:17], not necessarily the, kind of, mainstream isolation type individualism.

R: No, I think it comes from an evangelical which says, "I need to understand my faith. In order to say the Creed I need to know what it means and what [inaudible 00:27:36]."

Int: Right, okay. Yeah, the rationalisation of it, yeah.

R: Absolutely rational, yeah and that certainly comes from … and that's part of the rejection. It's an interesting …

Int: So people are like, yeah, they have evangelical backgrounds.

R: Which they've rejected but there is still that cultural, intellectual kind of understanding of what faith should be about, which is very different from a catholic tradition, which is about what you engage with about worship together, about the experience of worship and the intellectual stuff, it comes slightly secondary.

Int: I was going to say, if you even own a bible. That whole thing.

R: Indeed.

Int: Yeah.

R: But you would know your [inaudible 00:28:18] or you would know the [inaudible 00:28:21].

Int: Right, you'd know all [inaudible 00:28:21].

R: Yes, because you've got it there.

Int: Yeah. So it depends where the hard wiring … so a lot of the hard wiring for people in Moot probably came from the Evangelical tradition. [inaudible 00:28:31].

R: Yes, it's more [inaudible 00:28:31]. Not totally.

Int: Not totally, okay.

R: But more so. I mean we've got a number of people who don't come from that tradition.

Int: Okay.

R: Yes, Elizabeth who actually, she's not coming tonight, she went from atheist to Anglo-Catholic. Robin [inaudible 00:28:55] middle of the road, not evangelical. So it's a nice mix.

Int: Okay, there's a mix, but I guess would you say it would be from the big early stages of this type of movement kind of comes from?

R: Yes. I mean it's had a complicated history and it's come out of, I think, the alternative worship movement of the 90s and various add on's and drawing people from an Evangelical tradition into a more radical theology or understanding of the bible and church.

Int: I'm going to switch it a little but you've mentioned a little about some traumatic experiences that happened within the community, or just some real pain that happened, can you discuss that a little bit about what happened with Moot? Some challenges, yeah, so some of the community challenges that have [inaudible 00:29:54].

R: I think it relied on a number of key people. I think in its desire to be all inclusive and welcoming its took on people that were actually too needy, it took on projects that were too big and perhaps didn't have the support from the diocese that it should have done, for example, in setting up a café. And the ideal was that it was going to be a community run café and there was going to be a community house and all those things kind of didn't materialise.

Int: Oh, I see. Okay.

R: So there was probably not enough professional support in terms of a business model, I suppose, and it relied on probably the priest too much to kind of run things and get it all sorted, as well as, I think, a number of individuals who were very destructive, intentionally and unintentionally to the community. Very needy people, and actually, again, that's where in terms of community Moot made the wrong decision of wanting to

include them, actually it was damaging to the community and what perhaps needed to happen was for them to be excluded because they were with their issues and their problems. If they were too big a problem for Moot to hold and help.

Int: They could be included in a different way maybe?

R: Possibly. I think that would be a Moot point but my take would be, actually just from my experiences, no, actually Moot even then was too small a community to cope with those very needy people. Yeah, difficulty in relationships and the ramifications or reverberations are still there, they've largely gone and people have actually been very good and there's been a lot of healing that's taken place within the community and with those who've left or are much more on the fringe.

Int: And also, like, individuals.

R: Yes. Yeah.

Int: So as a whole the challenges that Moot as a community encounters, you think those issues have brought those up? What are the general challenges that Mot encounters? For a community like this, what's challenging?

R: Survival.

Int: Yeah?

R: It's basic, it's survival. It really is because it really is hanging by a thread. This place will survive, I mean a café church will survive because it's bringing an income, it's whether Moot … well, Moot can't survive as it is now, it has to go somewhere and my take is it's a lovely group of people. They're still quite [inaudible 00:33:04] and they need to be encouraged to make the journey or to turn outward, to be confident of themselves to actually, "Well we're here for a reason and that's to preach the gospel, to reach out to others," and we have to do that by increasing our numbers and by getting away from this reliance of a Sunday service. I mean I think this is key. It's as basic as

that. Get other people in to share the responsibilities and at the moment it's Tim holding the fort really, Kate holding the fort and the GCC council, and they are, they're doing a very great job but it's stretching. They're all working [inaudible 00:33:48].

Int: Are the numbers going down?

R: No, the numbers aren't going down and we do get people coming in and belonging and staying, which is good. Good news, but you've got to be careful, you don't want dumping stuff on newcomers, you want them to come and participate on the right …

Int: On their terms, yeah.

R: Yeah, not because we're desperate.

Int: "Yeah, we've got a new person." There's like a right time when you can start inviting people.

R: Yes. Yeah. So, yeah, I think it's survival.

Int: Survival, in terms of just people coming … is this what you mean by survival and being …

R: No.

Int: Basically inward versus outward looking.

R: Survival in terms of making this a viable place, both as a café and as a venue for using this place effectively, as well as the whole community stuff. What will Moot be in a year's time? What will the community be and how will it look like? All those are up for grabs, I think. I mean heading in the right direction, I think it's all positive and good and there is a job being advertised for a part time priest here and so the future is looking good.

Int: No, it's good. You were saying about because there is a social justice focus but you're saying it's still quite inward looking, so you said there's really no outreach ever, it kind of stays in. Is there any social justice type things?

R: No. The only outreach is the Serum discussion things which are very good and if they happen a couple of times a month or something. In terms of other outreach stuff, nothing at the moment.

Int: How do people find out about Moot besides just it being a famous London …?

R: Yeah, it's often a website, often through Googling. Because Ian had quite an international ministry in terms of coaching and teaching on new monastic stuff, Moot is quite well known across the world so we get a lot of interest from people across the world who want to come and visit.

Int: Okay, so it's just the reputation too.

R: But they want to come and visit and see what it's like and it's very different from what you see on the website. Yeah, we get, yes, quite a lot of [inaudible 00:36:38], but others I think, yeah, it's often by searching the web. I'm just trying [inaudible 00:36:47] recent newcomers. People have either walked past or done a search on the internet.

Int: Okay, online really.

R: Yeah.

Int: If not reputation.

R: Yes and reputation as well, yes. Word of mouth, that kind of goes on. I'm just trying to think. And by its nature as well we are quite transient. Being in central London and being in the city people often stay here for a while and then go, either because they're getting married or their job changes or they move out.

Int: It's just the city lifestyle.

R: Yes, that's just typical of central London, it really is quite a transient population.

Int: What would you say Moot does really well? What does Moot do that everyone should start picking up and incorporating too?

R: I think Moot is a haven and I think that's what the church should be. It has got its faults but it tries to be a haven, a safe space.

Int: And it does fulfil that?

R: I think it does. I mean it's not without fault but, yeah, I think it does. Without the need to … you know, you need to sign up and belong to it and subscribe to this or that way of believing its … you know, "We welcome you as you are. This is our style of worship. We like to have silence. These are our social things, come and join in with."

Int: So it's that inclusivity thing.

R: Yes.

Int: So I guess the challenge, it sounds like, is having that and providing that because it's what it does best and it's what people come here for but also to taper it off with the challenges, like you're saying, either being too inclusive for those that could be really dangerous for the community or doing too big a project.

R: And indeed become cliquey.

Int: Do you think that cliqueness is there?

R: I think there's an element of cliqueness, yes. I think it happens in all churches because once you get familiar with people and the whole thing of welcome is a challenge to newcomers and some people are very god at it but I think we as a community, it's an area that needs to be worked on a little bit more.

Int: You get enough new people coming in that you worry if you might recognise their faiths or they're not welcomed [inaudible 00:39:49]?

R: Well as a newcomer myself it was interesting who welcomed me when I first came in and how I felt about coming in to the church when I didn't actually know anybody.

Int: That's really valuable I think, good to know.

R: That was quite an interesting experience because the first time I came I didn't come with my dog collar.

Int: Okay. Do you ever wear the collar?

R: Yes I do, yes.

Int: I don't think I've seen you with a collar before.

R: No. Well Sunday you would have and normally on a Wednesday. Yeah.

Int: Do you wear a black shirt?

R: I have got black shirts.

Int: But you don't wear the black shirt here, or do you?

R: Actually, I did do the other week and it was commented on because I looked a little too like a father from St. Stephen's House.

Int: At least it wasn't a linen collar.

R: No.

Int: I'm assuming.

R: No.

Int: You could if you wanted to. So you wear like a coloured shirt.

R: I just wear [inaudible 00:41:03], the plastic thing.

Int: On a normal shirt?

R: I've got grey and black shirts that fit, yeah.

Int: Okay. I'll pay more attention on a Sunday. That's really interesting though because they're coming in, I mean in your own personal experience, not coming in as the

chaplain but just coming in as part of the community, what was your sense of what made you not fit in or what made you fit in?

R: Well, I was welcomed by a new member herself and we ended up chatting and I was aware … people tend to gather on that sofa or that sofa and that's quite a hard group to break into.

Int: The sofa group?

R: The sofa group.

Int: Ah. I didn't realise that. [inaudible 00:41:57]. There was nobody else on the sofa though when I first came in. I just sat there and then the sofa group came to me.

R: Yes, that's right. Oh, you were in the right place, you see.

Int: I was in the right place. Maybe too much ethnography I learned there [inaudible 00:42:17]. I'm joking. Anyway, so there's the sofa group, [inaudible 00:42:22] sofa.

R: That's where people tend to gather and also I think …

Int: But you said you and another newbie …

R: Talked to me and we gathered around the bar. So we gather around the bar or around the sofa. Some people are very good. A lot of us are more introverted and it's harder to go up to somebody strange.

Int: Oh, there's [inaudible 00:42:46].

R: Exactly. I think that's a feature of us. There's also and [inaudible 00:42:52] collar or not is there are people who are Moot returnees or who've been away for a time. So I did go through a little phase of, "Have you been to Moot before?" and "I've not seen you here before." So we've got a number of people like that who are on the fringe.

Int: Who only come a few times.

R: Yes, but obviously they know some people here anyway. So, yeah, I mean I would say that of any church community, the welcome always needs to be worked on.

Int: But it's more just a human interaction.

R: Yes.

Int: Do you think you would feel isolated if you had a different … like coming from a little more Catholic than here, do you think that could be isolating for someone that came in? Someone with a Catholic tradition and they came into here, would you think churchmanship would be isolating?

R: No, I don't think it's churchmanship particularly, I think it's going into church that's the challenging thing. So I think even for people who come here for coffee, the next step for them to come on a Thursday evening and to go down there, I think that's quite a big step.

Int: To walk past those doors.

R: To go past those doors and to do worship or to do [inaudible 00:44:19], but that's our aim and I think it's achievable because people are coming in to church to have coffee and saying, "Oh, this is a nice place," but it's still a big step for them to say, "I'm going to spend half an hour …"

Int: "Engaging with the church."

R: "Doing something or having coffee." And that's why we do the hospitality bit and why I'm choosing wine not coffee. So you can do your half hour bit of meditation or bit of worship, bit of god and then go back home, or you can stay and meet the community, meet people [inaudible 00:45:06].

Int: Ah yeah, because wine gets you all bubbly.

R: So it just relaxes you.

Int: It relaxes you a little bit.

R: Yeah.

Int: That's true.

R: But I still think and I do think we have to do it much more, you know, another couple of months really and actually if nobody turns up I think it's, as we were saying, it's good to do because actually it's about our worship as a community and breaking this Sunday evening thing.

Int: Yeah, I mean it's just good to try it too, seeing where it goes. It's a good idea, good enough to keep going. I mean in terms of if anybody ever felt isolated from the community it would just be typical because you don't know everybody yet. There's natural cliques.

R: There are and actually the natural cliques are good because people have got friendships and we've got a Facebook page and people do post stuff on there and there are some [inaudible 00:46:01], you know, house groups. So people are supported, is self-supporting in that sense in terms of keeping in contact with the people who are part of the community and by and large people are very good at making people feel welcome.

Int: But you see that is, kind of, the best thing that Moot provides is the haven, the city haven.

R: I think so. That would be my take.

Int: Alright. I think that's really all my questions. You can put the wine in the fridge now. I kind of went around. I had my general questions but then the order of them changes depending on where the conversation goes.

R: Sure.

Int: But thank you.

R: You're very welcome.

Int: Do you have any last remarks that you want to add or maybe to cover something that you talked about?

R: No, I've covered it.

Int: Yeah.

R: I've got some questions for you but just about your project.

Int: Oh, yeah, yeah, we can have that conversation over wine, off the record.

R: But no, [inaudible 00:47:11].

Int: Yeah, nothing to go back and "Actually, erase that," or "Edit that."

R: No, I don't, no. that's all fine.

Int: Great. Thank you very much, Aaron.

'Kate' (Moot)

Int : Yes, I got a lot of celebrities.

R : I thought you had Dave Tomlinson?

Int: I did, that was him. We did it in two halves.

R: He's a legend.

Int: I know, one of the really good things, I feel like I'm getting so many legends.

R: [unclear 0:00:19] he shaped the movement.

Int: Gosh, I know.

R: [unclear 0:00:25]

Int: The funny thing is, he was so open to do it too, because he's working on another book now, he's finishing it up and he still does all the parish stuff. I don't know where he has time to do anything.

R: It grounds him. I have a friend who goes to his church as part of his parish in Holloway and that's what inspires him, the parish does.

Int: Have you ever been?

R: I've been once, yes. I went for her kid's christening, I was there. It was an enormous number, and they've had some gigs at his church so I've been there.

Int: They have so many different, I think I might go this Sunday but the main one is in the morning, so that means I have to get up really early to make it. Either that or spend the night on Saturday.

R: That's an option.

Int: That's an opinion, we'll see what happens. So, questions, say your name and then the group that you're involved in?

R: My name is Kate and I'm part of Moot.

Int: How would you describe Moot to a general audience, a random person speak that you're talking to?

R: I think Moot is the elbow of the Church of England.

Int: Elbow?

R: Yes, it's part of the body but it's not a welcome part of the body. But I think the Church of England hierarchy recognise its value. A lot of people in Moot have had hard experiences in church, maybe less so than before but it's always been quite a part of identity that people have been into quite fundamentalist evangelical tracts of charismatic preachers that have not fitted and they've not been welcome there because of who they are, the questions they ask, the discomfort that they bring as person in their identity. So Moot has been very much a place of belonging and acceptance for people who have been chewed up by the church, basically.

Int: Do you think it's always been that way, since the beginning?

R: Yes, I think that's role it's served, so maybe when the Church is better, we'll not be there but it think that's the purpose it's served since it began.

Int: Has it developed in any way, because it's been around since 2003?

R: That was very much people who were in the alt worshipping, like you'll have spoken to Tim. So that was people who were disenfranchised with mainstream church but also worshipping became this whole ego trip – look how creative I am, I've got all my [unclear 0:02:50].

Int: It gets so much more conceptual.

R: Yes, and end up working the creativity of the person who's leading this service or whatever. Moot was very much when Ian – you should talk to Ian.

Int: Another Ian?

R: Ian Mobsby.

Int: Yes, I will talk to him but we have to do it over Skype.

R: He's in Peckham.

Int: I should bother him, I'm here.

R: You should. He would love it, he would seriously love it.

Int: He said that he would do it, but I'll have to do it over Skype because of scheduling.

R: [unclear 0:03:25] So Moot was a response against that. Using the ancient liturgy, bringing ancient to the modern, takes out the ego. You're using the liturgy which is ancient. So it's not about what you bring, it's about God doing whatever God wants to do. It's not about me and my skills and talents, it's about these are the ancient structures and scaffolding for you to find yourself in and for us to create a space and hold that space, and God does whatever God wants to do in that space.

Int: So it was trying to do something different from alt worship?

R: Yes, it's trying to move beyond the ego.

Int: Because a lot of that postmodern stuff-ness…

R: It's totally ego driven, yes. Also intellectually driven as well. A lot of people in Moot are quite smart and they're quite analytical, so you become stuck in head space, then that means the heart space doesn't grow. So a big part of Moot was the balance between orthodoxy but also orthopathy, so right thinking and all the practice, so social justice, ecological justice, right living.

Int: I know there was some talk about not being called New Monasticism now?

R: We used to be. Ian's big passion was about New Monasticism, reclaiming the traditional rhythms of life, the simplicity. It's very beautiful but the way he expressed it was not in an accessible way and there is a lot of guilt in the community, like we already know what it's all about. Try not to let Ian down, but now Ian's moved on, I think

people have almost reacted against it. So we're not New Monastics, no, we're not in the traditional sense but I think there are elements of Moot which are quite monastic in their simplicity.

I think also that the Moot community has operated a little like a monastic community in that it's been a place of refuge for a lot of people. We get a lot of people who are in transition, who come for a time and then they go on. It makes me think it's a little bit like how the monasteries were, people who weren't in the church would come and they would spend some time in the monastery and they would heal, then they'd go back out the world, like vicars.

Int: Yes, you need to just be fed and then go.

R: Yes, I think Moot does that for a lot of people. People who've had bad experiences come in and then they heal, then they go back out again. People who are going through divorces, people who are going through massive break ups, often you get people in transition. It's hard because you love them and [unclear 0:06:05] they go back off to their old church.

Int: But there types of transition, like life transition as well as faith transition?

R: Yes, definitely. I think that's something I've recognised over the time I've been at Moot, you can see people who don't see any more and it's often because they're more able to engage in local church in a way they couldn't before because it was too painful. Moot asks nothing of you, you come and you just engage in liturgy and then you chat and you make friendships.

Int: If you want to get involved, you don't even have to get involved?

R: Even if you get involved, we never discuss theology. In most churches it's about believe and then belong. So you believe what everyone believes and then you find a sense of belonging. In Moot, it's always trying to be accepting. People come with all

their different theologies and this is all God so why should it bother us, people believe what they want to believe, we're not here to coerce them into what we believe. Just come and be.

Int: Wherever you're at?

R: Yes, and then if their beliefs change that's great, if they don't, that's not a problem. It is hard, we get people who come who are… most of Moot is quite left leaning.

Int: Social politically?

R: Yes, definitely. We're hippies, basically. You get somebody in, you get chatting in the pub and then you realise that they vote for the Conservative Party and they like Michael Gove, and you're just like, oh my God, I'm really challenged here. It's hard because then you realise that this person disagrees with things that you fundamentally feel are right. Acceptance is a lot harder than people make it sound like it is, but I think it's really important and we do really, really try, and we are diverse but we're also quite homogenous in other ways.

Int: So there is a certain level you think is self-selecting, so there would be a natural assumption that if you're going to come to Moot you come from that left leaning side of things?

R: We do have some token Tories who've stuck around.

Int: Stuck around, even. So you have those badges.

R: It's three people and I know who they are, the rest of them work for Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth or some other random charities, some other social justice. Most people have got some kind of lifestyle with a social justice kind of mandate.

Int: There are a variety of different types of things. There is a Sunday which is the main one and then there is Serum and then there is this Thursday thing and then you have a morning Tuesday.

R: Tuesday and Friday, yes.

Int: Then you have the meditations?

R: Wednesday night, yes.

Int: Are there certain situations where everybody is sharing as opposed to just being a service?

R: You mean talking and stuff, yes the mini-Moots.

Int: Those are the home groups?

R: Small groups, yes.

Int: Then you have a wide variety of social political leaning from those two?

R: Yes.

Int: How do you guys deal with that as a group?

R: Try and be loving.

Int: But it's okay though, they feel they would come to those?

R: Yes, people do come to those. In our group it's quite a big group, we've got some disparity, different people, but really what it's about is getting to know each other as human beings, living in London, trying to live in a right or loving, just way, however that might look and how you might perceive that. So we get together and we talk and we have some food, share with staff and then have a little contemporary prayer and that's it.

Int: So even if there is that difference, it still works?

R: Yes. Some people aren't sure about it.

Int: Basically on top of the assumption of everyone being lefty, there is still the openness that is a higher value?

R: It's like really integral but it is really, really hard. Also I think some people, they didn't feel safe in their old churches and they've come to Moot and they feel a sense of safety. Then they find other in their safe space and that's challenging because they've a single identity and it's a safe space, and then somebody who comes here who belongs but who is representing the enemy almost in their mind, that's hard.

Int: Yes, that's what makes it challenging because it triggers on those reasons why you even went to Moot to begin with?

R: Yes.

Int: What about for those people that are the triggers, for example, for them do we have their own experience of other churches being…

R: Yes.

Int: So it's a similar narrative but it's general right now?

R: Not everybody in Moot is bruised by the Church but I'd say about 70% is.

Int: 30% are not super bruised but just like going?

R: They just like the openness and the different way of doing spirituality and the Moot focus.

Int: When you started coming, what was your reason for coming?

R: I was part of a community church in Bethnal Green where I live. It was maybe 2009 I started coming. Basically I started to realise that the theology, they said it was loving but it was only loving up to a certain point, when people's behaviours disagreed with what they said. I had a friend who had a baby and she wanted to get it blessed or dedicated, and they were fine with that, her and her partner, they weren't married. Her partner didn't come to church and they were okay with it. Had a second child and they refused. I was like, what is this. So basically it was because she wasn't married to him. I was like, that's such hypocrisy and it's so unloving. I felt it was kind of disgusting.

They wouldn't've been cool if they were married, even though maybe it wasn't right for them to be married but they wanted people to conform. You're supposed to conform to social rules.

Int: There was like a hard and fast rule, an all or nothing rule?

R: Yes, all about conformity. Another friend of mine, she'd been in the church for 20 years and she went to worship every week, she was an integral part and she was single, and it was really painful to her to be single. She was 35. At 36 she met this guy on a holiday – a Christian single's holiday, playing by all the rules – seek first from God in order to be added, all this kind of stuff.

Int: Yes, ticks all the boxes.

R: Totally, she was playing the game as she should've been playing. She met this guy, she fell in love, everything was wonderful. They wanted to get married, turned out he had been divorced so they refused to marry them in the church.

Int: It was like a cold series of these rules?

R: Yes, because he was divorced. Would they prefer that he slept around, yes they would've by that logic. They didn't get married, just have a bazillion promiscuous relationships, it's completely incompatible with the loving God as the way I understood it. There was another friend who was closet gay and he's still closet gay because basically they're forcing him to choose between his community and his integrity. I felt like I was being forced to choose between my loving community of friends and people who lived in that area – I still see them all around, live in the same area – and my integrity. I choose my integrity, and he chooses his community and he supresses his homosexual, same sex attractions, whatever he wants to call it. He's single and I know it's really, really painful for him but in order to belong, that's what he has to do. Has to say, that side of me is wrong and I find that really hard. I choose integrity, so I left.

Int: So you left and starting going to another church, and you maintained your friendships though?

R: Yes, as much as possible but they found it quite difficult that I was going somewhere else.

Int: I would imagine, because sometimes a lot of those groups too, so much of it is the group friendship and then the individual friendships, you don't really know where they are sometimes.

R: I had some really, really good individual friendships. I'm a musician as well, I was in a band as well, the band were quite tight. I couldn't sing the songs, I didn't agree with a lot of things, so I would goldfish the words I didn't agree with and then I'd sing out the ones I did. Then it got to the point where I was gold fishing more than I was signing, and I was just like, I can't continue here, it's compromising too far. They thought I was just being adolescent.

Int: They thought you were slipping away?

R: I was just like, I think this is not loving, I think this is incompatible with a loving God that we profess to follow. I don't see where you're going with this. I cannot understand this.

Int: Are there expressions of your faith or your spirituality that you miss?

R: [unclear 0:15:08] mini-Moot about what do we miss about normal church.

Int: Or other types of church, yes.

R: Yes, or previous churches and people said corporate signing, they really miss that. [unclear 0:15:19] once a month. People missed diversity. At Moot, because of the kind of church, most are in their 20s and 30s and that's it, but in a local church you get old people and families. People in Moot who have families generally don't come back because they can't get in for Sunday night, it's just impossible. So they don't attend the

church, the services, so they drop out of the community. I've lost loads of really good friends that way, it's really sad.

Int: People that have kids?

R: Yes. We've tried so hard but we can't.

Int: Just the time?

R: Yes and the energy it takes to engage kids in it. None of us have got kids so we don't know how to do that. We've been trying to do that but the ones that can do it the best are the parents and they end up doing everything and that's shit, isn't it.

Int: You don't have enough people that had kids at the same time so they can have a little small community, it's just always one less?

R: Yes.

Int: You guys are a group just decided we can't?

R: We can't do it, yes. We're trying to keep ourselves afloat, never mind the kids there as well. It's too much.

Int: The things that you miss, do you feel like you need to feed in in other ways or do you have enough that you need with Moot and what it does?

R: Last Sunday we did that hymn. I don't know, dodgy.

Int: Everyone was so like [unclear 0:16:51].

R: What is this.

Int: What's Aaron doing?

R: I know. He's only been here a year, he clearly hasn't made a memo.

Int: He knew at least that it was going to be challenging?

R: Yes, because we didn't do any music for the longest time, we've only been doing Teza since 2012, four years.

Int: It's really new, so music and then Teza is new?

R: Yes, because people have this experience of being manipulated by worship leaders and by music, it can be so manipulative. I know, I used to do it, it's manipulative. So bring it all out, yes you totally can do that and it's exploitation and it's not necessary. It's not necessary for any experience of God to gee people up, now we're going to have a meditative bit, I'm going to sing some chilled out stuff. It's so false and manufactured. So people were like, had enough of this manipulative practice, let's not do music.

Int: Let's keep it safe and not do music, yes.

R: We introduced Teza gradually and that is very unreligious, it's just these songs again and again and again.

Int: If anything it's just contemplative and everyone is okay with that. The hymn though, what were your feelings?

R: I was just like, what is the point of this. It's theologically dodgy.

Int: Aaron liked it, Aaron wanted to put it in.

R: Aaron is a lot more trad than the rest of us. He's a lot more trad than Ian was. Ian was very progressive and really wants to have expression of faith which is authentic to the life you live outside of church. Culturally potentially relevant. Hymns, that kind of language, I don't use that kind of language. Even the words Aaron has brought in, he's brought in much, much more traditional than the Moot stuff.

Int: How did Aaron come in?

R: Interregnum.

Int: Yes I know it's interregnum but was he just assigned there?

R: No the Arch Bishop asked something in the Diocese said he's coming, and we're like, all right. We googled him and didn't find much.

Int: Really, it was just a sign?

R: Yes.

Int: Your church wording, it's you and Tim?

R: Yes.

Int: My parish…

R: We were in trouble basically. Ian had some mental health problems and made some terrible decisions and we were in some serious trouble with the diocese. So it's almost like we're following special measures and giving a safe priest.

Int: To scare you back?

R: We had some really, really, really bad times. We're only just coming out of it really.

Int: So big trauma happened?

R: Extreme pain, yes.

Int: With Ian leaving?

R: No, before Ian left. Extreme messiness.

Int: Do you mind going into that?

R: I feel awkward because you're going to talk to Ian.

Int: I won't pass it on. Part of my methodology is to find out where the big trauma points are in the community too, because that highlights where the values are. If a real trauma really happened this is really…

R: What we had, in terms of that, what the problem was is we were fearful of authority and suspicious of authority. Ian especially. Ian does not do well with authority, especially male authority. Got some daddy issues I think.

Int: If he's a male himself.

R: Yes.

Int: Except for that part.

R: Daddy stuff, you know. We're not able to assert authority in our leadership, we have a quite flat leadership and even the authority that Ian tried to asset was undermined. Also because of [unclear 0:20:37] we attract screwballs and crazies who have been spat out by Church for legitimate reasons. So we had some screwballs and crazies who were recruited into positions, which was a stupid thing to do but it was something about, people are unemployable, let's employ them and mentor them and give them a chance. Give them something good on their CV and maybe that'll be good. But turned out to be the most destructive thing.

Int: People were just not competent leaders?

R: Incompetent, undermining and sabotaging. There was mass sabotage and dividing the community. This one person, I think she had mental health problems as well, challenged Ian then attacked Ian, basically. He had severe anxiety and depression that was exacerbated by that. He made some stupid decisions and then some more stupid decisions, and then some more stupid decisions, and the diocese was like, you guys are crazy, we're going to pull the plug. It happened multiple times. We've had enough of you guys, kind of thing.

Int: This same type of pattern with the leadership not…

R: Yes. He was undermined by the diocese as well. If he had broken his leg, he'd have got off sick and I was pleading with him, Ian just go off sick, and he wouldn't. They didn't support him at all, they made it worse and they bullied him. If he was in a big institution, most definitely his experience was bullying and it was made worse by his anxiety and his depression.

Int: Around what year was this, it was getting drawn out?

R: About a year ago, he left a year ago.

Int: So it was drawn a couple of years before he left?

R: Yes, it was at its worse 2012-2015, the last three years when he was with us. Big division and lots of back biting and some very, very serious allegations were made against people, and real manipulation.

Int: Did somebody come in to try and analyse the situation, it was just he said, she said, then it got reported back?

R: It was he said, she said, and then it was silence. Nobody is allowed to talk about this.

Int: Or else we're going to get shut down?

R: No, the person who was the destructive person went to HR and got a gagging order.

Int: To the diocese?

R: No, against Ian, so he couldn't say anything about it.

Int: So legal action?

R: Yes.

Int: Not even just diocese action, ah.

R: Essentially he couldn't defend himself. So she said all she needed to say and then she got this gagging order. So he was respecting that and couldn't say anything, so couldn't defend himself. So the community was against him and for her. It was just extremely painful and destructive situation, but it was because he had severe mental health problems and we had unhealthy leaderships, unhealthy relationship with leadership. Unhealthy relationship with the diocese and they weren't sure what we were all about.

Int: The diocese, or at least Church of England would always show off as… you guys are like the successful…

R: They weren't last year.

Int: There is what you see and then what's actually happening.

R: The reality. [unclear 0:24:09] we attract people who've got problems, who've got unresolved issues with people in leadership.

Int: How has it been, you said it's starting to calm down now finally?

R: We had a day of reconciliation. We got a mediator [unclear 0:24:27] peace and reconciliation and that was really, really good. There is still hurt and anger which I think always comes from it.

Int: Are all these people still here, some left?

R: Some left, some have come back, some are still around. I was a good friend of Ian's so I always in the campaign.

Int: So there was day of reconciliation, you guys all set that up together?

R: Yes, Ian organised it but he didn't come because he was moving on. That's about 18 months ago.

Int: Aaron came in?

R: Last June, July. He's meant to be there until September and then it was January and he's still here. We just needed to pick ourselves up and reform who we were before we think about what kind of vicar do we need.

Int: Right, because then you select the vicar or priest in charge?

R: Yes, whatever you want to call it. To do that you need to know who you are, so we needed to move on from the pain of it all and somehow recollect our thoughts.

Int: Has Aaron been good coming in?

R: Yes, he's been great. Like I say, he's much more churchy than we ever hard before, less contextually relevant than we ever had before, the service tonight, not my cup of tea.

Int: Like these Thursdays, not really your thing?

R: No, not at all, very un-Moot. Really un-Moot.

Int: Was that his idea?

R: Yes, they were all Aaron's idea and it was Aaron's liturgy he put together himself, completely un-Moot. The most Moot-y service, I think is the Teza one, me and Paul wrote it.

Int: Yes, you and Paul are like looters. On the Sunday, has that always been that format or is that Aaron too?

R: No that's been generally that format. The [unclear 0:26:30] is Aaron but generally, although he uses the prayer that we wrote, the confession that we wrote for Teza is now in the Eucharist, so that's good.

Int: What else is different?

R: We used to have the Rhythm of Life, it had seven words that part of the rhythm of the life – acceptance, creativity, balance, accountability… that's four. We had one content of the service on each theme, so once a month we do a contemplative service.

Int: For the Sunday?

R: Yes. We had this rotation, the Eucharist contemplative service and [unclear 0:27:11]. Teza.

Int: Now is every Sunday like that Sunday?

R: Ish, but then the Eucharist is always lead by the priest because he's doing Eucharist.

Int: Then the prayers are the same around it though, like [unclear 0:27:28] generally the same?

R: Yes.

Int: The Eucharist administered pretty much the same?

R: Yes, with the singing.

Int: That's really cool, I love that.

R: That was Ian. He recorded it for [unclear 0:27:42] and changes it every time we do it, it's not his natural habitat, he's trying really hard. We're all laughing.

Int: Let's give him credit for trying but he's also trying to put little things that he likes. It's more him trying to do it for you guys as opposed…

R: Also if he's interregnum, then he's got to go with the rhythms of what's there already.

Int: Yes, he has to do a few things that's him too though right, that's so sweet. We'll go back to more positive things.

R: I don't mind.

Int: In general, what are your favourite things that you've done, that he does?

R: Mini-café is cool in that it blows sacred – secular divides, so this is a holy place, everybody should come in and enjoy it, people should come in.

Int: You've been getting a regular amount of people coming in?

R: Yes.

Int: That's happening during the week, office hours?

R: 7.30 in the morning to 4.15 in the afternoon.

Int: It's like a proper café in that way and regular people come in.

R: And high quality coffee.

Int: Do you come in? No, you work somewhere else.

R: I'd love to come in. I'll be in tomorrow morning for Teza but yes, the fact that it's a café but you can come in and bring people from outside and just sit, it's again holding this space but that's what moves it quite well, just holding the space. Nothing is asked of you, you don't have to do anything or be anything. Basically you haven't got to conform.

Int: Yes, to any particular thing.

R: Just sit down and do these things, hopefully, the idea, the best part of Moot is a very gentle holding of the space.

Int: When people come in, it just works like a café, nobody says anything like actually we're Moot, blah, blah, blah?

R: No.

Int: Do people know, it's just a café in a church as far as they know?

R: Yes, I think so. It used to be run by members of the community, that was a disaster. Theologians make terrible café managers. Then we had a good café manager who is also a theologian and now we have a café manager who is a manager. We're having to push back for the first time, actually this is a social enterprise, an initial enterprise, the bottom line is not finance and not profit making, our bottom line is holding the space. So will you do this, the compromise, thinking about things they do to increase profit will compromise our space holding. And the hospitality of it all, the [unclear 0:30:34].

Int: So there are meetings [unclear 0:30:37]?

R: They're really life words.

Int: How long has the café been around?

R: Next Friday is our fourth birthday party.

Int: I've been seeing all those signs?

R: You've got to come.

Int: That's going to be big, six or seven but probably six, now a whole conversation on seven. So fourth birthday of the café. I heard a conversation last Thursday when people said that during the week Moot versus weekend Moot?

R: Yes, we haven't been very good about blending the two communities.

Int: When you say during the week Moot, that's not café people because café people are just…

R: People that come in from the café and who use the space, a lot of people come in and just sit in the church, or they come to meditation on a Wednesday lunchtime or a serum in the evening and sometimes they cross over but largely it's different people that come on a Sunday evening.

Int: But people who just use the café they're different, if they go to one of those during the week services [unclear 0:31:43]?

R: Yes, so they have Moot-chos, who are people who come on a Sunday and then weekday Moot-chos. They would never see themselves as part of the community. We see them as part of the community but they don't see themselves that way.

Int: The weekday ones, I see. Sunday the big one though, I guess. Those are the ones that's like, that's where it's explicit. If you're here on Sunday you're Mooter, but then during the week, here or there, depending on…

R: Somebody said and I think it's true that Mooters are by nature fringe dwellers, they don't like to get involved or committed because they've had bad experience of church maybe, or with authority, or they don't want to get sucked in.

Int: You said the people don't like to get involved, they just like to do the church thing?

R: Or they don't even get involved in church thing, they want to come along and then go home.

Int: You have that in the whole cultural Catholic, just go for the Sundays and go, you just have the person to do it for you.

R: Yes, it depends why. Maybe they do it because they're fearful of getting sucked in, It's a fear motivation rather than an apathy.

Int: Yes, as opposed to culture. What do you think is challenging in general? We're in [unclear 0:33:01] but in general what are the challenges?

R: I think it's hard to find who we are without defining ourselves in opposition to something else. I would say I'm post-church, what does that mean apart from not that, that's not helpful to define yourselves in opposite, it's better to define yourself by this is what I am, I'm not that. So I think we have to be defining who we are, maybe because we're not really doing the New Monasticism.

Int: Or just because people don't know exactly what New Monasticism is, that's really it, right?

R: Yes, because Ian was very brilliant at describing it. He described it, oh yes I get it.

Int: [unclear 0:33:44] some of you guys lived together so it's like, oh that's kind of New Monastic, even if it's unintentional.

R: Yes, but don't tell the rest of the housemates, they're not interested. [unclear 0:33:59] is Buddhist, he'd be quite unhappy thinking he's in a nonmonastic house, he'd be quite shocked.

Int: So just the definition?

R: I think that's what we struggle with, yes.

Int: That's what you're working on now, so you know what to get…

R: We wrote a parish profile which is quite an interesting experience.

Int: So just you and Tim and…

R: The GCC, yes.

Int: So you do the proper thing, so instead of calling it PCC call it GCC.

R: The Guild Church County, very Guild Church, not Parish Church. All these delicious hierarchies.

Int: I know, wonderful C of E terminology. So you guys all wrote it together, is that up somewhere?

R: I can send it to you. It's part of the recruitment and I can send it to you, it's quite nice.

Int: You're proud of it?

R: I think it's a good reflection of who we are, and it's an honest reflection of where we are. It has a very carefully worded section that we've been through some bumps in the road basically and we are where we are because of these bumps and we're trying to recoup and hang on to what's good and valuable and constructive, and move beyond what has been destructive.

Int: Did everybody had a chance to look at it?

R: We in the Guild Church Council.

Int: Just the GCC?

R: Yes.

Int: It hasn't been disseminated to everyone?

R: No, because it's just for the recruitment really. A little bit, at the end you've got meet the Mooters and people have a little bit of, why I am a Mooter, we asked them to submit reasons, I am a Mooter because… and it's what it means to them.

Int: Do you think everybody in the GCC is pretty much confident in what came out of there?

R: Yes.

Int: There is nobody that's like, I'm not comfortable with that, just let that go?

R: No, we changed it.

Int: There's been lots of incarnations to get it where it is?

R: [unclear 0:35:58]

Int: That's really funny. What do you think Moot does the best?

R: I think we're quite good at holding space and being somewhere that doesn't require… I think it's just a space without expectations.

Int: That openness thing that you're saying. Do you think there are certain words or concepts… there is a leadership thing that's kind of touchy, sometimes like you're saying, hymns is a little bit of a touchy area, what are the rough edges? If people speak about Jesus being in their life with them…

R: [unclear 0:36:55] A very Moot question is, what does that even mean?

Int: That would be your response to a stereotypical church-y thing?

R: What does that mean, please help me.

Int: You had that conversation about [unclear 0:37:14]?

R: What is it, she's a fantasist.

Int: What is it, she had a choice, right? Did she have a choice?

R: She didn't really have a choice. Anyway from what we know historically of this story, it probably didn't even happen.

Int: There are all these version cults that happened during that time.

R: Yes, somebody saying, she might have said this, oh yes. It didn't happen like that, we don't know, somebody made it up. She didn't have a [unclear 0:37:48] spontaneously having a prayer, just somebody wrote that, she didn't say that.

Int: So what does that even mean would be your response to?

R: A liturgy or…

Int: Give examples.

R: Somebody says, Jesus is my personal saviour, what does that even mean.

Int: So stereotypical church-y things that you might hear?

R: Yes, clichés. Lazy metaphors.

Int: Is there a specific tradition that people are responding to, would it mostly be…

R: …evangelical, yes. Charismatic as well.

Int: That kind of do all thing?

R: Yes.

Int: But no high church responses a little bit?

R: Yes, some, but people quite like the high church because it embraces mystery and it's comfortable with non-dualism.

Int: So really responding to evangelical, charismatic, maybe fundamentalist church?

R: [unclear 0:38:49] turn or burn.

Int: Bible based churches, things like that?

R: What does that even mean?

Int: Would that be one of those things too, would people be in the closet about reading their Bible every day?

R: I don't know. Maybe, some people do, I don't know. The Bible in my experience has been used as a weapon too many times. I've reclaimed prayer, more or less, that took a long time.

Int: Out loud prayer?

R: No. For me I found some way to pray that I wasn't able to do once I left church because it has been used in a way that was like a weapon, and the Bible as well was used as a weapon. Actually [unclear 0:39:33] basically just like, oh you may not have heard so and so is ill.

Int: It's like gossip, it's all gossip.

R: Yes. Some people love it, I don't.

Int: There are some people who would still be okay with the Bible?

R: Yes, some go to Bible studies.

Int: Some people actually recommend doing Bible studies?

R: Or they would say, hey why don't we do a Bible study?

Int: Obviously not popular.

R: If they want to do it they should get on with it, that's great, do it.

Int: It seems like the home groups are the ones that are a lot more spontaneous?

R: No, they are definitely expressions of the spirituality of the people in it.

Int: Mini-moots?

R: Yes.

Int: Would you have different traditions that you'd bring in outside of Christian rooted things?

R: Oh yes. Martin did this brilliant thing, yoga prayer practice. So good, I can't remember what it was all about, what was the word he used, I can't remember but he reinterpreted what he'd done in yoga in a more Christian-ish way. It was great.

Int: Do people come from other traditions, other religious traditions?

R: Not so much.

Int: Mostly just traumatised Christian backgrounds?

R: Yes, basically.

Int: But also incorporating other things once they find out about other things?

R: Yes, like poetry and music and other beautiful things are inspiring.

Int: Transition.

R: Topic guide?

Int: I have a little bullet but we've already talked about a lot of them. I'm just trying to see what we have and what we haven't done. This is something that you've covered already too, but do you personally feel a sense or others feel a sense of the fitting in thing? Do you feel like you have issues fitting in sometimes?

R: Fitting in where?

Int: Just as Moot in general, there is a whole belong situation. You've been in Moot for a while so you feel quite integrated I'm assuming?

R: I'm the minority though. Most people come, like I say, heal and then go.

Int: Have you talked to other people that feel like, this is not really for me?

R: At Moot?

Int: Yes.

R: They wouldn't say, they're too polite, too British about it. They probably think that, but you never hear it. I'm sure people think that but they don't talk about it.

Int: So in general, because you're saying once people come for the spiritual goods, there would be a completely different experience there because you'd say you're the minority feeling like you'd actually…

R: It's my home, yes.

Int: On a rough numbers estimate, what is the wide number of people in Moot?

R: Of people that stay?

Int: What's the wide number of people that you would think are Mooters, whether they're week based or…

R: They're all Mooters.

Int: What's a rough number, how many people?

R: Maybe 30.

Int: On the wider scale?

R: Yes.

Int: Then on a regular scale of people that come regularly?

R: On a Sunday we normally have about 20ish.

Int: So 20 committed?

R: But then they would rotate between the 30, some people don't come.

Int: How many would you say are like you, really it's their home?

R: Maybe 10 or 15. A lot of people are very new. Some people are in the last year, last 18 months we've had quite a lot of new people in who've no idea of what we've been through.

Int: They only know it from ever since Aaron or something?

R: Yes, they think Aaron has always been here. No.

Int: You have a lot of short termers anyway because you're saying it's a transition space?

R: That's London as well, lots of change.

Int: That's the thing, London always makes it different. Last one, again personal question, how would you describe your own personal faith or you're personal religious identity, spiritual identity?

R: Have you heard of Brother Stendhal Rass?

Int: Yes.

R: I read a book by him and in that he said, religion is a framework for the quest of the heart. I really love that and that really resonates with me. Because I've grown up in a Christian culture, the framework for the quest of my heart is Christianity, but if I had been in any other country and if was to move to another country then I probably would adopt their framework.

Int: In a sense, would you tick Christian?

R: Sometimes, depending on the day. Probably not because there are a lot of things Christians believe that I don't believe. I don't believe in an interventionist God, I disagree with lots of these concepts of heaven and after life. I think that's a big distraction from living well now.

Int: It's mostly your background?

R: It's about your culture. My cultural background is in the Christian culture but that means I hold very loosely to a lot of the teachings because I would say that they're not helpful.

Int: In terms of the religion concept, it's more about [unclear 0:45:21]?

R: Yes, I think religion is a framework. When the framework becomes the dominant then it's obstructing.

Int: You're missing it?

R: Yes, what is the quest of the heart.

Int: Have you dabbled in other traditions yourself?

R: A little but not very much.

Int: You're okay with the open Christian?

R: Yes, I think my quest is to be a loving person and to be generous and compassionate and accepting as Jesus was, in a radical way. So that's what I try to do and the rest of it is inconsequential.

Int: Do you have difficulty when people ask you the question, are you religious or what religion are you?

R: I always say, what do you mean by that? Try and figure out what they're really asking. They're basically asking, are you going to judge me? I'm not, so that's the answer I would give them.

Int: If you encounter another Christian, someone that's straight, no questions asked, identify themselves as Christian?

R: I would have very little to do with them. I've probably got very little in common with them because I don't really respect that kind of unthinking religion.

Int: You would find more common ground with somebody that had no religion than somebody that was…

R: Yes, but who genuinely wanted to live well, how then shall we live, that's the question.

Int: So there is also dogmatic atheists, so that's just as challenging?

R: Oh yes, fundamentalist atheists exist, don't they.

Int: Yes, they do. Just the same, that would be as challenging as a Christian?

R: They're fundamentalists, they're in that group of fundamentalists.

Int: They're all fundamentalists?

R: Yes. That's a different, separate religion. [unclear 0:47:04]

Int: Is there a reason why you would stay… it seems like there has been a transition from Church of Bethnal Green, then you came to Moot, that's probably changed you?

R: Yes.

Int: You can't go back to the church like the Bethnal Green one anymore?

R: I tried, they had a Christmas choir, they asked me back because I sing, so they asked me back to the choir and it was so, so awkward. It was so difficult, it was too soon, I think it was four years after I'd left, it was still too soon, too painful.

Int: If you were to go to another country like you're saying, would you seek out a spiritual community?

R: I've been thinking about that because my partner is from Australia and if we moved to Australia, I think I wouldn't seek out a church because I would assume I had very little in common with them. I don't know. I don't know what would be there and what would be available. I think it's more important to try and live in a compassionate, loving and accepting way, and try and get over your ego and try and be generous. I don't

know if I'd be more likely to find that in a zen Buddhist group or in a Christian group. I want to be where I find it.

Int: You might shop, depending on what's around?

R: Or I might just listen to podcasts and beautiful music. Do what I can at my end.

Int: Just hold on to the compassion and openness and being a good human being with values?

R: Yes.

Int: Do you have a spirituality that you share with your partner?

R: A little, not so much . He says that hippy Christians are the only Christians he could ever tolerate.

Int: Hippy Christians?

R: That was his word.

Int: The only Christians he could tolerate?

R: Yes, he could ever contemplate. He lives in house with six of us, and four of us go to Moot.

Int: Who's the other one?

R: The other one is my friend Kaz's husband. He was so ground by a church he wasn't able to get over it, and he's still in a world of church pain.

Int: Would you say that hippy Christians or whatever, progressive Christians or whatever word you want to call it, post-Christians…

R: Progressive sounds more sensible.

Int: There is always those that want to reembrace the [unclear 0:49:20], so there is the connotation of what everyone is responding to because that's what the loud voice of Christianity is, but also progressive Christian is what Christianity is, but the openness is

the root of Christianity. How do you feel about that kind of positioning on the Christian term, the reembracing of it?

R: I really like that, reclaim it.

Int: Reclaim it, they're not the only ones who are allowed to say they're Christian, we're just as Christian as they are.

R: Yes, I like that. But then you bump up against people who… the discussion we had this evening about the Magnifica and then, she could have said no. I'm like, you're talking as if this actually happened. I don't believe this happened. Step back. She did not have a scribe in a room with her, as she spontaneously sang out songs, and she didn't remember it, she didn't go to someone and say, write this down, you'll want to remember this in 2,000 years' time. This is a beautiful poem but let's not say that she said it at the time when she found out.

Int: We can't look at the literal right now, I really just want to look at the poem and what it's feeding.

R: Yes, and what need is it feeding but why is it there. What is the beautiful context, all these kind of questions. Those kind of questions could pop up and you bump into people who really, really believe it and I'm like, I wasn't going to say that to Elizabeth when she's saying, it's so beautiful. Yes it's beautiful [unclear 0:50:57].

Int: Those are the kinds of things that you say come up that are challenging, that might come up in a mini-Moot?

R: Yes.

Int: So you have all those different voices that come out, okay.

R: Then you challenge to be authentic to yourself but loving to the people you are around, and accepting what they say and challenging where I really don' understand. They want to believe what they want to believe.

Int: Also just letting it go sometimes.

R: I haven't got the need to convert them, who says I'm right. I want to listen to what they say. I love changing my mind, I'm a researcher, I love learning new things and changing my mind, I love being surprised. That wasn't surprising to me, it didn't change my perspective but I have no right to criticise.

Int: I feel like that's the balance of your doing as well, it's not even sometimes… it's just more like, let them have their say, so happy to say what they want to say, that's okay too.

R: Yes, that's great, they're really fulfilled by that thing, how wonderful. Good for you, not for me. The Amy Poehler thing – good for you but not for me. That's what I think a lot of Moot is about.

Int: That's it [unclear 0:52:19].

Joe (The Earlsfield Collective)

Int : If you just say your name and the community that you're part of?

R : My name is Joe and the community I'm part of is the Earlsfield Friary, sometimes known as The Earlsfield Collective, in Earlsfield, South West London.

Int: How would you describe it to an outsider, a general audience, religious and non-religious?

R: That's partly why there's a kind of evolutionary language to even how we describe ourselves "friary" immediately resonates with a particular tradition that has some kind of Judao Christian heritage background story to it but actually, that can be a sort of linguistic turn-off or on, depending on where you are so in the kind of outer reaches of the neighbourhood, well actually pretty front and centre, to be known as The Earlsfield Collective in a kind of artistic way, is a better appropriation of how we might posture ourselves and by that, I suppose, which is a nod to the Franciscans because part of our initial formation if you like as a community was led by a friar who really helped us think that through, with the great name, Mica Jazz.

I suppose there's the theology behind that of people like Bonaventure in terms of how we see the world and how we see ourselves in the world, there's the activism of a kind of Franciscan position and then in terms of the spirituality, again, that it is something – and this is not exclusive to Franciscan, this would probably be more the influence of the community as a whole, who have got quite a strong mycological background between us, would be more about that emerging as a kind of, nuanced contextually to the place that you're located in, so our kind of hermeneutic is communal in that sense and not just kind of orbiting around other traditions.

Int: So it depends on the actual community or social surroundings that you're in, it can be fluid in that way?

R: Yes, we would critique that as well as absorb it or accommodate it so in Larman Sani terms, we would be in that cycle of what he calls sort of quarantine accommodation and prophetic reform, so there are moments where we're closed and exclusive in that quarantine form but they are momentary shall we say, more than with a longevity and I guess that's part of our wider critique in the kind of different epochs of history, that the church particularly in its kind of [inaudible 00:03:25] has spent way too long in quarantine at the kind of residential place but accommodation is more that idea sociologically, that you are growing , forming, learning, acting out of the, being accommodated within the place that you're in as with by else and then prophetic reform is I guess more of the Brugamen idea that you exist to critique, to energise and critique somewhere.

Int: So there is that feedback loop coming through?

R: Yes, so there's a sense of communal reflection and that is really important, so that we're not just sponges to the place that we live.

Int: Is that a formalised thing?

R: Depends what you mean by formalised.

Int: So those three phases, do you guys have a discussion of what phase you're in, like everyone knows what … is there steps?

R: They're more of an ecosystem that we exist in than that we would, I think we are mindful, there is a part of our year that we're currently in that we always have a full season of reflection, self-reflection and communal reflection and wider and we end that remembering and celebrating and engaging in commitments to the future together again, around the Autumn Equinox.

So I guess there is a particular in the timeline of the year, that we do do that but also we're live in terms of aware as we're going along.

Int: So there is a mindfulness of these three phrases and you have your own cycles that you go through …?

R: Yes, we wouldn't necessarily use that language, it's interesting what John found, is that when you talk to the respective members of the community , you'll get a fairly joined up idea of what we're about but because we don't write it down and document it in a kind of professionalised form, it's more carried in our story and in our lives than it is a language that's universal to all of us.

Int: It's not like everyone has a particular terminology?

R: No. If I used terms to them like that, they'd say "you sound really boring"! They'd all fall asleep! Which you're welcome to do, it has the same effect!

Int: Just a side question, I don't know if it's possible because it is quite a residential, private community as well, do you have any regular events that you do together as a community that I could jump out on and hang out in?

R: Fly on the wall, yes. By all means, it's always a fairly problematic scenario, that, because we are obviously an intentional collection of families that are resident to a neighbourhood.

At the same time, we deliberately and we're kind of very intentionally doing this at the moment, broadening that space to have lots of portals for others to join in and I can explain or example that a little bit as we go along but, so we're not private in that sense, we have certain times that we would be closed or inward looking as it were but actually our whole posture is primarily to be in the place that we're in and again, the sort of Joe talk on it but really Bonhoeffer's idea in I think it's Chapter 5 in Ethics, that my tutor put me onto originally, really said things that you know you intuitively feel but he talks about the one reality of Christ and has an idea that he calls the two sphere theory, where in spatial terms you have language that perhaps we're more familiar with in terms of

secular and profane but it's a little bit more depth to it than that in what he's trying to say, in terms of for the church, trying to not blur that or confuse that but say not to have, to be distinct but not have the two spatial terms but to have the one in which Christ is real, so he says something like, "You can't have the world without Christ and you can't have Christ without the world", that there is this sense in which, I suppose it's a deep incarnational theology but you can throw these words around like you say the word "community " and actually, somebody translates it through their filter, so we try and be a bit more specific.

For us, it means a certain shape to our action and our life, that tries to not create those spatial borders again and then start patrolling them or policing them in an inappropriate way.

Int: You could translate that back into what you were saying earlier about the different phases of being …?

R: Yes, they inter-relate for sure, in the same way that Volf would talk about exclusion and embrace, we understand that there are spaces that are exclusive and not to be kind of apologetic of that …

Int: Yes, that's okay to do that?

R: Yes, but in terms of where we call home, in terms of place and what place means, we share that as both the guest and the host in where we live, so I think the church can sometimes have a somewhat arrogant posture of thinking it is front and centre of life everywhere and it's trying to say, "Well, we're trying to be a more collaborative, cooperative, co-creating life of the life here" and offer something distinct to that but without those borders.

Int: Should I just email you for a separate email to see potential things that …?

R: I think that might be a good idea because right now, until we roll out into October, we're pretty much in self-reflection mode, until the Autumn Equinox finishes which is the end of the month and then we pick up a number of activities. A great time to come and visit is advent and Christmas because we're up to all sorts of things then.

Int: I did see in the Facebook, certain things come up, I guess that transition between …

R: Facebook [inaudible 00:11:46].

Int: It's not new, it's not really updated?

R: No.

Int: But yes, there is that cycle that happens that end of the summer, starting autumn, everyone is just re-shifting back and …?

R: Yes, for us, it's kind of where our new year is really, we follow different parts of the church calendar and the Aquarian calendar and then various other rituals local to here, as kind of our rhythm of the year.

Int: Tell me more about the rhythm, what is your rhythm?

R: It begins now, in terms of this time of reflection post the summer, where we look back on the year and we kind of, I suppose we frame three questions that we got from Jamie Smith really, who I think he wrote them originally to one of Graham Ward's books as a foreword but he said, the perennial questions of the disciples is what do we do now? So kind of where we're trying to arrive to at the end of this time of reflection is what do we do now in terms of looking into the year ahead and sometimes a little beyond that , but that question as he suggests can only be really well done if you've also asked what time is it? And so there's a kind of sense that we're all asking together, what time is it in the kind of state of the place that we live and more widely that we're aware of and personally that we're aware of, and I guess sandwiched in between that, we ask each

other the question, "Where is God?" and so because we have a view of, probably a more heightened view than just the kind of Missio Dei language but of the spirit of mission being the kind of lead to what we get about doing, rather than perhaps just pulling resources off a shelf and trying to replicate them in a place, without really a deep kind of ethnographic reading of the place, we're trying to find that spirit of mission in what's going on in a place and then collaborate with it, so what is God doing is really important to us in terms of what do we do now?

So those are our three questions that begin the year as it were.

Int: Did you guys have a meeting about it or something?

R: We've just had the first one, yes, no we've had two actually but we start with the personal, we start with those questions for each other and then we roll it next week, this week, next week, the week after and then it ends with a feast that is the kind of feast, we call it the feast of renewal, we're quite into feasting!

Int: There's nothing wrong with that, it really bonds people …

R: Yes, so we have a feast that is around the Autumn Equinox and at the same time, we have some sort of ritual of renewal that is saying yes to the pattern and rhythm of life together and that's framed by four mutual ideas that I can share with you, but also yes to what we've agreed that God is doing among us and that we're going to collaborate with and we have three layers to that, it's what we call All Together, Collaboration or Personal and we would all understand that language.

So it's All Together, it is what it says on the tin, you all have to [inaudible 00:15:28] to it, so we might say over the year there are four things that we're going to engage with all together, by way of example, one of our guys is installing a boutique café into the church, in the next few months and repurposing the whole interior so that we can place ourselves front and centre in the right way, to be a communal presence, a place that

you can do evenings around music and art and food and kind of conversations and then in the day at this place, that people can come and have really good food, that's grown locally and all of that sort of thing.

So with that, although it's someone's particular social enterprise from within the friary itself, we've agreed that all together this year we're going to support that, so it means whenever we say, "Hey, we're going to get around doing this for the café", there isn't a "Oh I'm really sorry, I haven't got time for that".

Int: You all agreed on that together.

R: So that would be an example or when we curate an installation which we tend to do at least one a year, it would be all together, everybody gets around that.

Int: You say there's four things?

R: So that's an example of an All Together, to finish that. A Collaborative would be I might say, "I've got a really good idea that I want to go and start visiting the prison up the road and do this, does anyone want to help or join in with that?", and one person might say "Oh yes, it's a great idea, I'll come and help you with that" but there's no, you don't have to get involved with it.

The Personal might be, as a good example is one of our guys is a film editor and so he's up in Soho a lot, not many of us get up to Soho that often sadly and so it's a personal commitment in his journey but then community is always asking the questions to each other, "How can I support you in an absent position where you are being present in Soho doing what you do?", so those are the three layers.

And that might again, they're a bit like a sort of ecosystem in that they might feed each other and inter-relate, so he actually at one point said, "I've written a script, it's about time and it's set in a hospital and I'd really like to produce it" and he ended up winning the Small Film Award at Toronto Film Festival, it did really well and we said,

"How can we collaborate around that to help you?" and in the end it became an All Together theme and we helped him finance it so that he could take three months off to do it, on the premise that we could all be in it so we could become famous!

Int: So that's how it can overlap …

R: Yes, so it's a living thing and then the four things that our friar friend helped us to frame, he was really good back in the day because he said, "By the time you've written a vision, mission and purpose or something like that, it won't be worth the paper it's written on because it's not the way to approach growing community, so why don't you frame it around four things that really matter to you and then see what emerges?".

So we did that and helped us think about that, the first thing really was sharing a mutual Christ, so it was around the word "mutual" because we all came from the emerging church culture, scene, blah blah blah and we didn't feel at home in that kind of deconstruction , the kind of death of God theology, we didn't want to travel far towards the kind of Simon Critchley view …

Int: Too experimental …!

R: Well, just kind of the afterlife is that I become some biomass compost that is my way of saying, I live on through my children, well what if you're single so we didn't want to go that far, although we're great friends, my peers are people like Kester Brewin and Pete Rowlins so we're not anti these guys and I think they've had lots of good things to say, we just wouldn't be as critical of what they're about in terms of religious organising or indeed, this kind of idea that Jesus, the sort of Connotic [sounds like] life of Jesus on the cross was to demonstrate the death, not only of God but of all Gods or idols, that stop us emerging into self-transcendence and we're just not on that page. So Christ became therefore very important to express …

Int: But also having a mutual idea of …

R: And a mutual idea of that and actually ironically, one of the phrases again that would be common language to us is that to get there, we had to let go of the Christ we knew, to discover the Christ we didn't so in that sense I think we equally were a bit weary of a kind of more of a form of traditionalism that kind of let history always subordinate any space or time in the present, with a view of God and Christ, that therefore we had to kind of submit to, that wasn't allowing us within the world of today and indeed a broader perhaps theology, cosmologically and so on, find a different Christ – not a different Christ, that's the wrong thing …

Int: But just one that you can't say that you pin down and one that you're always constantly trying to know.

R: It's an absolute farce isn't it to think that we know Christ so it was the idea of saying, the Christ that we have known, we're grateful for, most of us grew up in evangelical missionary contexts and we're grateful for that heritage but that isn't the only image of Christ that we want to journey with, so we had to let go of that and wonderfully therefore, it wasn't a substitution as such, it wasn't out with you and in with the new, it was an addition that has grown.

Int: Like its own development there too …

R: Yes, so that's mutual Christ is really key, mutual mission because our thinking around formation and the kind of contours of discipleship, orbit around what you do and we've been quite influenced by Rambo's Theory of Conversion, process theory? We love his name! So we've been really trying to think through mission in that process conversion idea and Scot McKnight's kind of sociological writings on conversion, which plant us in a very different terrain to the kind of cultic ways of thinking about evangelism perhaps, either liturgically or in terms of what we might, well he says there's three liturgical socialising and personal decision and we're trying to just re-imagine that a little

bit but mission was very important therefore because we felt the essence of how you're formed comes from hitting liminal spaces, that then if you reflect well on them, can open up a new vista and a new imagination into a kind of resurrection, so it's the kind of death and rising, death and rebirth, letting go and that that really in our view, we were very bored with the type of formation or discipleship that was either way too kind of mechanistic in its ritual, of a repetition of the past without any Newells of the present, or some sort of very laissez faire approach that didn't really have any structure to fill anything with and it also was very cognitive, rather than a more embodied idea and we come very much from the view, from reading people like Elizabeth Mortman, who's got this embodiment theology that when you do something, it is where it potentially places you into liminal space that then becomes very fertile space for change or transformation and that we were very bored with the kind of formation that didn't seem to transform very much.

Int: You wanted to keep it alive at all times …

R: Sure.

Int: That need to continue, you didn't want it to have that dry spell, you want something that is in constant motion, that you continue to have the three birth cycles throughout …

R: Yes, because life is live, you do it live, you know, even when you sleep, you're alive so there's a sense in which the various models of discipleship and formation that we've been exploring and looking at and reflecting on, just didn't seem to cut the mustard in terms of we were looking for really deep change in our own lives and hopefully through that change in the world around us and that there was some sort of symbiosis between those two, that we were trying to find, so mutual mission became really important to that journey, rather than saying mutual discipleship which we felt

would have led us into some sort of more regulatory impulse rather than a missionary impulse. Does that make sense?

Int: Yes, it's more action oriented.

R: Yes and that's the Franciscan activism that is great as long as you have the contemplative, reflective piece that happens with it, otherwise you just go …

Int: There's so much feedback that happens in this whole thing.

R: So that's mutual mission. Mutual Christ, mutual mission, mutual support, so we embrace the idea of what Ron Syler talks about when he says the church should look like being, how does he put it? Totally available and something like totally available and completely liable for each other and so we try to practise that in terms of what we mean by support, that is in our family life, our economic life, our material resources etc., we sort of co-exist together in a supportive way and that isn't that we have things like a common purse, we do have a bank account from things that we've done that we've made a bit of money because we then keep that for rainy days or things we want to support but we don't share common purse in terms of our households because we've chosen to live together, we live in one square mile of each other, that's a rule but …

Int: So if you need to move to another place , it has to be within that …?

R: Yes. Because you can't really embody, there's a slight sort of bromance going on with Water Brugerman so some of what he says in terms of there is no meaning without roots, it's been really true of our exploration and also the other reason was again, I hope this relates sociologically, but that if you don't have this kind of schism all the time between what's happening in the social context of where you live and what you think about that in terms of theologically, where is God, then there are already what we would call grass roots or organic rituals and practices that exist, that you can embody and

become part of, that give you that kind of common denominator in a place rather than having to either pull down some from somewhere or …

Int: Yes, like an imposition or something …?

R: Yes, and then you actually end up feeling bipolar because you've got two lives going on at the same time and it drains your energy and resource and really fractures identity, which is one of the things we've seen psychologically, we've come up a lot with people that have had experience of kind of particularly evangelical life in the last 20 years, is they're very fractured in their identity because they've been, had to practise this …

Int: Separated-ness …

R: It's very draining.

Int: There's a lot of trauma in it too, yes.

R: There's some really serious mental health issues around it, at its worst and that isn't to say at all that there isn't a lot of good that's gone on in that world but anyway, so that's that and then the last one's mutual rhythm, which was this pattern through the year that I was going to tell you about.

Int: So these four things, this was from the very beginning?

R: The very beginning, yes.

Int: And that's always remained …?

R: I'll just let you know, this is an autistic school behind us, that's their playground there so we sometimes we have a little bit of background noise.

Int: The rhythm, go back to that, so there's this space now where you're reflecting things and then seeing where you're going to go next in the following year.

R: And then we move into, back into, so we do loosely follow the church calendar so then there's a bit of ordinary time and then we roll into November and in ordinary

time, basically what we do is live so we meet once a week on a Wednesday and when we're not feasting, whoever's home we're being hosted in would offer some sort of short reflection homily space to pray.

Int: These are all everyone with the kids …?

R: Only the parents meet in that, the kids do their other things as well, one of the things just as a side to that is the group found each other around not wanting such a kind of religiously organised experience of their church, faith, life, churchy and faithy life and so one of the things they strongly felt was they didn't want to subcontract their kid's spirituality to a church or a Sunday school over there, which again is no reflection on them, it's just the sense that one of the things that emerging punctured and accentuated but then possibly didn't do enough on, was this idea of reclaiming responsibility for our own spirituality and story and where that then relates to children, so what I mean by that is a lot of my mates who were really radicalised pirates back in the day, got married and as soon as they had children, became entirely domesticated because they had this question which was, "What do we do with our kids in terms of their spirituality?" and rather than say, "let's do the soul work to really", in that liminality that we're feeling, explore how we could express that creatively, they said, "I know, let's take them to church" and contracted that to, so they then went straight back into the cycle that they actually had desperately wanted to get out of.

That's not true across the board but in a lot of places and that's why you've got so many people even in church contexts, who are like refugees really in their spirituality and they've gone back there to accommodate their children because they feel obliged and so …

Int: Either that or they don't take them to anything at all, I think it comes at one or the other …

R: So you're either compelled by the should and the ought emotions or you just are really as you say, “well” and I think this is where the death of God kicks in hard, “we’re just not going to take them to anything”. We did not want to do that so our kids do have their own journey that they share together and personally.

That would be what ordinary time looks like and then in November, you come into Halloween which we reconsecrate as Allhallows, we do stuff around that …

Int: You have the Equinox thing, so you have a few different cycles going on.

R: Most cycles are punctuated by, at the end, with a feast, so you have this cycle of reflection we’re in now that then will be punctuated at the end with a feast and then that leads us into this little bit of ordinary time, that then leads us into November where we actually continue to meet, the kind of pulse of the community is meeting every Wednesday, now that can seem very minimal but I’ll explain a bit more about why that is not like that in a minute, but we’ll come back to that.

So then in November, there begins to be more public things that we start doing like around Halloween and All Souls and then actually, that is again, when we get to the end of that cycle, we celebrate Thanksgiving because we all have had some experience or lived in America, there’s an American in our community so we really like the ritual of it and the concept of gratitude and thanksgiving. So that obviously happens right before Advent kicks in and that would be like an ordinary, what we would call all done in the low season, so right from where we are now through to Advent is all low season life, okay?

Then when we get into Advent, we get into what we call a high season and the intentionality of the community amps up a bit at that point, so for 25 days, we would be doing stuff personally and communally and publicly, way more, it would go up

considerably and I can talk a bit a bit more about that but for argument's sake, that comes up to Christmas and Boxing Day and into the New Year.

That kind of Advent 40 day cycle is a high season and then we roll into the new year and we go back into a low season, which is again, we always in the new year have a season of dreaming and because epiphany's coming up, we then end that or celebrate that with a feast of epiphany and we always go, we go away three times and do a residential away, that sort of pre-empts each of the high seasons, so we go away in November and then we go away in the new year before Lent comes around, then we go away in the summer again and in each of those, we feast.

Int: So it's kind of a blend though of the liturgical calendar and various different markers, so you have [inaudible 00:37:29] thing, you have more of a seasonal thing because you're marking something with Equinox.

R: We have things that we mark like Allhallows, we do stuff around Halloween on a field that we have stewardship of, that we do a big local communal thing that's a tradition around here. During Advent, we always erect a shelter in the community garden in solidarity with the refugees, it's like an art installation and then we hold a night called Beers & Carols at the end of it, with food and beer and singing and we tell the nativity story but we usually slant it around, the last couple of years we've slanted it around the refugee crisis and Jesus as a refugee and all that and that's, we get 4-500 people turn up to that and that is the neighbourhood so that's the kind of public expression and it is kind of a keeping in step with the place locally that we're part of.

Int: If you get that kind of a crowd, people really know you guys.

R: Yes and that has a bittersweet taste to it because there are some things we do that people think, "exclusive to the friary" when they're trying to be the complete opposite and that's where we have to really tread a careful line between exclusive/inclusive.

Int: They might still think "Oh it's one of their events" as opposed to "it's our event"?

R: Yes, exactly that. So that's that, you have epiphany and then a little bit more dreaming and it's really trying to just keep people alive to where we feel communally and personally, we're dreaming of how we support each other in that and that takes up to Lent.

Lent is the second high season in the cycle and we do a much more intentional thing again and usually, in each of the high seasons, we do one major public thing but it lasts over the whole period so when Lent comes, for 40 days, last year we did an installation called Rooted and we gutted the inside of the church and turned it into a forest and then we had stations going all the way around it, that were reflections on what does it mean to be rooted in today's world and it obviously has a kind of spirituality to it and then we end the installation with an event, that they get to participate in.

That obviously crescendo is Easter Day and that's great fun and that's kind of the highlight of the year for us. And then we dip down after Easter, although it's still Easter Tide, into a number of things because it also becomes the peak of the food growing season and we're very into food, we run a food cooperative so that's a whole other thing we can talk about.

Int: Everyone's growing their own things …?

R: Yes, the food is going to feed the café and it also services two other local gastro pubs and next year we're starting a farmer's market on site, so it's great fun. We commandeered a piece of land that was owned by the Ministry of Justice opposite the prison, it's about an acre of land and then since that, we've been invited to steward and garden other bits of land, so it's urban farming really but we also use it as a way of

talking about re-wilding and urban life and wildlife and George Mombio's ideas about that. We run a lot of education programmes with schools and holiday clubs as well.

Int: You have enough people working in all this?

R: Well, it's part of our kind of what we call again, this is a Joeism but we would call a cooperative episcopal quality, basically what it means is that everybody gets to play and join in, so the idea behind it is that, I think this is a Bonhoeffer idea as well, that we are one of the stakeholders in a place , we are not the stakeholder but we try, but what we try to bring into that is a certain energy, critique, prophetic direction but we have many co-conspirators that we get to play with, so the trustees of the food cooperative, although it was, one of the things the friary tries to go is to kick-start new enterprises and then blend them into the neighbourhood, so although the energy comes from us initially, the trustees of that cooperative now has a 70/30 split between two members who are from the friary and the rest are not.

Int: And then eventually, because you want that sustainability for just the community itself and not just everything is you guys.

R: Exactly that and then we also, because we don't think we're front and centre of everything, look to support other enterprises where we see what some might call a sort of city commons vision for common good or we might say Kingdom of God idea but so for example, there's an Irish friend of mine who's a very successful property developer, who met with me a couple of years ago and he said, "I've had an epiphany", he doesn't really talk this language, he would be nominally Christian from a Catholic heritage but definitely has quite a vibrant spirituality, definitely a friend and fan of Jesus but he's Irish …!

So he said to me, his wife is very high up in the RSA and has got this very prestigious role that is both demanding and exhilarating I think but he said, "I've

decided to flip my life from being 80% working for business and 20% giving back into community , to 80% of community and 20% in business" and he said, "I'm successful enough now that I can do 20% deals and still live very well", so he bought a pub off the back end of a cigarette packet in the name of it and he said, "I've bought this pub, what do you think I should do with it?", I said "Ask the community ".

One of the things we were very keen on and so basically, long story short, he invited me into consult as a friend with him on how to shape this and one of the things that we knew very quickly was that we wanted to be careful of a kind of wrong type of gentrification of the neighbourhood and this was an old Irish boozer that had grown off the back of what's called a knackers yard, which is where horses used to go to be slaughtered and then turned into produce and there's a strong gypsy community around there, so it has quite a big heritage and the kind of demographic of people that drink in there was all shapes and sizes, so we didn't want a wrong type of social cohesion.

Int: You want the same type of people to be able to use it …

R: Exactly, so he launched it last May, we're doing one or two brilliant initiatives, I'm going there Thursday night for a pop up supper club and the upstairs is all private use and hire, then the downstairs is a proper Irish boozer, so it's a really beautiful pub, he's put about 150 grand into renewing it.

But our role then as a friary, one of the things I kept beating the drum with him was to say, "hey listen, if you want to be communal, don't just put money at things, get the community co-opted into owning it and doing it with you, the power of the voluntary culture in this is phenomenal", so he's an amazing and remarkable man and will plough is own field in it all but he's a great example of where we would say, you know, if Eshan's 5 should exist within a place, you should have a role for the publican! And he's taking quite a strong posture there in how he's calling the community to not be wrongly

gentrified and to remember a bias to the poor and the local housing estates with social housing that also are part of our neighbourhood. So I love him, I think he's a remarkable man.

Int: And he really has the natural inclination to be doing all this …?

R: Yes, I think so, I think he's captured something, there's an awakening you might say in him, that's an epiphany as he said, that's driving him and leading him and he's hit his own liminal spaces I think, it would be fair to say. I haven't asked his permission I might add to say this so if you wanted to quote it, ask me and I'll ask him.

Int: Names are always going to be anonymised, I'll let you know if I use anything.

R: But he would be a great example of where the friary would say, "we want to follow the leadership of someone else that's doing something remarkable in this place".

Int: So something that's happening already …

R: Yes, we don't feel we have to do it all, we're one of the spokes in it. And then you come out of Easter Tide, just to finish off the year, then we come to obviously Pentecost Sunday and Pentecost Sunday, in between that there's been Rogation Day and there's been a day that we consecrate the gardens that we're involved with for growing and they become festival occasions but in Pentecost, we have kind of adopted a third high season, so that that is 120 days of the year then, that we are being particularly intentional in a really animated way. So we've basically taken Pentecost and given a 40 day cycle there and it ends with the Summer Equinox.

That's a much more outward focused time because of the time of the year it is but the same principles of personal and communal kind of life and walking together and then some sort of public life together and expressing that in some sort of event goes on, so last year, we did a summer fair, up on the field that is through the food cooperative's

main site and we had about 600 people there and we just did food and kids games and all sorts of fun activities.

That would then make the cycle and then we shut the doors in August, everybody does their own thing and there's stuff going on but it's more managed kind of as you go rather than intentional and then we're back to now.

Int: What were you saying about the dreaming, I didn't quite understand what you meant?

R: The dreaming season?

Int: Yes, what's that?

R: I think what we felt was from having a reflective season and then going through the first kind of third of our cycle leading up to the second high season in Lent, that because it was epiphany and that was a lot about the language of epiphany and the etymology of that term, that we thought let's adopt it as a moment in the year where we remind each other of the dreams we've shared or we want to share and how we can collectively support, resource, wonder and imagine those together and within the place that we are seeking to be hosting guests in.

Int: So you're kind of thinking of ideas at that point, ideas forming?

R: Yes, it's like a dream incubator.

Int: Going back to one of the very first things that you said, you're shifting in terms of calling it the friary versus collective?

R: It's one of those things where once you're known as something, it kind of sticks with you. I think there's been a view in many of us that because we don't see ourselves as neomonastic and we don't want to, we have nothing against that world, in fact some of my good mates like Ian Moseby are pioneering that but we're just not, that's not us, we've got a slightly stronger anthropological model to how we go about things I

suppose, that the word “friary” can communicate the wrong thing that we are and yet there’s something really good about carrying a name that doesn't quite fit as well, so we feel kind of mixed about it.

Int: That’s just recent conversations?

R: Yes.

Int: Within the past few months or the past year?

R: Probably in the last year. I would say it’s come up over the last three years because we’ve been much more public in the last three years and therefore our identity and how we are revealed, this is going to sound very grandeur but it has mattered more in terms of …

Int: It’s starting to come back now, you're starting to see how it’s being reflected and you guys are reflecting that as well.

R: I think the collective idea really came about because we do a lot of these artistic installations and we often collaborate with other people in the neighbourhood, so it leaves it slightly more blurred around the edges and I want to talk a bit about that at some point because our view is that missional communities generally have a shelf life and therefore, how do you kind of create some legacy that is longer than the kind of personalities? And often good missional communities have probably started with one or two strong personalities, how do you then diffuse that in a good way into something where it’s about the legacy and it’s more collective, collaborative, cooperative than it is directive and pioneering and really, the kind of axis for where we see that change taking place is we’ve reflected on that in the last few years, is working more specifically with the parish and the local incumbent and indeed my role as the bridge, as the associate vicar to him, to repurpose the inside of the building is a way to then begin to render that change towards the actual parish and worshipping community in it, becomes much more

where we graft ourselves into that and create a bigger community than ourselves, that is both postured to serve the parish and the place we live in but also is a worshipping body expressing that in different ways, so we're in this kind of evolution, we're not saying that we will cease to exist necessarily but we are saying that in the last three years particularly, thinking about Rambo's theory of process conversion, many people now are starting to quest or awaken or even have positive consequences to decisions they've been making around their faith or discovering faith, we have agreed with the incumbent that we are not just sending them to church because it would be culturally like cutting off their head and trying to put it on a different body, it just wouldn't work, particularly because a lot of them didn't find conversion through a liturgical process.

We love good liturgy, particularly when it's curated thinking within the context of a contemporary environment and we pretty much always use the service of the word, as the scaffold for any installation that we do. So it's not an anti-posture if you like, it's not anti-liturgy, in fact we think eventually like Jamie Smith says, even if it has a liturgical life, even if your liturgy is what he would call the liturgy of the more, everybody has it so in that sense I think we're trying to graft something that would leave the legacy of a spirituality and a mission or world view, in a place and the transformation that can then grow from that.

Int: I see, okay.

R: That is sort of owned or stewarded by the parish, not exclusively the missional community .

Int: It seems like how you would describe Earlsfield, would be more about the things that you do as opposed to a lot of these labels, whether it's … you could use collective or whether it's the [inaudible 00:56:16] but you don't like to use those other things, you just went into describing the things that you do, which is really interesting.

I don't know , if someone asked you what's Earlsfield's Collective like, what is your easy answer? I don't know , did I get that right?

R: I guess maybe it reveals, pretty astute I think, maybe it reveals that for better or worse, I think we don't think much of much unless it's by what you're doing, so I think there was a not necessarily all healthy but particularly for some, a weariness with language, I don't know if you felt this but particularly and we've all had great experiences of America but the emergent culture of America just bored us to death in the end because we just said, "For fuck's sake, do something, stop talking about it and do it".

Int: It's just people talking and talking and doing cool things! And that's about it!

R: Yes, and actually I've bumped into people like Stephanie Speller in New York and I have to say there is a lot of doing now, it's unfair but I did my …

Int: But the terminology is different now too?

R: Yes, I did my placement there three years ago and that was my research, was what's emergent really look like on the ground and there were some very great groups that were doing remarkable things, particularly in city areas like Detroit and New York but at the same time, there was still a lot of these kind of cohorts that were meeting and just talking and in the end, they were talking themselves into the ground and there was a kind of, if I had to drink another cup of coffee and have a café meeting, I was going to kill someone!

I think conversation is really important, I think in my view, some of the American authors, most of them women, Phyllis Tickle and Bob Brown-Taylor and Diana Butler-Bass, their contribution to an emerging landscape was massively important and affected Europe massively.

Int: It really changed it, to a new phase of it …

R: But I don't know if it was to do with gender, Brian McLaren, again I thought was a very important voice but I would also say that there was a certain posturing that was quite male in a not so good way, that sort of ended up believing its own self-importance …

Int: Well yes, it becomes that masculine spirituality thing if you want to call it that, where it is a lot of talking, it's very intellectual but that could also be a phase of trying to figure out what it is that we're really, there's a whole lot of identity issues just to begin with, right?

R: And that is where I would say to them, you don't figure it out by talking, you figure it out by doing something.

Int: By doing yes, right there there's a lot of questions that you pose but it's not really considering, you're just talking about what you guys are doing and that really defines you.

R: Yes, which ironically we spend a lot of time, I guess it's easy to have a universal language of silence but it's not an empty silence by any means, so ironically silence is our shared prayer language in terms of being reflective and we do a lot of, we believe in the contemplative idea, not just of prayer in that way but of self-reflection, to be the best activists.

Int: And really feeding you back into the work that you do?

R: Absolutely and in fact when the café is repurposing the church, there's a beautiful lady chapel in the top right corner of the church and we're turning it into a 24/7 prayer space and we are going to introduce an office that three times a day, people can come in and share a silent prayer together and occasionally, that will be led with other types of prayer but just so that anybody, because we're about a kind of spirituality that is inclusive in the co-creating, everybody gets to play, everybody gets to join in and also

inclusive in the sense of if that process conversion, if Rambo's right, we need to make sure that there is space for awakening and encounter, so we're curating it in the world, in nature, through art but also in silence and so it means that a mum who's had a hell of a day could turn up in the evening when dad's got home from work, a slight caricature but you know, and go "I'm just going to go and pray" and she can walk into the café, walk through the door, up to the lady chapel and sit in silence and solidarity with ten other people, so we are actually one of our next moves is to make prayer more public.

We think we do a lot of praying but Mortman's idea of that as an embodied idea wouldn't often be recognised as prayer by many other traditions, so we are marching often in protest to refugee status and things like that and we see that as part of our act of prayer, part of our inter-sessions.

So there's a certain ritual to how we pray but it's less mechanistic than perhaps traditionally thought of.

Int: So there's a lot of meditative type things I'm assuming?

R: Both and so I think yes, they're both and.

Int: What are you saying by different forms of prayer? Different forms of Christian prayer or opening it up to different types of traditions?

R: The edges are blurred but we share a mutual Christ, the difference for us is that we think if Bonaventure was right and others since him, that essentially, in fact it was Desjardins that really said this best for me, just this whole idea of the omega point and the consumption of all creation, this kind of starting to talk about a cosmic Christ, not in a kind of loose way but in way that the whole creation groans in expectation, that Hans Coombes' idea of the healing of all creation, that that it means somehow that there is an imprimatur of God in Christ in all humanity, whether we name that or not and as such, that there is a quest and a desire for communion that is inherent and that we might all be

on different points on that journey as such, clichéd though it is, that that means that some find that way to an awakening or an epiphany by doing stuff and conspiring with you, I mean I have lots of friends who come to Calais with us, that's another enterprise we've set up called Just Shelter and they, the chair, we deliberately appointed the chair of that to be a French woman who's an atheist but she reflects this deep co-conspiring of a vision of the Kingdom of God, of a city common and for common good, of beauty, justice and truth, that you know, there is a gentle awakening that is also taking place, we just don't feel we have to put our grubby little hands all over it and so the doing actually is a part of our mission, it's part of our prayer, there's a much more joined up way of thinking about that and that's why we like the language of a kind of ecology in our spirituality, that relates between what might be traditionally called the divine humanity and nature and the world around us and Alistair McIntosh talks about it in a Schumacher briefing, where he talks about, he says the [inaudible 01:05:24] basis of community is just that, or what Satish Kumar would call the relationship between soil, the soul and society. So it's that ecosystem in which we would find a spirituality.

Int: So some of it is subtle, some of it is more explicit but it's just …

R: Exactly, yes.

Int: It's the ecosystem, that's a really interesting analogy for it.

R: Ortega says doesn't he, show me where you dig and I'll tell you who you are, so it's that idea of actually digging is an act of prayer if it's done intentionally, so we express and emphasise the intentionality, not the defining idea of the borders of what prayer is, we don't police that at all and I think it's actually the last frontier of rewilding spirituality for the masses today, it's the last frontier in my view of where, if we can find a language and embody it of what we mean by prayer, that a lot of these people in this

holding pattern right now, who feel like refugees or in exile, will come home, I just don't think that they feel at home, not that they don't want to come home.

Int: There's still a lot of figuring out what's happening …

R: Yes. So that's what we're shooting for, you know?

Int: Yes, that's really cool, got a wide vision now. Can I shoot off the easier questions? Whether they're easier for you or not, that's up for you to decide.

Earlsfield Friary Collective, positive qualities of the community ?

R: I think there is a yes we can attitude, I think there is an extra mile attitude, I think there is a go into all the world attitude, I think there's a hospitality charism that lies in the heart of that in its broadest deepest sense and we love Nowan's idea when he talks about one of the three cycles moving from hostility to hospitality. So I think that's also right in the heart of it and there's a sort of prophetic charism in that as well possibly.

But I think also we've learned and are learning, we are inherently a bunch of ragamuffins and we feel much at home, much more at home as pirates on the open sea and some of us come from occupied backgrounds but we have learned to be cute and shrewd and clever about how we relate to institutions and we've learned that you need that positive tension and steer and interaction, in a microcosm that's really what we're doing with the local parish and to say, we both matter and both postures are important to …

Int: And both are still there.

R: And both are still there, yes.

Int: You're still working in that framework, you can't just pretend those structures aren't there.

R: We don't think, I think probably the other good thing is we don't think we're the answer, we don't like franchise models, what we think we're trying to say is please

consider these things and we're a little bit disappointed, which is no criticism of them, that if you like, I guess a lot of what we've tried to do from an Anglican perspective, is re-read and rewrite a different imaginary towards common worship and common prayer and there is no official common mission in the Anglican way of thinking, but what we would say is that the unofficial common mission has become Alpha and we think that that is brilliant for a particular demographic but we feel like when it's become the franchise model of particularly in the evangelical world, for how we do mission, in as much as our more Catholic life believes that liturgy is going to answer everything and people are going to get wowed by coming into so-called sacred spaces architecturally and think that that liturgical process is going to change people, that both polls are missing, are in danger of missing a really vital mycological lens to how we go about life and I think you picked up obviously from your comments back to me, that if the front foot is essentially the nature of God as a missional God, then our spirituality, our common worship and prayer is shaped by that mission impulse as opposed to the other way round and that's our, I think that's the thing we most want to say so that localised groups of people , communities, neighbourhoods, parishes etc., begin to shape around a certain principle but with all the colour and texture and beauty of where they are and the critique of where they are and how to bring justice to bear where they are and exacerbate the beauty and so on, rather than this, because as much as anything we're critiquing capitalism and saying this doesn't have to be only economic way of living and I think that's a big thing that we're really saying.

I suppose some of us have said what we're really trying to embody is a gift economy as opposed to a capitalist economy and so we're quite influenced in that because one of our crew is doing a PhD that is around where theology intersects with

politics and economics and so he's done a lot of research around the idea of gift and I guess we've been the guinea pig for [inaudible 01:12:16]!

Int: Slowly putting in the terminology and the ideas …

R: He's so bright that we don't have a clue half the time what he's saying but we have a great relationship, he's a good mate of mine, he says "We came up with a phrase" because he can live in his head quite a lot and so we came up with this phrase that is I teach him to do what he thinks about and he teaches me to think about what I'm doing.

Int: A symbiotic relationship happening …!

R: Yes, but he's the genuine brains of the gang.

Int: How many people …?

R: So there's five families and then we've got too many kids to remember how many but there's about 20 something of us all together, with all the kids, we made a decision to commute, because our kids have led us in certain things, we've made a decision to say that they are integrally part of the community , so there's a kind of measuring process that is adult only but we don't really subscribe to that.

Int: What's the age range of the kids?

R: 2 to 11. My eldest is 11 and he's just started secondary school. What I was talking about in terms of the indigenous rituals of a place , our local school that you can hear in the background, not the autistic school here but the main school, all our kids go to that school and we all walk there so actually, every day we see each other twice a day and we see everybody else twice a day.

Int: So even top of the ones that you do see each other …

R: Yes, there's so many rituals like that, that it would be really weird, it would be very unusual to go through a week and not see everybody, many times over.

Int: Especially within one square mile virtually.

R: Yes, because the point of all of those restrictions was to root ourselves in a way that would reclaim some of the best of what a village is about, in terms of being able to see each other, live out of each other's lives and actually act spontaneously, one of the things we're trying to critique was having some kind of way by which you could be spontaneous again and respond to what was in front of you, as opposed to knowing what your day would look like on Friday before that day's even happened because you've diaried it to be this and so this way allows us to interact more fluently and I guess the best of a, ironically a post-modern flux and flow, we can actually …

Int: You can still schedule everything but at the same time because of the locality, it is more organic as well.

R: Totally.

Int: The other side of that question, what are the challenges you would say the group encounters?

R: I think the challenges are different and varied, it's bloody expensive to live in London, all of us have had to find creative ways to overcome that challenge and that's an ongoing challenge although we are fairly sort of embedded now, we've found some pretty wonderful ways or God has opened these ways up so it's been brilliant. But the cost of living is very high here.

I think the challenges, we're seeing a lot of change go on, not to grow towards a gentrified model of transformation, is key. I think the challenge we all find of urban life that can feel very compulsive sometimes, so trying to slow down in a city that wants everything to rev up is a challenge and that's partly why we leave the city fairly regularly. The challenge just of the concrete reality of urban life, my garden, you can pretty much throw the cat to the end of it so with three boys, that's got its challenges.

Int: It's almost like there's this ideal that is just not there yet or is just not there in the world that we live in …?

R: No, I think what we do is we see that grit that we want to turn into a pearl so actually, those challenges have, I don't know if they ever arrive at a static point and then are there but they are revealing more and more good stuff to us as we go along, so the way that we've chosen to live as an alternative economy essentially, and socially as well as spiritually and within a particular geography, is answering a lot of the questions that we came here with, there's no doubt about that.

I think one of the things as a strong idea in terms of metaphorically, is this came out actually last week when we were all reflecting, we know where home is now, we don't feel displaced and I don't mean that just geographically, we feel like we have found a place called home that is a really genuine reflection of how we feel we can express our faith.

Int: That's quite profound.

R: Yes, so that's been the gift that has emerged and I think we're in a kind of stage of, like all good gifs, we love …

Int: [Overtalking]

R: Yes, and we love John Dominic Crossan's thing when he was asked what was the ministry of Jesus and we try and reach for this all the time and he said it so simply that I think it's best, he said "The ministry of Jesus was to live by the rule of an open table and free healing", and I think that's what we want to try and gift always into the place we live, that actually, the table's an open table and everybody's welcome and that healing is for everybody, socially, mentally, physically, communally and so on and that if we can encourage that, then we feel like that's part of what we can pass on.

Int: It kind of revolves back around to that. Actual favourite events that you do?

R: Our installations are pretty good, we do three a year through the high seasons and they are pretty mental.

Int: What makes them so awesome?

R: I like them because one of the things we reach for, I think there's a strong sacramental ontology to who we are and that sacrament as averse to say symbol, has a participatory interface to it, so there is that for us anyway, that it's not just a sign, it's the participation of something more and therefore, when you're being sacramental with these installations and this huge body of people turn up to participate in that with you, I guess you have these sacred moments or thin places that happen where the wonder and the magic and the beauty of God in the kind of here and now, take place that …

Int: As something that's accessible for everyone and it's not necessarily loaded with people's prior knowledge of what sacraments are.

R: There is no prior knowledge of them. In fact, many times that we've done it, we're really only animating what's already there but is, people come, I had a woman come up to me, we curated an installation in the field once and we called it something of wonder and this woman, you would come into the field in darkness and there was this candlelit pathway all the way into this place where we'd erected this whole installation with a fire pit and food and where each person sat, was a name tag with their name and then on the back we'd written something to them and this woman came with her husband and she just started crying as soon as she arrived.

She said to me later, "I didn't want to come here tonight, I really came to support my husband and I cannot find the words to tell you that when I walked into this space, the only word I can say to you is that it was magical" and often we hear that, it was magical because essentially there's an encounter and even the weeping I think was a kind of encounter with the love that will not let us go.

Int: There's like a transcentive experience for sure …

R: She just doesn't know how to say it.

Int: Magical's the best kind of word that she can use.

R: Yes.

Int: If you had someone with a churchy background, faithy background, they might use …?

R: [inaudible 01:22:56] So they are really wonderfully rewarding moments, they're very moving, they're very holy …

Int: Oh gosh, I've really got to see one of these.

R: We had one beautiful moment in the rooted installation where we'd created a pathway of soil right down the aisle of the church up to the altar and it was the one stage station in the whole thing, that when everybody got it to because you were invited to take off your feet and walk through the soil as a means of understanding what it means to be rooted and grounded, in the kind of Holy presence of the soil beneath our feet and really there was a backlog of people who just were buffing up to each other and wouldn't take their shoes off, it was a really interesting kind of cultural dynamic of what was uncomfortable for people and then this blind guy rocked up and of course, he can't see it and so for him, this is his most favourite moment because he can touch it and feel it and so his wife took off his socks for him and he walked through this soil to this thing that you could do at the end and the smile on his face just literally, everybody was watching him mesmerised and a friend turned to me in that moment and said, "It takes a blind man to show us how to see."

Int: Wow. That is really touching for everyone.

R: Profound, absolutely profound.

Int: Have you guys encountered as a community, really difficult periods or difficult events?

R: Yes. We've personally had one, in 2009 I was made redundant, when the economy crashed basically and I was working for a charity, of course all the bread and butter contracts were the first thing to go and I was made redundant, we weren't living here at the time, I wasn't selected for ordination and we were going to have to leave London.

Int: So did you go to a bap and at that point they did it?

R: No, this is way before and we talked to the community and said, "I think we're going to have to leave London because we can't afford to live here" and my second son was born in the middle of it.

Int: 2009, how long had you been in Earlsfield prior?

R: We'd been together for three years by that time, four years, sorry, just getting the timeline and the rest of them came back , I mean I had to go and sign on, we were on benefits, very dehumanising, very traumatic and basically the rest of the community came together and they said, "We don't want you to go, we're going to pay for you to stay here for a year".

"What we think then is that can help you take a year to reorient and retrain towards something else" and that's what I did, I retrained as a childcare worker at the time and coinciding with that, I was invited to consider this Pioneer training pathway for ordination and got selected for that and those things came together with, in being selected, my incumbent offered me this house to live in, so it was an amazing set of circumstances.

Int: So within the year, all that happened and it came together with you getting this …?

R: Yes, and I think that was another step in really embracing this idea, Richard Royle is a big fan of this but the liminality of life actually brings real resurrection, rising and if you don't embrace the suffering, you don't get the rising.

Int: It's true, you have to really go in pure darkness to be able to get any, wow that's really fascinating.

R: And we've all kind of hit different junctures like that.

Int: Just the whole thing of feeling you have to move, I can completely empathise with that whole just feeling dehumanised, not really knowing where to go next. Wow.

R: The other challenging one was one year, a beautiful woman who is a friend and lives next door still, joined our community and we knew she had mental health issues and she was very upfront about that, she's a brilliant artist, brilliant … so creative but she was struggling with deep depression and the community again made a decision, it was a very interesting one because we always decide these things together and it's fair to say that part of us, there was a strong conversation saying, "look, if we take on this woman, that is essentially going to be us done for the year because she's going to take a lot of our resources , a lot of our time and energy", she was very high maintenance at that point and you know, it's going to potentially drag us away from what God's putting us to do here, where is God?

And someone, some wise sage just said, just very beautifully and very quietly said, "maybe she is what is our will of God this year", maybe she is it and that is it and we just went, you're right, she's it, so she was our mission for the year and we paid for her to get therapy, we introduced her into a surgery, she got in touch with a brilliant doctor who then helped her in terms of medicating, she went through that process, she found work and then went through a gradual process of coming off the medication and wow, she's just a different person and I think we realised in that, that sometimes the one

gold coin is really important, it's the one, not the masses that really matters and it was a real lesson for us as a community because sometimes you get these people big grandeur things don't you?

Int: Quality, not quantity.

R: Yes, and that when you look at a person, you need to see them and not all the kind of great ambitions we have to do this, that and the other but actually, she was who we were meant to love.

Int: And everyone, you guys were all on the same page really in the end?

R: We were all on the same page, we have our moments …

Int: This is the polished, with hindsight …

R: Exactly, please don't think for a moment that we are urban saints because we are not! You're getting the story now formed!

Int: Personally, how do you feel that you fit in? Just that whole concept of fitting, a lot of times people feel like whether they don't fit in really 100%, they need to be fed in other ways or does it feel like, does it fulfil you and every part of you?

R: I think we do a lot of soul work as we would call it around writing mission statements or sometimes we call them our critical storyline of who we are because we, our friar friend and his friars have taught us that actually best communities are made up of strong individuals and then you choose the inter-dependence from that and so we've worked hard at, I suppose Ann Morrissey talks about personal vocation and foundational vocation, our All Together and to some degree, Collaboration, is that foundational, we're here to serve this place but actually not only do we do that in the grump work of serving each other and the needs out there and sort of maintaining the drains as it were, but also individually knowing what we bring to the party and my …

Int: So you do actual work in the individual thing?

R: A lot of work, we write mission statements and we've done an exercise called story lab which is all around finding the narrative or the critical narrative to your story, the idea of it is not a false individualism, it's not neoliberal at all, it's much more about how does that place itself in a communal context to serve that community and the place around it?

So I am basically a storm and a sign, those are the two things that frame me, so I'm really good at rucking with things and breaking up ground and a bit like a bulldozer, it's pretty boring but it can break up the ground and then …

Int: So sometimes you'll challenge for the sake of challenge?

R: Less so now! Maybe a younger version of me! No I mean I think that's part of it, is you need to know when to shut up and when to remain, when your gift remains furled but then in those moments when you need to unfurl, you need to do it and you need to do it well and I'm not shy or afraid to do that but equally, you have to sign something different, if you're going to break up ground, you have to be prepared to show something else and the only way I know to do that is to plant myself in that ground that you've just broken up and see if something can grow.

And so that's kind of what I bring to the community , I think they would say I keep them honest about that and they help me equally to be tempered well, you know, in that sense. As a friend once said to me, one of my spiritual mentors, he said – and this is the importance of knowing yourself, he said "Joe, you're so easy and enjoyable to be around when you're being true to who you are and when you're not, you're such a pain in the arse" …! He said "that's your shadow, put it away, put it in a box".

That's a really good point is because we all talk about making friends with our shadows, that we don't hide them in the sense of there's not a …

Int: There's a way to temper the shadow …!

R: To temper, yes, sash! So it's good, it keeps us all honest in that way but also just saying and I suppose, I use this carefully because it has a very kind of patriarchal feel I don't like but there's a kind of fathering that is part of my role, fathering people but also fathering something in the place, maybe more like an elder [inaudible 01:35:22] rather than a church but one friend of mine calls me the curer, I don't know what that means!

But I think what it does help in a serious tone is that it just helps you kind of go, "This is where I am and this is where I'm not" and it just allows for you, within a group like we are, I mean I obviously take through that gift, a certain leadership but I am not the only leader in the community by a country mile and you just get to know when your gift of leadership around what you're about is being invited to step to the fore and when it needs to step to the back and that's …

Int: And everyone has that kind of idea too …

R: Totally and we know when we step over it!

Int: I guess that's one of the graces of being in an established group too?

R: John Vardier says, "You're not a community until you've got to the point that you hate each other", so you know, we are more like family, the best of that is we are more like family in the sense that we can annoy the hell out of each other but we love each other and we'd go to the wall for each other and the place that we're a part of and there's a strong, strong cohesive nature to who we are but we're not … not in that kind of sickly way, we all have very strong social networks and friendships beyond each other, so we don't do all our socialising together and we don't do all our life together, that to us just is not …

Int: You want it to be that organic process anyway and that does happen that way. Do you ever get people or maybe you personally might feel like the whole, "I don't know if I fit in", I guess you've been together for too long to really have …

R: Some have been together longer than others if you like, we started some sort of, I guess what you call an intern programme three years ago and we've had some newbies come in through that, who are much younger than us, I'm nearly 50 and Hannah who I was with this morning, she's 27 and we were talking a bit about this this morning, our worlds are very different, I like that because I'm looking for a kind of, not an ageless but an all age way of kind of journeying communally, even if there's a core representative age, so yes, I think some of the newbies maybe have found it initially, not through lack of welcome but through lack of placing where they fit to take a little bit more time.

Int: There's a certain amount of time that you have in the process of internship?

R: It's a year and they do a series of modules with CMS actually, so that they're getting that learning as well, so that they go up there every Tuesday and study in Oxford and it works really well because part of my worry of Pioneer training was it has no communal doing context and we wanted that to be very explicit to what we were doing as an internship, they also all had to work so that there was a sense of normality in how everybody else is living here. And actually, initially it was agreed that none of them were allowed to stay here, it's interesting that in those first three years, they've all stayed.

Int: The option to stay is there but it's set for one year?

R: Well, it's not there but they …

Int: Have found their way in!

R: They've found their way in! Again, it's the father trying to get rid of his kids, "we want to stay for university, it's cheaper living with you, Dad". I think it's not like that in seriousness, I think my experience of these things previously is that the first one to three years, you kind of get the first fruits of something and they tend to be then reformed into the whole, it's interesting as we're having a sort of fallow year from

interns this year but one of the conversations that we're dreaming and looking towards is possibly formalising a learning community , perhaps a slightly larger group because of some properties that are coming available around here, that next year, we do do something but it will be slightly more formalised.

In fact, some of those original interns will help run that, again in partnership with CMS and partly with the Centre for Learning, but it will be, I would fully anticipate them saying these people are not staying here, they're going back to where they came from because we don't, we're not interested in just growing the centre the whole time.

Int: But is there a way to, if people just really want to be part of this thing?

R: Yes, you just tell us.

Int: [inaudible 01:41:18] live here.

R: It's exactly what happens, so the most recent couple who came five years ago, through a mutual friend, we didn't know them so well at the time and they said, "I think we need to have a word with Meg and Alex", I said "Why's that ?", he said to me, "She said to me they've just bought a house in Earlsfield" and I was like "oh really?", she said "Yeah, we're coming to join your community ", we were like "Oh okay, we'd better think about that", so we all sat down and looked at each other and said "What do we do?" …

Int: But you already knew them?

R: I had met them but I didn't know them. Most of us have arrived here through a strong connection to someone in the community , if that makes sense, we've never had a recruitment policy, we've said we never want to be bigger than 25-30 including our children, so we just said to each other, "What shall we do?" and we said, "We can't tell them they can't come, they've bought a house", they'd enrolled their kids in school so we said, "Why don't we say to them, look, you know what it's like, the grass always

looks greener on the other side, you may find out that we're nothing like what you imagined", we said "Why don't we court each other for a little while, let's take a year, you can be totally part of the community and vice versa but both parties at the end of the year get to then have a conversation and determine whether this has long term viability", and so that's what we did.

I mean within about three months, it was obvious that it was going to be a long term thing, they are absolutely integral to the life of the community now, one of them is the person who set up this charity interest organisation that's going to be the enterprise for the café.

So some of these things you learn on the hoof but I think we would have rather gone on a road where we weren't, we never liked this idea that we had a vision that we were trying to sell people and then bring them in but that if people came, like Varnier says, "come and see", and they captured something that they felt at home in or they felt they could contribute into, then we are always open to that conversation, to listen to the spirit of God, to one another and to determine if that seems like a good fit.

Int: So there's nothing set, that's just how it happened …

R: That's how it happened.

Int: And maybe it might happen in a different way with other people.

R: Yes. I will say this, that's happening more and more frequently now so also part of what we're doing in terms of the partnership with the parish, is when the café's installed, we already run a family gathering there once a month and we intend to turn that into a bit of a Sabbath day because a lot of the parents who are awakening to their own spiritual life, are coming to that now, there's about 60 kids that rock up with their mums and dads and we're going to turn that into a Sabbath day because most of these parents, they can't come every week, they won't come every week, it's a kind of unrealistic form

now so we're going to have a day and we're putting in an industrial kitchen that can cater for up to 4-500 people so then after the service, we're going to have a big meal together and then probably go for a walk or something like that, so it's a day together.

We're also introducing a Wednesday night space that we haven't quite decided what we're going to do yet but it will be somewhere as a touch point for people to come and join in with something that's a bit more explicitly talking and thinking about spirituality.

The reason we're doing that in part is that not everyone can join the Earlsfield Friary and so it's more about the Earlsfield Friary joining something else and then letting that, so we're wanting to grow up the life of the parish there, as opposed to growing up a friary as an alternative thing to that, so that's kind of where the Segway point we're at.

Int: I can imagine that being something that you would continue to talk through because it shows you that there are certain boundaries and then what's a good way to blur them or to maintain certain ones.

R: I think you're right, I think boundaries are important, the problem is you have to have a strong centre or a strong identity for boundaries to be able to be crossed in terms of coming in and going out, if you try and define it, it's a bit like Brexit, you try and define them without a strong core identity, you get xenophobia, you get all sorts … so I think the friary feels that it's about affirming a strong core identity that allows those borders to be very inclusive and welcoming, rather than the opposite.

Int: There's also a boundary for the, you have this family that wanted to be part of it and part of that life too, that people know, there's an explicit way of life that that is as well.

R: Yes, there's a certain kite mark to that as well, but hey, we're making it up as we go along.

Int: How would you describe your spiritual or your religious identity?

R: Rewilded. I would say that because a few years ago I read George Mombeo's book called Feral and he was arguing, brilliantly in my opinion, a case for rewilding nature through mass ecosystems, so reintroducing a rewilding programme and actually the second thing that he was saying that was we need to rewild humanity to resist and kind of create an antidote to a role form of domestication that is the kind of product of consumerism and I thought that's so brilliant, I'm on that so much, really resonated but I also felt going back to this [inaudible 01:48:09] basis of community and Satish Kamar's idea of this ecology between the soul, the soil and society, that Mombeo was lacking in saying something about this third cycle which is spirituality, the rewilding of the soul and I feel like personally, that has been a quest and a journey that I now would say I am at home in, that I've come home or found home and that therefore, it is also that which I guess you place on the altar as your offering, to a very spiritually alive society in my view out there, you can say secular or post secular or whatever, post [inaudible 01:49:07] , for me if you can rewild spirituality within that ecosystem and that shape, then I think there's a spirituality nuanced by the rewilding of the natural as well as the turning a domesticated world back towards something more profound, that actually means that we no longer live in this kind of schizophrenic way and so I feel I am here now and at home in that place, so I think that's been the greatest discovery, is a rewilding of my spirituality within that ecology.

Int: Is that a recent thing?

R: It's so funny you say that, it began 20 years ago but obviously back then it began intuitively and that was really interesting, I remember, I definitely in Bonhoeffer's terms, from 20 years ago, have chosen not to live with this kind of spatial divide between the secular and the profane, sorry, sacred and profane and that I do really concur with this

idea that places are desecrated and that actually, the people of God have this unique capacity in consecrating their lives, to change desecrated space as an agency of Christ is reality in a place.

So I feel like I've practised that for 20 years, I've incrementally discovered language along the way and now I'm fluent, as much as anyone can be fluent but I am, I don't call home other expressions of Christian spirituality, but I can feel at home in them so I can be bilingual.

Int: You were talking about [inaudible 01:51:34] , the labelling is not really important anymore because you can, there's a blending that can happen in any situation, it's second half spirituality.

R: Second, yes, falling out with stuff and I think in that too, having sort of done some homework on Rambo's process conversion theory, I would say in a kind of latent modernity that has been in our ecclesial culture, there has been this kind of pathological obsession with a naming cult as a form of conversation and what it's done is it's actually robbed us of a more inclusive shape of journeying in the fullness of humanity together, wherein we don't have to, partly it is because I think in my view, temple politics has a naming cult in terms of its idea of conversion and I make that point in distinction to personal decision because personal decision is something that you are independently, autonomously and with your own free will making, whereas the naming cult I think is often corrupt in the way it approaches getting someone to name something for the sake of becoming the member of a temple, then in its worst form seeks to harness that as a kind of biopower for the political agenda of that space and so, I think people whether they can use that language or not, gutturally are saying no to that and therefore it's about finding something, a language, an embodied language first and foremost that then allows for a different process, more akin to what Rambo talks about having looked at it

sociologically, that makes space for all co-conspirators in a place and doesn't create these kind of ecclesial fiefdoms that they have no capacity to relate to its wider context.

Int: It's the relational side to it.

R: It's the relational side, I've done a long exegesis on Peter in terms of biographically and looked at what did it mean between Matthew 4 when he responds to an invitation to follow and that particular text "Come follow me and I'll make you fishes of men" and all that that has in it, to Matthew 16 where he has this revelation of Jesus is Christ, has a name changing experience, then immediately filters what's happened through his own particular world view about Israel in particular, that leads Jesus to call him Satan, he's the only one to have claimed that particular honour in scripture and then through the denial process, then the restoration process, then the experience going into a chance on the roof, the don't call unclean what I've made clean, the crossing over there of borders through the cruciform of Jesus and into Cornelius's house where the spirit is discovered already present because suddenly Peter's got a different view of … and so I sort of really have looked at that in terms of what it means to be formed and transform and I think it speaks to all the social, environmental, cultural makeup of what ecclesially and otherwise , as to what sometimes are the cul de sacs we get stuck down in terms of really curating space for people to grow without harnessing that in a wrong way, of which naming is an important part in the process but it needs to be understood in the process and I feel like not only therefore do we have this rewilded spirituality that we can have a sort of rhythm and life in, but that it is generous enough and inclusive enough to allow others to join in and go through those different processes accordingly.

Int: Going back to the favourite thing of the installations, it really fits well with that.

R: Yes.

Int: It's really just open to how you can experience it.

R: Yes. And I think some people will critique us as saying they're too universal, they're not …

Int: It's not grounded enough …

R: It's not grounded enough to acknowledge the point of reference of naming but I just see such an abuse of that that actually, that's not it and if you read anything that we write about, the reality of Christ is paramount to how we see, our Christology's big but I think what we're trying to do in the letting go and rediscovering is not feel that we have to kind of create a model that we don't think actually captures what mission evangelism and spirituality are all about.

Int: You kind of capture a wide audience and you also have, it's not like you can't speak about more explicit Christ things if it comes up.

R: Absolutely. The reality is we talk about it all the time. I was coming home from a meeting in the home counties with two friends who I work with, neither of whom are Christians, with our refugee work yesterday and we got into talk about baptism and why my kids are not baptised and why one of my mates refused to be a godparent his sister's child because he said "I'm not prepared to say I turn to Christ, I don't believe in Christ" and a whole conversation around the authenticity of that as opposed to, and then is there a ritual of dedication that's as equally valid or is there a place for the divine in our lives that we were surprised to discover? Just a whole gamut of things …

Int: What a rich conversation …

R: Very rich because we're not trying to obsessively move him towards a point of naming so that we can tick a box that says, "we got him" or you know, so …

Int: I think so much of the trauma might come from that as well.

R: Yes.

Int: A weird note to end on but we've talked about everything!

Dave Tomlinson (St Luke's, West Holloway)

Int : Would you say that everybody that goes to Saint Luke's would be one community or do you think the different events have a different set of people that come to them?

R : We are a very eclectic community and I think 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is the main gathering point, that's our main event. But on Sunday evenings we have three out of the four Sundays of the month there is a service on, one of which is called soul space which you've been to and that draws in quite a lot of people who don't come Sunday morning.

Int: So that's the only one that might be distinct, would you say?

R: Yes it's a cross over one and there are quite a few people who weren't there actually on Sunday but I would say that at least half of the people, that's all that they come to. And we have an Iona [sounds like 01:36] service also on one Sunday which is … Do you know Iona? [sounds like 01:36]. I think there may be some people who don't come to the 11 o'clock there but that's mainly a kind of place for the regulars for the 11 o'clock. And then we have, by total contrast, a completely traditional choral evensong on a Sunday which is by far the most traditional thing we ever do. There are parts of it that I find really difficult though I take part in it. I sing, play and chant.

Int: Is it because people want that service?

R: That again actually does bring in some people who don't come to the 11 o'clock and others who do and just like that sort of … I suppose really the actual kind of words of the 1662 service for evensong are pretty full on really and I would say they express something so different to what my theology is and what I would be putting across on a Sunday morning in that it's got the quite grovelling confession and stuff, there is no healthiness and all that. And I suppose I kind of get my head round doing that on the

basis that it's a kind of … I don't think people come for analysing the words, I think they come for the music, they come for the sense of peace about it, it's the whole experience. And so I -

Int: Or even if it was for a traditional reason, just the fact that it's been passed down, you don't have to over analyse everything.

R: Well that's true. But it's interesting that then perhaps other people who come fresh to the 11 o'clock service and they really like what we're about there and then decide, 'Oh there's this choral evensong, I'll go and give that a try.' Sometimes I've seen them look completely horrified. And they've only just come once, that's it. So we're a sort of funny mix like that.

Int: Was the choral evensong always there?

R: No, no it wasn't. our musical director, Justin Butcher, who's a very talented, very flexible person who stretches across a full spectrum of church experiences and so on, but he loves choral evensong and he likes .. There's a certain section about the choir that we might have on a Sunday morning, some of them wouldn't go near choral evensong but there's a certain section who really quite like doing it who come and it's interesting that in our Danery, this area of Islington, the church of England in Islington, I don't know if anybody else does a choral evensong.

Int: Is it quite a Catholic belt though, isn't it? It's like the Anglo-Catholic belt.

R: Well some of them are. There's also quite a lot of evangelicals around as well. But i think that … I suppose the thing I like about it despite it being a bit bizarre that Saint Luke's, of all churches, does a choral evensong, is that I do believe in a sort of synergising of past and present. I like the fact that this building, from the outside, looks like a very traditional, Victorian, Anglican building. When you go inside it's not actually like that. It's got quite a modern feel along with the pillars and stained glass and so on

and the main space which doesn't have any pews or anything is used by all … Most weeks there's theatre groups in there, there's dance groups, there's musicians who use it as rehearsal space. It's a very popular space for these people to rent. And they love it and they love the fact it's kind of got a sacredness about it but it is really, as I say, quite a modern sort of building. And we have parties in there and we have gigs in there, it's a space that's used for all …

Int: I heard about the cabaret nights.

R: That's right, yes, that's right. Speakeasy. So it's that mixture of something which has the symbols and signs of the past alongside of and in interface with the present, I think is actually … It's more than just a pragmatic coincidence. That is actually something I believe in.

Int: It separates it too from that whole green belt clique that you were talking about too?

R: Yes, it does. Absolutely. That's right. I wrote a book called Reenchanting Christianity a few years ago and I put forward the idea there that I said that my spiritual and theological posture I kind of encapsulated in a clumsy sort of idea of progressive orthodoxy. And what that was saying was the orthodoxy is saying that we are routed in a past, there's a history, we're routed in something that goes way back here. And that's still important, there's sustenance and rootedness and stability and all kinds of things in that. But we're also very much people of now and that's the progressive bit. And i think that tradition actually isn't some fixed entity that you pass down from generation to generation, tradition to me is a dialogue, a discussion, an argument, a heated debate, a row actually.

Int: Everybody always remembers it in a different way too.

R: That's right, yes. So it's a row between the past and the present that are coming and clashing at times, tumbling and so on. But somehow there's something in maintaining that conversation that's important. So I think that that's something which I like about what we're doing at Saint Luke's and I think it's perhaps more of a challenge for emerging type churches to take that on board because in a way they're often churches or groups that have stepped right out of a tradition and do something new. And I think that's … I get that. I completely get it. But I also think that going forward in a relevant and connected way with today's world, we also need to maintain our connections with the past as well.

Int: You can't just do the whole baby and the bathwater thing.

R: That's right. Yeah.

Int: That tends to be the problem with any kind of reactionary movement, I guess.

R: Sure.

Int: So what else do you do then?

R: So those are the main kind of services, if you like. Added on to that, obviously there's a whole range of other things going on through the year that are linked to the church here which again take on a very different kind of form and character. But also we do other groups periodically, we things in like a term of things really. So for instance I still hanker after what I did for 10 years with holy joes in a pub because I think there a lot of people who, regardless of however much they may like it if they came into this building, are just not going to come into that building. It's got too much baggage for it and so there's a pub slash bar kind of thing called Shillibeers round here where … But we don't do it non stop all the time but we may do six weeks of it or do it in batches.

Int: So there's a period of it?

R: Yes.

Int: Like a weekly period?

R: So we always do it through Lent, for instance, but then at other times of the year as well and I think that looking forward into the future, I think that it's clear there is an appetite for that and I think I should do it more. I mean actually, as an aside, I think that going around talking about my bad Christian books, my bad Christian tours, I find lots of people … There's a lot of interest in something like holy joes. I actually think it may be an idea whose time has come really. The people who are … I'm not talking about churchy people now. The people who are not church going people, I think there's a lot of appetite for what you might call deep conversation. To be able to have real engagement about things and so I have had groups round the country who've got in touch saying, 'We'd like you to start doing this. Would you be a kind of mentor to us or something?' So that's something I'm looking at and thinking about for the future because -

Int: Like maybe a kind of instructional book?

R: Maybe, maybe. But I mean there's a group in Brighton for instance who have formed totally … They've called themselves the Bad Christian group and they formed themselves to look at first of all how to be bad Christians. They did a chapter a week until they'd done the book and then they went on to the bad Christian's manifesto and then they did that, so they're all done now. And they've now actually hitched up with the kind of progressive Christianity network. But actually the book I'm writing now has got that kind of format in mind, that it would be useful stuff for a group like that to look at. So I think that … Because people say to me when I go round talking, 'We like all of this but you're a vicar. How do you reconcile this?' To which I would say, 'Well I feel I've got a foot in two camps.' I don't think that this form of Christianity, the sort of church building type form, I don't think it's got a long future actually or I think its future is very problematic and it will have to adapt massively in the future. But I think it's still there

right now, I think it still connects with a certain kind of demographic of people so if I can give anything I've got to help to reform and renew that model, I will do it. But my heart is not totally there. I also think that we need other fresh models and I feel stretched that I want to give some input or effort or thought to that too really. So I think Saint Luke's actually is a place where we do have some of both going on really and most of the people who come on a Sunday morning, a high percentage of them probably wouldn't go to another church. They just happen to have found this where they feel they belong.

Int: Do you … I know you do the [inaudible 13:53] workshops?

R: Yes.

Int: And I think I saw yoga on the website too?

R: Yes.

Int: Are these all regular things?

R: Yeah, yeah. Every Monday there's a yoga class which a member of our community, a woman in the church, teaches yoga.

Int: Is that a parish thing or is that also just people that just go to that?

R: You know it's a bit of a sort of woolly area thing really. I think she is totally a member of the church. Quite a few members of the church go to it but a lot of people who don't come to the church go as well. I think it's something which we don't have anything to do with the organising of but I would say we would happily own and say that is part of who we are. And that, I know, when I've travelled elsewhere has brought me under some fire really. People sort of … Because some Christians have quite a big problem with the idea of yoga. I don't know really what that problem is really but … SO there's that, yes. I think that … You see there's a guy in Australia called David Tasey [sounds like 15:00], I don't know if you've come across him?

Int: I do know him.

R: Who's work I like a lot. I've met and talked with him in Melbourne about it and in his book about spirituality, contemporary spirituality is it called? He makes a lot of really good points there I think and one thing he says is that if churches are going to have a future in the 21st century, if they're going to thrive and continue, he thinks they need to shift from what he calls 'devotional worship' to become centres of existential spirituality, which is a nice mouthful. And I think what I take from that is I think … You OK for me to carry on? I think that be devotional worship, I think what he's getting at there is that in the past people, just general population people, went into a church, they would roughly speaking know what it was about. They would know the language and they'd understand what was going on. Whereas he's saying today, it's a foreign land. They don't know. There's a massive thing … So what he's saying by devotional worship is that the church is caught up with its own little kind of linguistic sort of ritualistic system that is not connecting with the felt needs of people today. Whereas what he's saying is we need to become centres existential spirituality, that people do have a sense of a spiritual capacity and a spiritual hunger and need and that churches need to adapt to be connecting with that. So I …

Int: Yeah because in certain ways it's almost forcing a certain spirituality that not everyone's connecting with anymore.

R: That's right. So the challenge I think from a Christian point of view, is how can you provide some of these things, maintaining a connection to the Christian narrative? And I think that in part that's a big picture thing rather than in every detail you can't necessarily do that. But I do think that something like yoga for instance, is something a lot of people connect with these days and they find that it is not just for their physical wellbeing, they feel spiritually nourished by it too. I think that the enneagram [sounds like 17:52] is another whole interesting area because when I first came across the

enneagram I was only very new here at Saint Luke's and at first it was just like this charming little self-analysis thing and then I quickly saw that, my god this has got enormous potential pastorally, and it's a very accurate sort of system. So I began to put that to work by … And I trained to be an enneagram teacher which sadly meant going to San Francisco several times. And I began … So I offer it all couples I'm going to marry. So the marriage preparation is based on the enneagram and in fact I've given a talk at the international enneagram conference in San Francisco on my pastoral application of the enneagram which people are very interested in.

Int: The one from the enneagram institute?

R: It's where they gather all the strands and streams come together, yes. And so …

Int: That sounds fun. I haven't been to that.

R: Yeah it is fun, it is fun. I've just had … They're just asking for offers to do workshops at it now which I'm interested in applying again really. But yeah and so then … So that's interesting because couples I marry, quite often they don't come to church. They're just people who live locally, they live in the parish, they've got a right to get married here, and so it's interesting thart marriage preparation can be quite a threatening thing to people who … You know, what are they going to do to me? Lots of these people live together anyway, most of them. and the enneagram is just such a kind of fun thing coming from another angle that people enjoy doing but it actually very quickly … Suddenly we're really into things and so I would say, if I know that the types of people, I think you can pretty accurately say what the dynamic of that relationship is likely to be. Obviously they live their own life but you can say, 'This is going to be a hide and seek relationship', for instance, because one needs lots and lots of time to themselves, they need to recharge, they need to pull back and this one is someone who needs to be connecting and giving and all the rest of it. And so they're going to be coming wanting

to give and the other one will want to run away and the more they run away the more insecure the other … And so this is very helpful stuff if you know this.

Int: I think it really hits the nail on the head in terms of people's … I think it hits at your deepest traumas and desires as well and so I think it shows you those things.

R: It does. I think it's a hugely productive spiritual tool and so …

Int: How do you find out the types of the couples if they're just coming for this …

R: Well the sort of narrative approach of Helen Palmer, which I trained in, is based on a kind of 40, 45 minute conversation with each person to try and … What I find is I have got an extremely good questionnaire which I like which just sort of tends to at least get you into the right zone really. But if people are a bit phobic toward them then obviously that's my training. I can do the one to one thing, it's just that it cuts out quite a bit of time.

[End of Dave Tomlinson 1]

Int: Would you call the Saint Luke's community a cohesive community?

R: Yeah I would. I think there are lots of little mini communities within it but I think that what most people would identify as being Saint Luke's would be that sort of community that's gathered on a Sunday morning and that's the visible side of it. And yeah so I think there are little enclaves within that and I think there enclaves apart from it in soul space and so on. But yeah.

Int: Would you say that the holy joe's group would be very different from the types of people …

R: I think there are. I mean actually I'm probably in a more deceptive side that I should have touched on here. Which is that having said what I've said about the services and the things that are going on, part of what we're about I think is avoiding too much top down organisation. So I could say, 'These are things that we have going on that we

organise' and I'll probably be talking about the more top down type of things, whereas there's an awful lot of bottom up things which we want to encourage and facilitate in any way that we can. So for instance there is a pub group that I have nothing to do with whatsoever which is all 20 somethings who have gotten together and they socialise and stuff and actually one offshoot form that is that there's a small women's group who get together and talk feminist theology and stuff like that. I don't know anything about it, I have nothing to do with it at all.

Int: Even you said the yoga, that was self started?

R: That's right.

Int: And even the evensong was because you had the choir director who was interested in doing it and so you supported it but it wasn't you had this vision.

R: That's right. And there are other things. There's a Thursday night football group which is some of the men in the church who play football in a gym type place with quite a lot of other guys who don't come to church but somehow are part of this bigger community of Saint Luke's, even if they don't come to church because they're sort of … It's quite … They play football and then they go to the pub and they talk and they have all kinds of conversation.

Int: But everyone knows each other?

R: Yes. So that is definitely part of Saint Luke's but it's not … In organisational terms there's no administration of it from the centre if you like. And then we have a thing called Vox Holloway [sounds like 03:37] which is a community choral society and this was set up by Justin, our music director, along with another celebrated musician really in the area who doesn't come to church at all but he's a guy who used to be in a jazz band called Harvey and the Wallbangers which is before your time but was … A lot of people of a certain age would know who that was. And Harvey lives locally and

Harvey and Justin got together with this idea that people want to sing and so they set up this thing which now has totally got a life of its own. It is based in the church, it's grown out of the church, it's based in the church. They do about four performances a year and all the rehearsals take place in the church and the performances are mostly here. There's been one in a big theatre in town but mostly they're here and the choir is mostly people who don't come to church, local people, they don't have to have had any singing experience and the choir will be on average 90 or 100 people in the choir.

Int: Oh wow, that's huge.

R: And then there'll be professional musicians and maybe soloists who are contracted in as well to be with them and the performances are amazing, really amazing, very ambitious performances. And the church, well it couldn't be any fuller. It's just jammed to capacity, often it's all sold out. So the interesting thing about that is that some of the people who are involved with now the organising of Vox Holloway actually had certainly at one stage reservations about being tied so much to a church and so at the start of each term when they start rehearsing for another thing and the choir may change each time, I will go along and just sort of welcome them into the building and say, 'This is the way it is. We are a very, very fluid community here and in the very best sense, you're part of us by virtue of being here. But on the other hand, you're totally self-organising. It's nothing to do with us.' So that's an important one because it's got quite a big profile. So there are these kind of things which …

Well we have a tradition of the notices at Saint Luke's that we do at the end of the service where our particular idiosyncratic way is anyone can stand up and give a notice. Now we try and … We trim it back periodically as best we can to say just things to do with the church, not, 'I've got a gig on on Thursday.' But there was a … Just before Christmas there was a Lutheran minister from Switzerland visiting, he was on

sabbatical and came to the church, and I had a chat with him afterwards about it all and he was … The thing that impressed him out of anything at Saint Luke's was the notices because he was hearing about all these things going on. We've got a prison opposite here and someone stood up and said, 'There's this angle project where you … It's a women's prison and they can't give presents to their kids so the deal is you get a present, you wrap it up and give it to them so that they give it to their children.' And so this young woman stood up and she organises all of that and lots of people do it and then someone else stood up and talked about Vox Holloway and somebody … And there was a whole bunch of these things and he said, 'Do you organise all these things?' So I said, 'I don't organise any of them.' So he said, 'If any of those things were going to happen in my church, I would have to make them happen.' So I think that was what impressed him, that that's part of … And so when sometimes people say to us, 'Do you have any organised this …?' We always seem to be very modest in what we've got organised at Saint Luke's but I think that's actually what we're about, about not organising it but holding the space where people can be confident to do their own thing really.

Int: And like you said, some of them you've never been to before but they're still kind of connected.

R: That's right. Absolutely.

Int: To switch back to something you said earlier, you said most people in terms of their positioning to religion …

R: Yes it's difficult to understand what that means. You maybe have got it all defined now. But I think that what I'm saying is that the overwhelming majority of people who would identify with Saint Luke's are people who have been profoundly influenced, I would say, by the culture of post modernity, which is a bit old hat now isn't it but that would still be true. That they're people who are people of the social media sort

of world, and this is not necessarily to do with an age, we've got reasonable range of different ages, probably our biggest age demographic would be probably 30s into 40s really. But we have teenagers, we've got a lot of 20 somethings who are a lot of them are young professionals. We have got only a minority of people who would be in the 55 upwards. It's the opposite. We've got hardly any … I mean we have three elderly ladies who are revered in Saint Luke's because they are our three … These three lovely old ladies who sit on the front and they just are lovely. I mean one of them is 94 and they're just a delight to everyone. But part of the reason is they're so unusual. They're in a church that's really very young in age but also very young in mentality and outlook really. So I think …

And I suppose another thing about the emerging thing would be that we don't really tend to have people who are terribly fixed in their theological position. There's a lot of openness and fluidity. I think if anything there would be a strong predominance of anti-authority about them. So it's strange because we're in this Anglican Church which on the face of it is quite hierarchical, in reality it doesn't work out that way actually. Bu it think that they would be predominantly people who would want to kick against the establishment. And I think that I've probably been an effective mediator for that because I think that I am the face of the establishment here.

Int: Because you're a vicar now.

R: Yes. But I'm totally one of them and I'm also someone who's constantly up against the establishment. If you look at the whole thing of same sex relationships and so on, we're a church that's known to be a welcoming place and so we have quite a lot of same sex couples here, I've baptised their children, I can't … Legally I cannot marry them but I do everything short of that. We have, tomorrow actually in the church, Christian and Mark are getting married in the registry office and then they're coming

here and I will … There will be a blessing but for a lot of people who come here it will look just like a wedding really. So this is not really what you're supposed to do. So I think they're a church who are led by a vicar who is also … Who has found a way to be at peace with the establishment but at the same time isn't part of it. And I think that that's what enables us to hold the tension of it together.

Int: It's really interesting that you have the opposite of what's happening everywhere else where you have the younger people and you don't have the older people. But most people are commuting and not necessarily parishioners who have been here forever?

R: Well we have a mixture. I would say that perhaps it could be 50% or just more who do live locally. I mean not necessarily strictly in the parish because parish borders are quite a … This is quite a small parish border here with 12,000 people living in it but it's quite tight. But if you take this part of north London then you'd have to say that probably 60 or 70% live within about three miles of here. We get quite a lot of tourists who've read my books and that's fine, everybody's OK with that because it's all in proportion. And there are a small minority of people who do travel a fair way to be here. One of the things we've done to try and help that is on the third Sunday of the month we have a church lunch which is mostly quite organised though people can contribute to it. And so what we'd say to people is, 'If you can't come every week or you live quite far away, why not come of the third Sunday because then you can hang around and enjoy the social life rather than just coming to a church service or whatever.' So quite a lot of people do that, so the third Sunday is usually a bit bigger.

Int: Do you think that people in the congregation or the community also dabble in different types of religious traditions? Is there openness to incorporate maybe certain services with other traditions?

R: Yes I mean sometimes we have at the peace, sometimes I will introduce it with 'Namaste' and we'll all do that very comfortably. And I personally take part in an interfaith forum once a month which is, for me, a real treat that I look forward to. I've got to know these other people very well. There's an Imam, a Jewish Rabbi and a Buddhist, a Pagan sometimes and others off and on and these have become friends and we have a lot of banter. So that spirit is introduced into the church quite a lot. And there are people, for instance there's a young single mother, Nina, who describes herself as the director of tea and coffee at Saint Luke's. She organises the rota for tea and coffee after church. She's got now I should he's probably about 13 year old son and she grew up in a Christian background that she totally rejected and walked away from and went on her own spiritual journey in which mostly she identifies as Buddhist but she wanted a community, a spiritual community, for her son to be in and so she found that there wasn't that in the Buddhists and there wasn't that in the Quakers and the various places she went looking at. And her friend brought her to Saint Luke's and she's at home here. Now she would say quite openly that she doesn't really believe in God and that her spiritual practice is Buddhist. She is totally a part of this community and nobody even thinks … That's all cool, that's OK. And actually a lot of that is about words anyway. What do these words mean? Atheist or Christian or whatever, what do they mean? It's who you are as a person. So she's a good example of something that probably would be there quite a lot I think, there's the yoga group, and …

Int: And it sounds like you do have a lot of non-religious, so atheists or agnostics, coming in as well?

R: Yes, we do and I think part of our creed is that we don't have a creed. Now obviously the Church of England does. I have never imposed the Nicene creed in 16 years because I think it's mumbo jumbo from a bygone era instituted by Constantine. But

I suppose we do baptisms and stuff, we have a sort of version of the Apostles creed in a question and answer sort of thing. But basically what we're saying is this is not a community based on beliefs, it's upon a spiritual journey. But there's no question that at the heart of this particular complexity of spiritual journeys, there is the narrative of Jesus and there's no apology about that, no need to apologise, that's totally accepted by everybody. But it is proclaimed and held in such a way that gives a lot of space for people to be on their own journeys and with integrity to say … And I do. I give communion to atheists every Sunday because that's the way we approach this thing, they're part of … And it just seems ridiculous to me that you would make that kind of segregation on the basis of some rational propositions that people can or can't sign up to.

Actually another thing to throw in on the interfaith thing is that I have taken two at least inter-religious weddings here, both with Muslims where one partner's a Muslim, one a Christian, and I have taken the ceremony with an Imam. Two separate ones.

Int: So there's lot of interfaith here?

R: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. And in both cases there was a real enthusiasm on the part of the bride and groom and everyone else concerned to retain the integrity of both of these faith traditions but at the same time for them to be put together. This is not just a marriage of two individuals, this is actually a marriage of faiths and I think that poses a lot of questions and challenges I think. Children, all kinds of stuff come up. But that's just a reflection of the world we live in. if the world doesn't find out how to do that then we are really in big trouble and therefore I think the church needs to be at the cutting edge of trying to work that through really.

And another part of that is that on midnight mass at Christmas this year, which is a peculiar service of course because an awful lot of regulars have gone away but the church is packed full, and so I don't know a lot of the people who come. Quite a lot of

them I do know because we encourage … We say that there will be prayers for absent friends at midnight mass because I think Christmas is a time when people miss people they've lost, so quite a of people who I know from taking funerals come to midnight mass to light a candle for someone. But the church was packed out and we offer a non-alcohol alternative, just like we offer a gluten free alternative for the bread, and I noticed that there was quite a large number, more than usual, people going to the non-alcoholic option. What I didn't realise was there were actually 15 Muslim students who came who said they'd never been to a church before, they love Jesus, Jesus figures, and they wanted to come to celebrate the birth of Jesus with Christians, and they were shocked and intrigued and warmed by the fact that my invitation to communion that night was as it would normally be. I would say, 'This is a time in many churches where there's an invisible line that drew and says who's in and who's out. This is not … There are no innies and outies in this church. Every single person is here is welcome at the table of Christ, you are all welcome to receive bread and wine.' And so they took it up and came. So I gave communion to 15 Muslims that night which I think is fantastic. I told a woman from down the road here who doesn't come to church but I know her from dog walking things and I was telling her about this and she was totally knocked out and she said, 'Go very carefully, Dave. You're going to get me into church if you're not careful.'

Int: I feel like stories like that would really pique people's interest in what kind of church it is.

R: Yeah. The following day, on Christmas day, I put it on Facebook that I gave communion to 15 Muslims. Well I got quite a barrage from people telling me you can't do that, you shouldn't do that. So I said, 'Well I did it.' To me, my policy has always been if someone puts their hand out, they will receive.

Int: What do you think are the positive things about Saint Luke's?

R: I think it's … I don't think anyone could or should claim that they're totally inclusive but I think we inspire to be inclusive on all sorts of levels and I think we're quite good at that, though with plenty to learn and do. I think that we're a place that people can bring non-Christian, non-religious friends with total confidence that there will not be any embarrassing, cringe moments. I think that's a positive about it.

Int: Oh wow, you're confident about that too. That's great.

R: Yeah I am confident about that, yes. I think that there is a strong core community of people which enables us to have a big fringe edge. I think churches … I believe in having woolly borders or no borders but that the in and out at the edges, you can't tell. And people may come sometimes but in order to maintain a broad, generous, inclusive community I think you need a core of people who are committed to keep that show on the road. So I think we're good at that. We've got a good strong core of that.

Int: I guess it's a difficulty in a lot of these more liberal type churches that people are more non-committal.

R: Yes, that's right. I think our music is good, I think we've got a good … It's not a formal choir, it's very informal but we've got a great choir and Justin has developed not just the adult choir but a children and youth dimension to the choir too and they all often take part. So yeah, I think these would be some of the positives.

Int: OK, challenges then?

R: I think that there is a challenge that centres around me in that I am a seven and therefore I'm not the best manager in the world and I think we could sometimes be strategically better. I think that just generally we are very, and it's surprising this given the people here, but we're surprisingly poor at selling ourselves. I think that in a way our product is very good. I feel very confident in what we're about and what we've got to give. I think that we're very laid back and although, funnily enough, we've got so many

media people and digital people and all the rest of it, I don't think we're very good at using the things that people have got great talent at. So I think we undersell ourselves. I think that it goes back to the first point I made really, that I think that trying to hold the tension between something which is a loose networky relational sort of form of community, holding the tension between that and being strategic and organised and so on, I think we're constantly wrestling between those two things and that is a challenge really. And I think that also we are in need of doing something beyond this building because I think we've hit a ceiling of being sufficiently full in this building that I think it's difficult then for people to feel they can come and get in and find a place there. So I think that, I don't know, people say something like when a building's 80% full you stop growing. It's something like that and I think that we've been at our limit for a while and so that posed the challenge of the whole church planting thing because the words, 'church planting' don't go down well with us. That is associated with a different form of Christian spirituality that we don't really … The more driving, evangelistic sort of thing and I think that we've got to overcome that and find out what does church planting mean for us because we get a lot of people who … There are new faces all the time and I think some people find it hard, as I say, to get a purchase on how to fit into this community because there are so many people who know each other, it's all there and I think it is to do with size and the way we are in the building. So it's difficult in Church of England because anywhere outside of this immediate parish that you go to plant a church you're doing it in someone else's parish and that has implications and there are lots of tensions in the Church of England about that. Places like Holy Trinity Brompton, they have gotten well into the swing of where they take over a church that's ailing somewhere and import people in. Well that's another strategy altogether but whichever way it is, I think that the part of the future is finding out how do we continue on a pathway of growth

beyond the gathered congregation of tis building because we've reached the limit there for that.

Int: So just the space itself?

R: Yeah. And that's a good challenge but it's a challenge.

Int: It is. What are your favourite things that Saint Luke's has done?

R: That we've done as a community?

Int: As a community, yeah.

R: I think that our regular Sunday morning I'm proud of. I think that people … It's good to feel confident about a place and say … And we are a funny blend. Some people come along and say, 'Oh it's a bit more traditional than we thought it was.' Other people come and say, 'Wow, this is really different.' So you kind of walk a pathway there but … So I do feel proud of that. I think that Vox Holloway I feel very proud of, the choral community choir I think is brilliant. I'm very proud of our young people, we've got a great bunch of young people. And I'm proud of the fact that we've got teenagers who, some of them right now are going to be going off to uni, and very proud of the fact that they don't seem to wander away. They want to be here, they love it and that's good. I think that the … One of the things I said when I took on Saint Luke's, when I gave my first vision to the church here, I said that I wanted Saint Luke's to be an effective corner shop church. I don't know what that means to you but you know the corner shop is the little shop that basically does a great job of giving you everything you really need and in a way I think that's what a Church of England church is, it's sort of … I wanted us to be good at doing the basics well for the community and I think that means that what we in the church call 'occasional offices', of weddings, baptisms and funerals, I feel very proud of the way we do those. Lots of people who are regulars on a Sunday morning have come through that. Couples I've married or people where I've taken a funeral. And

so yeah, I think we're quite good at being a basic parish church. And it's nice talking to people. I have on more than one occasion, several occasions really, local people have said something to the effect of me and this exactly [inaudible 33:12], 'It's rumoured that good things happen in your church.' So you think, 'That's good. That's good.'

Int: Have you encountered major traumatic moments as a community before?

R: We've been pretty lucky really. I don't think we have. We've had a couple of really very painful deaths but on the whole I think that we've done really well. We've never had any kind of significant split or a trauma of that nature. People have their spats with each other but on the whole I think this is a happy community.

Int: So I guess the last major thing would have been that vicar before for you?

R: Yes that's right. That is right, absolutely.

Int: So there's little things that happen in between?

R: Yeah I do think we've been pretty lucky really that we've not had any major traumas. There are, as I say, a couple of relationship things that have caused some pain along the way but they're not huge really, they're quite contained.

Int: And do you think they've been healed?

R: I wouldn't say all have but I think mostly they have, yes. And we've got two couples I can think of immediately, maybe more, who while they've been here have actually broken up and been divorced, where both partners still come to the church and will sit next to each other. And so I think, 'Well that's pretty good going really.' Because these things happen, it happens everywhere, and I think it says something about them as people of course, but it also says something about a community, a church, that can kind of hold that, where people aren't aligned behind one or the other but are supportive to both. I have, over the years I've been here, taken a number of divorce ceremonies. Not necessarily for people who come here but people … It all seems wrong to me that the

church sort of metaphorically rings the bells, or literally, and makes a big song and dance about marrying people but kind of washes its hands of it when it all goes wrong. And there's a sort of feeling of sometimes disapproval or whatever and I think we ought to … We're part of that existential spirituality David Tasey talks about I think is providing rites of passage for people and I think it's important to have rites of passage to deal with the painful and difficult bits of life as well as the happy parts really. So I think that's important.

Int: I think even in say funerals, so much of the funeral service has even lost the genuine mourning period and things like that so the really sad bits have been washed away.

R: Yeah well I agree with that. I think there's a certain type of funeral that you can go to where everyone seems to me to be in some kind of super spiritual denial where it's all kind of rejoicing that they've gone to be with the lord of whatever and you think, 'No it's shit actually. And we need to acknowledge that and …'

Int: Do you think there's a feeling for anybody in the congregation or even for you of fitting in or not fitting in?

R: I think there may be for some people. I'm not hugely aware of it. I think there are people who have not found it an easy church to fit into, yeah. I expect that. I think you always need to be self-reflective about that and say … And we've had this conversation so many times, how can we be as welcoming as possible and the thing about someone who comes on their own for the first time and doesn't know who to speak to and that kind of thing, what do we do? Do we trust that and try to cultivate just a spirit among us that we will look out for that and do something about it or do we need to be a bit more organised so that some people are actually on the lookout? So we've moved a bit between both of those things but I think there are people who feel that … That have

found it more of a struggle to fit in than others have, it's not all perfect. And obviously different personality types plays into that as well.

Int: Do you think there's a certain … Have you gotten feedback of certain reasons why people feel like they're not fitting in?

R: I think you've always got to be confronting the fact, and this is just sociology of groups really, that people do end up clustering around their group of friends and then it's hard for someone else to know how to fit in, how to establish yourself. So that's something which we're well aware of that and what really thrills me is over and over again I find people saying to me how much they found it was a welcoming church they've come to and I think, 'Well it sounds like for you it's better than I think it is' because I'm not that confident in it but it's good to hear. So I think there's that side of it. I think there are people who've perhaps come from a more traditional background who have had their struggles with, mostly overcome I think but the fact that I'm quite particular about using a fair number of feminine pronouns and language to describe God.

Int: Oh right, you have the inclusive sign of the cross? Or the inclusive trinity?

R: Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I've just written a chapter of the book I'm writing at the moment which is all about Christa and that statue of Christa. But no, so there's regular things. Like for instance in the invitation to the confession bit of the service it's got a statement there which is … I can't remember what the word is now but it's … Anyway, we talk about God and her world and that sort of language is just rather naturally sewn into what we do and I don't even notice it but obviously someone coming fresh may do and may not necessarily find that so conducive. And people have said that but mostly they've quite quickly got over it really.

Int: So it's mostly if they've had a more traditional background and they would compare it distinctly from that?

R: Yeah.

Int: Last question. So personally how would you identify yourself? What is your spiritual or religious identity?

R: As a label sort of thing?

Int: Yeah as a label. Some people have narratives.

R: I've come from … Historically I grew up an evangelical in a brethren church. I then became involved in the charismatic movement and the house church movement where I was an apostle in the house churches, so I was evangelical, charismatic, and then went through a big deconstruction, unravelling and everything which was summed up by the title of the book 'Post-evangelical.' Which I think was probably … Well as I said in the book, post-evangelical is not necessarily the same as ex-evangelical so it's saying there's discontinuity but there is also continuity. That probably has … But then I quite quickly found when I was doing lots of talks about the post-evangelical in the Anglican church before I was an Anglican, I found the people who really liked what I was saying and where I seemed to connect actually were people who were in the liberal catholic sort of notion and they seemed to be the people who most liked what I was saying.

Int: To begin with though?

R: Well no. I think … Then I obviously went to Westcott which is a liberal catholic sort of thing so basically it's the combination of a fairly conservative catholic liturgy with a progressive liberal theology and social and ethical outlook. So that combination works quite well for me, I quite like that.

Int: So you would say post-evangelical but also liberal catholic maybe?

R: I think I concluded quite quickly that post-evangelical met Anglo liberal catholic quite comfortably. I think there was quite a lot of overlap. Now I'm not that fussy about the things that a liberal catholic would be fussy about in terms of liturgy but I have

moved in a sort of catholic ish direction, in a very broad sense which is, to me it's about I suppose taking ritual seriously and recognising ritual as an important part of human life and experience and you can do it well or you can do it crap but you don't not do it. Evangelicals with no ritual do plenty of ritual, they have their rituals they just don't recognise it as that. It hasn't been thought about I think and so on. So I think I find labels very difficult because I am a natural beach comber. I'm an eclectic person.

Int: So even saying you're a Christian is difficult?

R: I think the word Christian is loaded, that's the problem with it so you have to immediately explain what you don't mean by it. But I think after I gave a talk at green belt when I launched, 'How to be a bad Christian', it was in the beer tent there and I don't know what year, I remember it being flooded everywhere. And there was this packed bunch of people there and I kind of went off on it really, I got very excited about what I was saying and somebody said to me afterwards, 'You're really on fire, Dave. You were like a liberal evangelist.' And I thought, 'Well actually, I quite like that term' because I think what is it that I really hold on to from my evangelical past? Well probably a few things but I think the sense that you've got a message to proclaim, there is something to say and there's an invitation with it too, there's a calling about it. I think, yeah that still matters to me, something that you feel passionate about. And so I think that would be the kind of evangelist side of me. Theologically I think, yeah I'm liberal. The trouble is that's a wretched word in itself, isn't it? But I think that I would certainly fall into the category of liberal on many levels so I think that my message is of a sort of progressive, liberal nature, open. But my sense of purpose and passion is quite evangelistic I think, so I think I can live with those two things together.

Int: If you were to describe Saint Luke's to a general audience, how would you describe it?

R: It's really hard. Are you talking about labels now or …

Int: Yeah I mean you could say labels or I don't know, just how would you …

R: I don't think I would use a label because I think we rather don't fit one. I would quite happily say that we're Anglican, we're part of the Church of England. That is such a loose and meaningless term in itself anyway that that works for me. But I think I would say that we are as very strongly a community of friends, that we are inclusive in the sense that we try to make space for anybody and everybody and, in the present context, quite a bit of that focuses on sexuality, that we are a place that's welcoming to people in the LGBTQI community and I think that most of all it's a place of spiritual and theological openness really, where there's no prescribed thing that you have to sign up to.

Int: So that inclusivity and that openness really is core almost to the whole thing?

R: No it is absolute core. I think it is totally core, yeah. And I suppose there's a lot of people who would say they're bad Christians really <laughs>.

Int: Well that's a good note to end on unless you want to add something else?

R: No, that's fine.

Randy (The Borough Common)

Int : Could you just say your name and the group that you're in?

R : Randy, the Borough Common.

Int: About the Borough Common, how would you describe what it is to a general audience?

R: Depending on who they are and depending on whether I've got an interest in their emotional wellbeing, so like if they're a Christian and I think that that's kind of important to them, then I would say it's kind of like a church that, where we don't really have hierarchy and we're not particularly attached to dogma. If it was a non-Christian who I thought might be scared by the fact that it was a church, I might say it's …

Int: Non-Christian as in no religion or in like another religion?

R: Just a person, I think the reasons I would explain it are either me explaining to someone I know who I used to go to church with or I used to talk to about church, about what church I'm in now and that group I would say, "the church I go to now is sort of like a bit of an experimental church, it's non-hierarchical and it kind of is a group that runs itself" and then another scenario, another use case of me talking about the Borough Common would be someone or a friend who I want to talk to about a particular aspect of my life, maybe something more spiritual, maybe something spiritual has come up in conversation or they've said, "Are you religious?" or I'm on a date, something like that, then I would probably say – and I'm assuming that person isn't religious – and then I'd say, "It's like a kind of spiritual group that's oriented around doing good in the world and growing spiritually and it's kind of like a church but it doesn't have a dogma and it doesn't have a hierarchy."

I think the last use case would be, and then yeah, I think that's probably the two main things I'd say, I don't spend my life telling people about it and then that second

group, I might be going, the conversation might move onto, “that sounds cool” and then I might say, “come along, it’s quite easy to come along to.”

Int: So if there’s some kind of interest, you would invite someone?

R: Yes, sure.

Int: And usually if there was a Christian background, you would be more comfortable just using certain Christian terms?

R: Yes, like church and stuff like that. I think there’s just a lot of, basically I think there’s a lot of trauma in the general population about church and the word “Christian” and I find it interesting, even though I was just on this zen, yoga, meditation retreat and the guy who’s the zen teacher is like his family’s committed Christian, his mum goes to church every week and his mum’s always going to him, “I like what you're doing but I think something’s missing, Jesus” and he’s funny because he’s like this super cool zen spiritual guy but yet he’s a bit edgy around Christian faith or Christian tradition.

I would always say to him, “Oh man, you know there’s some wonderful meditative traditions in Christian faith”, and he’d be really attached to saying things like, or he’d be quite attached to saying things like, “Christians believe XXX” and I'm always a bit like oh my goodness and I think a lot of people have this alpha course mentality of what Christian faith is and I think you've got this massive, wide, deep, spiritual well that’s got everything from weirdo poets living in the desert in the middle ages, to kind of CS Lewis and there’s quite a big gulf.

Int: There’s so much, even now existing today …

R: Exactly, yes, and so I think one of the things that I sometimes try and do for people, so again it’s on this zen retreat, there’s another guy there who’s like “I'm a committed Christian and I’ve found a lot of solace in the writings of CS Lewis” and he’s

about 55 and he's trying to work his way through the fact that he kind of likes this zen meditation stuff but he's a bit worried that Jesus will get lost or something.

Int: You should have a chat with [name], have you talked to her?

R: What, about her yoga stuff?

Int: Yes.

R: Yes.

Int: Because she had the funniest story that she told about her process of reconciling Christianity with yoga, so that would be a fun conversation to have with her.

R: Yes I'll talk to [name]. But anyway, there's this kind of interesting thing and I think so many people have got all these anxieties and traumas which is mostly to do with a kind of evangelical Christianity that they've been exposed to, or a kind of, like a lot of people talk about Catholic schools or religious schools, so you've got a certain type of Catholicism when someone's a child and a certain type of Christianity normally when someone's a student or a young adult, including a lot of stories like I did this anthropology of religion course at the start of the year and this woman was talking about how one of her friends, her and some of her friends when they were teenagers, they started going to this youth club and then this older girl in her mid-20s started hanging around with them and they were like about 16 and basically started kind of manipulating them to, to convert them …

Int: Slowly, slowly …?

R: Like a classic, I don't know if you did but like I did as a youth leader and she said she found it really weird and then this girl vanished from their lives and she found it all a bit emotionally manipulative and destructive and one of her friends got really sucked in, in her language and so I think you've got this kind of whole generation of people who sort of have experienced religion as this quite oppressive, manipulative force that's kind

of trying to tell them to believe things that they don't believe or trying to persuade them that they're wrong about their intuitions or feelings and that is a really horrible thing to go through and then people have kind of gone, "that's Christianity off the radar for me" and then they've gone and done other things and I guess my orientation is towards, that's kind of annoying for everyone, is towards the Christians to go, you know what, there's a much broader world out there and we can be much more expansive how we think and we can … and that can be hard for them to listen to and that can be hard, like I don't talk to my mum and dad about it too much because I don't want to scare them off, the fact that it don't believe that Jesus is the son of God anymore or anything like that, so I don't want to scare them off and my cousins and all that, I just sort of have a light veneer of "my church, the Borough Common".

And then there's another group who also are just petrified of religion and who I want to say "come into this", "we can just play in this space", which is ritual and myth and magic and we can play with and actually these Christian stories and these Christian traditions are really deep and rich and they're just as deep and rich as the things that you want to play with that feel safer because they haven't manipulated you when you were a teenager, like yoga and zen …

Int: Because they have those too when you have these traditions that came from there, you have the people and our generation also having those same kind of sharp edges …

R: Yes, exactly, I think you've got, I think we're already starting to feel like the difficult edges of sexually manipulative yoga teachers, of meditation practice that's actually an oppressive force, like coercive and controlling spiritual leaders of all sorts and I almost feel even now, for so long in the UK, our narrative around church leaders was basically as sexual predators and now what we're realising is that everyone in the 80s was a sexual predator, that every powerful man, it can be any radio DJ, any scout

leaders, anything, and so I think there was the time when religion was cast as this kind of dark shadow and again there's a bunch of evangelical atheists who have got no more open minds than anyone and really fixed views of what's right and what's wrong and very strong …

Int: When you say evangelical, you mean just like dogmatic atheists?

R: Yes, I guess I use the evangelical to mean rigidly attached to ideas …

Int: And trying to impose them on others?

R: Yes, and kind of trying to tell others about those ideas and basically who see their main work in the religious arena, being a work of persuasion and I feel like it's really funny now, I've not had an argument with anyone about religion for a really long time because if someone says to me, "I believe this", I'm like "okay, why do you believe that?", "oh cool" and I might like poke them, I might go "what about this?" or "have you thought about this?", or they might go "I moved away from Christianity because it was controlling and now I'm a Buddhist" and I'll be like "Oh", and then I want to poke them a bit and go, because the thing is I don't think that's true, so I think a lot of people's thoughts about religion are really thoughts about an experience they've had or a traumatic difficult thing they've had, which is fine but I think it's really, if people label it as a problem with religion, then it's a problem with people.

Int: Or there's these categorical boxes that people have in mind and this is like what they …?

R: Or it's like people have something in their mind and be like, "I thought that and then I had a conversion", because I've had that really deeply spiritual, transformative experience in a Christian tradition but I've also had ecstatic sort of transformative bodily experiences in a [inaudible 00:11:36] meditation retreat and through sematic body work in an entirely secular environment, so I've come to see like those bodily experiences as

neither proof nor disproof of any sort of theological correctness but then you still see people going, “But I know that Jesus is real because I felt it in my heart on this particular day, on this particular occasion” and I'm like “oh you had an incredible spiritual transformative experience on that particular day, on that particular occasion and it was the wrapper around that transformational experience was a Christian wrapper”.

But that’s not a bad thing and I'm not saying that like “and that means that Christianity is not true”, I'm just saying that the human ache for a spiritual transformation can find its home in many traditions and again I'm not even concerning myself with any questions which are way above my pay grade, like which one is true or which one’s more true, I'm like I don't know, I'm just me, I'm just like a little person! So it’s almost like I’ve become much more comfortable with the role of seeker, I'm just down here trying to find my way, “oh is this is helpful to me?”, I don’t live in a big fear that I'm going to get it wrong, of course I'm going to get it wrong because I'm a person and people don’t have infinite knowledge or I don’t transcend time and space.

If anyone is transcending time and space, that’s God and God isn't going to hold me to account for not being God, He’s going to go “You're a person”, so He’s going to look at, if there’s any job to be done assessing my choices, there’s lots of assessments that can be made of my choices around I might be a sheep and I might be a goat, depending on which way you measure but I'm not going to be assessed based on my theological ideas about the abstract nature of reality, I'm going to get judged on if there is judgement, I'm going to get judged on whether consideration all the things that I had on my plate, I made good or bad ethical choices, of course I’ve done both and I’ve made some choices where I'm like “I'm really proud of that choice”, that’s me at my best, I’ll make that choice again and I’ve made other choices where I'm like “that’s my dark side, that’s me at my worst, that’s me doing something that I'm not sure is in line with my

better nature" and I've had to live with both of those and tolerate both of them and … then we'll see what happens.

And also I work in concepts so my work is marketing consulting, so it's all about concepts, we just take different concepts and we reflect on what those concepts might mean in different situations, that's how it works, you go if I'm working on a beer brand and I really want to be connected to the concept of refreshment, then there's all sorts of semiotics that we'll use and all sorts of actions that we might take to kind of bring to life what refreshment means in different scenarios to different people and what images and symbols might bring about refreshment to a person, a stupid example but because I'm working in concepts, that's what religion does, it works in concepts, so it takes these abstract concepts and tries to bring them to life and make them real for you.

But we're not judged on whether our concepts are real or true because that's not how you, you don't measure a concept like that, it's like you can't, I would say you can't look at a poem and decide how true, whether it's true or not, it's the poem, like it's not in the business of truth and falsehood, it's in the business of connection, potency, perspective, authentic reflection of author, that's its work, its work is not either true or false based on some sort of measure of historical fact or ultimate reality, it's like you can't measure a thing like that, there's no yardstick to measure that, unless then you create the yardstick, say the Bible is the yardstick but then you've got all sorts of historical and contextual …

Int: There's so many ways you can split the hair or measure it.

R: Yes, so I think and that's maybe the post-modern endeavour, just to go oh, we've all got a perspective and that perspective is informed by who we are and our historical scenario but we can't be measured on that, you can't go "Fran, I really wish you would just look at the world from the experience of an English man who's 34 and has had all

the exact experiences that I've had in my life, including being brought up by my father and I'd love it if you could just see the world, having been brought up by my father".

Int: Yes, exactly, this is the only way that you should see it …

R: It's kind of funny and then when you get out of that mode of thinking, it like becomes comical to look at someone who's in that mode of thinking because you're like, "Hey, come on" …

Int: And that's how you engage with it then, you realise how people almost become dogmatic of their own influences and that's just kind of like, that's where you find substance in those conversations sometimes?

R: Yeah, what do you mean by dogmatic?

Int: Or there's that kind of imposing of ideas …?

R: Yes, I've got these ideas because of my history and that's why, when people ask me if I'm religious, I'll say "religion's in my blood", that's my phrase at the moment and I'll always say, "My grandfather's a pastor, he's a vicar, he helped out at the Samaritans in the 1950s, he had four children, two of them became pastors, one of them had a son who became a pastor" and there's my mum and she gave birth to me, so I'll always be like "so it's in my blood."

So religion's in my bloody, it's not like "do you believe it?", I'm just like, it's not even worth it, it doesn't feel like a worthwhile conversation, do you believe to not because I could say, "what do you mean by believe?", "what does that entail?", am I attached to, like I definitely don't believe that the things written down in an old book are somehow … historically perfect in a way that nothing else is that's ever been written down, I just don't think there's some sort of magical nature of this work, it's not that I don't think that the different councils that look to deciding what was on and what was out, had this sort of magical influence over the whole of history and the universe.

Int: When people say the believer, there's almost an assumption behind what that means.

R: Yes, and what they mean is, often depending on their perspective, they either mean "are you with me?", so "are you tribally with me?", right and "in my blood" gets me out of that because I'm like "I'm tribally with you" and then there's the other thing that they sometimes mean is "are you stupid?" or "are you naïve?".

Int: That's a thing when people ask "are you religious?", the assumption of being religious has that …?

R: Yes, although I've definitely gone on an interesting journey where, through my 20s, I spent time telling everyone that I wasn't religious but I did have a faith and now I'll just tell everyone that I'm religious and I won't really talk about faith because I'm not sure what the means anymore.

Int: You've used the term, "seeker", like you said you're comfortable being a seeker, would you use that term?

R: I can't remember what context I used it in, I did say it but I think I'm curious and I'm curious in lots of directions and I'm really excited about where my spiritual journey might go and what I might discover and what I might unlock and …

Int: But not as a label necessarily …?

R: But the thing that I would reject about that label is I would say that in the label is the idea that one day I will find, it's almost like I see my spiritual vocation as an explorer and as a prober and as a reflector, so I don't see spiritual life as a destination but as a process. And then I think it will change over time, at the moment, I'm in a really interesting phase actually where I was just crying in the mirror this morning, singing, there's a song called, which used to be a song, my mobile phone could first play a song

as a ring tune, for about a year I had, do you know S…. Stevens, Come Thou Fountain of Every Blessing, his version of that from the Kissmas albums, do you know it?

Int: Yes, I do know it, that always plays at Christmas, that whole boxset.

R: But that "come though fount of every blessing", was a song that woke me up every single day for a year and a half, two years, right, at a time when my spiritual life and my Christian faith was challenging and on one level it was falling apart and my solid ideas of what faith was were falling apart and on another level, was a time when I was deeply attached to church life in Reading, where I lived and was part of the church, I was deeply embedded in home groups and going to church every week, so it was a really powerful time in my life and then I listened to it this morning while I did some yoga …

Int: Once in a while, first time in a really long time?

R: First time in a long time that I listened to and the words are really beautiful because they're about [sings] anyway, it's got these beautiful lines which is like "I'm praying to wonder, Lord I want you", da da da and ""I'm prone to leave the Lord I love", it's basically asking, it's a prayer of asking God to bind you to the thankfulness that you know, it says "May your peace come like a fetter", so it's like binding and I just found it, this morning I was just like … "Yeah, yeah, I kinda want this" and I can feel myself in a way, in the last month, I can feel myself really waking up to my Christian tradition again and it's partly connecting back, I see it as part of a journey of connecting with my family because we're the first generation where religion is choice that you make in your head about what you think, it's always been part of your tribal identity, that you're given by your parents, like we're really attached to this idea that I'll make my own decision, as if that's something that's at all a good thing to aspire to, to be making your own decision apart from your family, like what have we become that our ideal is to go "oh, I'm 12, I'm going to detach myself to the spiritual traditions of my family and find one that suits

me", it's like so individual and I just can't, so my … like my life on lots of measures is curving back around to reconnect with my family, curving back around to reconnect with my past, curving back around to reconnect with my childhood and that's like my emotional, spiritual growth is all coming from that, it's coming from, I've just been on the phone to my cousin, I never phone my cousins ever, why would you phone your cousin? They're just over there, when I was a kid I used to play with them, that's what I'm trying to do now.

I think the spiritual life is part of that, again not seeing Christian tradition as a set of ideas that I either agree with or disagree with but as a kind of family line, it's like how I see it.

Int: You don't have those sharp corners or sharp edges with Christianity because it's part of just family and culture and background …?

R: Yes, and childhood and like ten years of deeply, deeply fanatical evangelicalism and that is me as well, it's not like I've left that behind, it's like yeah I'm a bit like that, I can get a bit fanatical about stuff.

Int: How comfortable are you with saying you're a Christian?

R: I try to say it's in my blood, that's my side-step.

Int: That's the most that you say …

R: It's not the most but I would just prefer to say it because it feels the most true and I think … but I had a, about four months ago I had a dating profile and I was like "Religion: I'm a Christian", it never crossed my mind to put spiritual and not religious or anything like that but then I'm also conscious that that has a bunch of baggage that I don't live in but then again , actually I think so much of that baggage is often what you bring to how you lay that on for someone because in the past, I know that that was a lot of baggage for people and I had people respond to it really badly but none of the people

I've met recently, I've gone "this is me, this is where I'm from and this is what my family are like, this is who my grandfather is", people don't tend to go, "Oh you're so naïve", when you say that because it's a different story, it's a story about who you are, not a pronouncement about who they should be or what someone in abstract should think and I think like that idea of religion as a set of ideas that you need to persuade someone of, for me feels like stupid and I just don't find value in it and I don't think that people respond well to it.

I've got a friend who's advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury on evangelism and he talks about evangelism as bearing witness to Jesus Christ, as opposed to persuading people to believe and I think that distinction is a really powerful distinction which says, "We are called to bear witness to the experience of Christ in our lives", not "we are called for people to become Christians", do you see what I mean?

I don't think I'm quite ready to be the, again I'm not sure I'm bearing witness to Christ in my life, I think I'm bearing witness to my religious tradition that's in my family, which is again a slightly less active engagement with Christian ideas.

Int: Say for example the dating profile, you've always had "Christian" on there …?

R: I've had times when I've had nothing but I would never put like, I did have a time when I said "Christian but I'm not too serious about it", but I found it a funny thing to write because I was like "Oh my goodness, I think I've gone the other way, I think I've got so serious about it, I think it's so serious that I think it's funny", rather than I don't think it's very serious. Even that whole grading, I'm either serious about my Christianity and that looks like I'm very strict and very dogmatic, serious, or I'm not serious which means I don't think that Christianity is very important, so it's like our idea of what seriousness of religion means feels to me really off.

Int: So it's just better to not put the sub-heading in there?

R: I'm not doing any internet dating anymore but yes, I think it's a good icon of how I would talk about it with a person that I'd met. But people like, "Are you religious?", if I'm just meeting someone, I'll be like "oh yeah, well religion's in my family", that's what I always say, I always say it's in my blood and then they go "are you religious?" and I always be like, I always have a bit of a think of it and I'll be like "yeah", I'll say it like that, I'll say "yeah" as if I've never thought about it. "Yeah, I guess I am" and they'll be like "oh", and then they'll normally go like "oh okay, oh I didn't have you down as a thing" and I'm like "well, yeah, I guess I am", like that.

Int: And then that brings up a completely different kind of conversation.

R: Because so much of the problem with religious labels is tonal, it's about what do you mean when you say those words? Again, this is why I always bring him up because he's a very clever man, Chris Russell always used to say, people would say "I don't believe in God" and he'd be like "tell me the God you don't believe in because I probably don't believe in him either" and I think I've maybe gone a bit further than that because I don't .. yeah, but I think it's a similar idea where I'm a bit like, I'm more interested in challenging what people mean when they say the simple religious words, than I am about deciding whether those, which of the simple religious words to use to describe myself because I feel like I could describe my spirituality in lots of different ways and they're all fine ways to describe it, I could say "I'm a Christian", I could say "I'm a committed Christian", I could say "I'm agnostic", another word I say is I've got quite an open perspective, so I'd say "I'm a Christian with a very open perspective", sometimes I would say "you know the Quakers?" and they go "oh yeah, the Quakers, yeah, they're cool, the oats and the [inaudible 00:31:10] of slaves and stuff" and I'm like "I kind of identify more with their spiritual practices", so I've got all these different semiotic associations or words I can use which for me, I don't have to decide which one

to use because it's all contextual, it depends who the person is and what they're after and what I want to say to them, so it's more like there's no true words that describe my spiritual existence or practice, there's just a bunch of different ways I can explain some things that you can't really explain.

Int: So there's a level of fluidity, depending on who you're trying to …?

R: That's it, whoever I'm talking to, what's my intention at the time, like am I trying to get off the subject or go deeper into it? All of those will affect what I'll say to someone when someone says, "Are you ..?", it's like if someone says "Are you ..?", I don't know , "are you serious?", it's like well I'm serious sometimes, I'm not serious other times, depends what you mean by serious, it depends what context you ask me in, like if I'm making a promise then I'll probably say I am serious, if I'm on a first date and you're trying to flirt with me then maybe I'll not say I'm serious because it's kind of … so it's like all these things are languages, just a game that we're playing, with different people at different times for different objectives, so the idea of trying to track spiritual existence in some words just feels a bit funny to me, it just feels a bit like "okay, we can use those words", so someone will be like, "so you're a committed Christian then?", "yeah sure", someone else will be like "so you're not really that religious are you?" and I'll be like "well, yeah, sure, you can say that" …

Int: But you're also not shy of it ...?

R: I just feel very, and this is why I think, it's funny because I think what people get, when you're rigid about how you want to describe it, it's as if you're not giving any credit to this other person to have a bunch of concepts that they might attach to the words you say, so if I describe it to you, you've got a bunch of concepts already for what that means and if in your conception of what religious means, I am religious or I am not religious,

it's more interesting that you label me than how I label myself. Like "are you easy-going?", "well no, I'm quite uptight actually" …

Int: It's a lot of language you're saying …?

R: Yes, and I actually have come to think of religion and theology , so differences of religion and differences of theology, I've come to see them more as differences in linguistic patterns and linguistic habits that we have, so when I say "I'm praying for you", what I really mean is I see you're going through something difficult and I care about you and "I'm praying for you" is a really nice linguistic pattern that means I care about you and there's loads of those linguistic patterns and I think in religion, so I've come to see religion as a kind of set of linguistics patterns that a group might share, that allows them to communicate really basic things like "I love you", "I want good for you", "I believe there's more than the difficult things you're going through", like "I think we can trust that the situation we currently find ourselves in isn't the only situation there is", I think we can trust that when we go through difficult times, we're there for each other, I can trust that if I turn up next week, you'll be there, I can trust that I don't need to prove myself to you.

So all those patterns, whether I say, "praying for you" or "we're all good Christians here", whatever it is that I say is really just a way of saying, "hey this group, we're good, I support people in this group and I don't judge you and I care for you" but again what I don't want to say is that, but I'm not putting an atheistic frame on that and saying, "therefore what's really going on is there's no God and what's really going on is these people are just manipulating each other with phrases", it's like "No, I don't think that's true either", or I just think that's not mine to declare because I'd also say that the atheistic frameworks and language is also just a set of language that they use and the thing that I'm really concerned with is how, go 100 years ago and everyone's going to

church but you've basically got some fanatical religious people and some people who go along to church because they're friends are going to church and they sing songs and say things because their friends are doing them and they're much more concerned with connection to the group, than they are with connection to the abstract ideas and I sort of feel sad now that for so long, Christianity is paraded like "the real Christians are the ones we want in the church and those like hangers on, actually we're kind of good to be rid of them" and I'm a bit like that's the saddest thing in the world because those hangers on are most people.

Most people are not abstract thinkers, they're people that like to be around people and love to be in groups and want to be connected and I feel the saddest for that group because now they've got nowhere to go because they've kind of been almost forced out by ideological extremism and they've now been told that they're not really religious if they don't believe these certain weird abstract things or aren't really into reading a book on their own at home. It's like some people just don't like reading that much. Maybe a bit boring.

Some of us like reading and some people don't, some of us love intellectualising and frameworks and all that, some people just don't, they just like hanging out and I feel like religion used to be a really good home for people that like hanging out and now it's not, or it still is a bit but …

Int: There's still that activeness in terms of that ideological awareness.

R: Yes, like now, with the way that culture is now, it's much harder for people who are just drifters, like ideological drifters just go where the flow goes, the flow doesn't let them really go to religion because they'll get really robustly challenged for being, because of like "right, son" all of those kind of things. So I think that's sort of like how I kind of see my faith.

Int: There's an aspect of it, this activeness in faith or spirituality or whatever you want to call it is there though, because there's people who are just not active …

R: I've not read the Bible for about three years probably.

Int: But these are things you think about on a regular basis? You would say that religion or spirituality …

R: Is alive, yes, I was crying on my own this morning.

Int: So that's like a basic assumption you would almost ..?

R: About my own life, yes. I think what it goes is it goes in waves, so there's definitely waves where I'm not super concerned with spiritual practice or I haven't been but I find it quite hard at the moment to know where to put my spiritual energy because I feel like a lot of the people, so one of the things I'm really into at the moment is the idea of the physiological experiences you could have in Pentecostal worship, I'm really into it and I really want to go back to deeply spirit-filled gospel setting and I want to go back not as a critical observer but as a kind of participant.

Int: And almost feel all those things?

R: Yes, but to detach myself from whether or not I think … but the thing that's hard for me about that is first of all finding someone who's up for that little journey because you've either got people who have never had that sort of experience, so they'd be going as a voyeur, they might not be critical but they'd be like "oh what's that?" but they wouldn't necessarily have the …

Int: It's too new.

R: Yes, it would be hard to get involved, so there's that kind of person and then there's the other person who's just been really burned by those experiences and they don't want to go, so I haven't yet found someone who wants to go into the fray of like a

hill song worship session and just wave their hands and sing and speak in tongues and do all those things which I do that a lot actually, I speak in tongues on my own.

Int: That's something from your upbringing too or …?

R: Part of my journey, yes, like 19 to 24, was my Pentecostal …

Int: But it's a deeply ingrained part of your , after spiritual life, if we're active in a certain way?

R: Yes, I think so. But it's hard to find people who are up for those sort of, because it's kind of dark in a way to want to do it because I don't want to, I sort of want to do it and then I think I'll have all sorts of mixed emotions about the emotional manipulation of those leaders and whether or not those practices are helping people in meaningful ways, how they're being used, the stories that are told around them, the alienation of people from these experiences without manipulative theological layers, like I almost want a kind of, I mean yes, but then I guess the other way is you go to festivals and you've got people who've got these dissociative experiences in a different context but then often they're loaded with sexual dimensions or drug dimensions or others, so there's no way of presenting these kind of things that's entirely free of context …

Int: The dark side

R: … or something that's kind of framing for people, "this is what's happening" …

Int: But there's a give and take in all of them but then you also see their good side of that and so you also want to experience it fully …

R: But you can't do it on your own, you can do it to some degree. About three weeks ago, I've got an Aikido class I go to and I was going and then I was wandering, talking and I sort of have a confusing thing of am I talking to myself, am I praying, I don't know any more but I'll quite often talk out loud, I guess I'm kind of praying but then I'm not necessarily thinking of a receptacle for those prayers in a very clear way, I'm

not like “this is me praying to Jesus through the Holy Spirit, by the power of God”, I wouldn't think in those terms, I’d just go, I'm speaking out my intentions and my hopes and I think I know that there’s something about, so again in yogic, it’s like requesting the universe but I don’t like that either because that feels, it doesn't feel free from loaded context, “like the universe, really, the universe is doing ..?”, but ultimate reality, God, Father, I’ve been attaching myself to the phrase “almighty” at the moment, that feels like a really nice phrase for me, it doesn't feel too contaminated with other ideas, “the almighty” is non-gendered as well which is quite nice in a kind of, with new ideas of gender, like putting Father God on everything and He thinks that, but I think the almighty feels a bit more personal than the universe.

But I was walking along, sort of praying on my own, I had one of the most, like a real ecstatic spiritual experience, like a deeply, like a kind of, just like walking on my own and then I decided not to go to my Aikido class and I just wandered around and …

Int: Enjoying that …

R: Yes, just basking in a kind of not trance but kind of almost, like those moments …

Int: It’s a transient space …

R: Yes, kind of like that and … yes, but then those spaces feel available to me in different theological contexts, so that feels available to me at the zen yoga retreat but it doesn't feel available to me like because of zen yoga and zen yoga’s done this for me because that’s what loads of people get really attached to in those traditions and this is why I feel like it’s funny that everyone’s so critical of Christian traditions but then there’s all these other traditions that are also trapping people in dogmatic frameworks or practice frameworks, so the zen guy’s all about, “the best thing about zen is that there’s no dogma”, it’s like there’s fucking loads of dogma!

Int: What you just said right there …!

R: The dogma is we need to do sitting practice that has got a certain structure to it, the dogma is where anything that's concept is bad, really, that only things that happen in the present moment are good, it's like what about plans? Plans are good!

If you go to Thailand, all the Buddhists are like so stuck in accepting reality the way it is, which is a very Buddhist idea of "this is what it is and our task is to ensure what we have" and blah blah blah, which is a very passive ideology really, it's an ideology of acceptance and I think there's something in the Christian tradition which is really beautiful which says pushing on despite, whatever's behind, I leave it behind and I move forward for the goal and I think that momentum idea is a really, that's a big thing for me.

Int: There's an assertive side to it too …

R: Yes, there's a yang to the ying. We're allowed to go, "I desire this and I don't have it yet", "I want this for the world, not just for myself", "I want these people's lives to be transformed in this way", like you can make that sort of declaration.

Int: But you can also probably bridge that so if you were talking to somebody that was Christian, that was looking for something that was Buddhisty in the Christian tradition, there is like a …

R: There's space for it, yes, so I don't know and I think just so often, again I'll come back and circle around personality types and going, people are different and have different interests, some people really like abstract ideas, some people really like connecting with people, some people really like the rules and the idea that there's an established order to things, those are all really valid things to value and so often, when people are trying to guide someone else's religious practice, what they're trying to say is, "Hey, you know how people should be like is a bit like me", it's like the zen guy, lovely

guy, really lovely gentle, passive guy, it's like so of course he likes zen Buddhism but then Buddhism goes, "Do you know what the best thing to be? The best thing to be is a really passive guy", it affirms his natural tendencies and it doesn't challenge, well it does challenge, I'm sure it's deeply challenging for him but it's a practice that he can find his home within whereas if he's only been exposed to extreme driving forms of Christianity that are about persuasion and control, it's like no wonder someone who sees much more value in care than in progress, why would he be drawn to that?

Int: One thing that I'm interested in is you wanting to go to the bodily experience of a [inaudible 00:48:54] but you wouldn't go on your own?

R: I just like being with people and I don't like the idea of having to, I think the thing that I don't like the idea of is having all those lovely, kind warm people come up to me and go, "Are you going to come back to our church?" and me having to look them in the eye and say "No, I'm just here to harvest the physiological experience that's created by your energy as a group".

Int: But if you go with another person, it's almost easier because you can just …?

R: I don't know , I think I can just say look, you see I can go on my own and be like "I'm just visiting but I'm a Christian …", but I then have to have a narrative, that I have to tell the people that I'm there for and I'm a bit worried that that narrative might separate me from the experience, so like having to construct a narrative that says, "This is why I'm here", "This is what I'm doing", even if that's just like I construct something that's nice and soft, it doesn't …

Int: But would it change the experience, if you went with somebody else, you don't think as many people would come up to you?

R: I think I'd just have a bit more moral support and so I wouldn't have to formulate this, it feels a bit manipulative for me on my own to be like, "I like the idea of doing

this", whereas I think if it was someone else who's like "you know what, I've got a genuine interest in that?", and then I feel like we might be able to turn it into something a bit more than just that and then we might be able to really honestly look someone in the eyes and go …

Int: You have like a mini group dynamic?

R: Yes, we might be able to look someone in the eyes and go, "We used to be more into Christian traditions and we used to be more into our faith", or "we used to be more into these kinds of churches and we're just coming again to taste what that was like, we used to be part of churches like this all the time" and that could be more honest and then someone could look at us and go, "come back on Tuesday" and we'd be like "we're just visiting but maybe we'll visit again."

Int: I see what you mean, so you're just looking someone to do it with.

R: I've not processed these ideas very deeply so I'm just talking out loud, it's like all this stuff I've thought about, so I think I've just never sat down and gone, "What do I really want from this?", "Why would I want to go?", I don't have this clear idea, I talked to one of my friends and he said "I have not processed all my Christian guilt", okay, fair enough.

Int: Positive qualities about Borough Common?

R: Now or through the history?

Int: Now or through the history.

R: Lack of spiritual coercion, nice people who are kind of interesting people, people with alternative minds, we're a cohort of liberally minded people with ethical dimensions, just people that I really loved.

Int: Positive experiences?

R: Doing the homeless project, doing the old people's tea party, having done that for six years, being deeply connected to that project, having seen isolated older people every six months for the last six years, having seen the same isolated older people and knowing that their eyes light up when they see us, that they really enjoy our things and that we bring an energy that they don't have available to them very easily because most of the volunteers are women, older and the Borough Common is younger, kind of big mix of genders and with a different kind of energy and knowing there's a lot of those old people love that energy and don't get to experience it much.

Int: What was the first project?

R: The homeless one, Robes [sounds like]. So I think those are the clearest ones and then loads of little ones, more other ones in the past but I love the services, John and Lisa's leaving [inaudible 00:53:54] did you go to it?

Int: I missed it, I really wanted to go.

R: It was so good and it was the best of the Borough Common because it was like weird. We sang Atlantic City by Bruce Springsteen, "because there within dies, baby that's a fact" … [sings] … and we just sung the chorus five times, we wrote it up and John Bigger was playing his, it was beautiful because what I loved about it was we really embraced the sadness of them going, it was a beautiful ritual in the poor sense, it wasn't like "your lives are going to good!", it was like "we don't like it that you're going and it's good and we accept it but we don't like it and you don't like it that you're going and you also are deeply inspired by the possibilities", so I felt it did a really good job of being a proper ritual because I think it's possible, when you extract, I think 2000 year old religions tend to be really good at rituals and most contemporary rituals tend to be really shallow and so that was a ritual that had seven years of depth in it and it felt really good.

Int: There was meaning and there was all kinds of emotions …?

R: All the emotions, yes.

Int: Not the kind of emotion that you're supposed to feel …

R: All the emotions all together and it was weird as well which I think is important and symbolic and there was an object and there was candles and we cut the candles with knives to symbolise their marks that they left on us, it was beautiful. That's a great example …

Int: And that's fairly recent?

R: That's really recent, yes, so that's the Borough Common at its best, it's one of my favourite services of all time. But also I like the last one we did which was, what did we do? So I led one on something … resilience and strength, what does it mean to be strong? It was, again I really enjoyed it.

Int: That was one of the ones here too?

R: Yes, it was like a month ago, the one before Jenny. So again that's why I think the Borough Common's interesting because it's still a good place, it's just a bit smaller and I don't think it quite is clear on its role at the moment and I think there's a lot of people who are worried, again like Borough Common has had a deeply wounding experience two years ago, that it's not really dealt with, most people haven't dealt with and a lot of people who have left probably would have a really nourishing experience by coming along every month to have coffee with people that they love and simple rituals that don't manipulate them, but it's really difficult once you've had a wounding experience, to reconnect.

Int: Would you mind, what that was?

R: You must know, inclusion, exclusion and …?

Int: It was the France trip?

R: Yes. All of that but not really the France trip, more like the feeling …

Int: That triggered it though?

R: Yes, have you read, there's a really wonderful essay that if you want to understand the Borough Common, that whole thing, read The Tyranny of Structurelessness, it's a feminist writer from the 70s who's writing about how it just really simply, is how the early women's movement was mainly therapeutic in role and it was just like "let's talk about the experiences we've had as women" and it was structureless and that was really valuable for a therapeutic intervention but then once the group had any political aims, the structurelessness became a kind of breeding ground for, the premise of the essay is if you don't have a structure for power when you have an organisation that's attempting to wield power, that's not just a therapeutic group, that you cannot have anything other than elites forming, where elites are small relational groups who control more of the agenda than anyone lets on, people don't know how to access those groups because essentially they're closed relational groups and those relational groups control the agenda for the wider group and the wider group don't know what to do about it and therefore feel alienated and lost and difficult, it's an exact replication of what happened in [inaudible 00:59:19].

Int: And you think there's a lot of that, that has been really difficult to heal that?

R: I think there's also a bunch of people who, I think any work to heal broken things requires the kind of amount of encourage that is quite hard to muster and I think a lot of people have got, I think you can muster it but people tend to only muster it for families, where the level of commitment is so great that you almost can't help but address those deep wounding experiences but you don't spend your life taking every wounding experience and clawing over it, mostly, because mostly the thing isn't worth it, you have a difficult relationship for a couple of months or even a couple of years and what tends to happen is you don't spend your whole life going back and trying to heal all those

difficult romantic relationships that break up, do you? Because some of them find their home over time with some sort of acceptance but you don't need to because the whole point of those ruptures is that those ruptures, they teach you something that maybe says "this isn't a good connection to have" and I think that's probably what a bunch of people's experience of the Borough Common is.

Int: So there was this trauma within, they didn't necessarily have to, they just …?

R: They don't need to, why would you go and be part of a group on a Sunday every week or every month, that have wounded you?

Int: Like you felt they were your friends …

R: And then something happened and in both ways and for both sides of that story, I think that's the thing that no-one left out of that, no-one left that experience a victor because basically there was a bunch of people who were accused by people that they loved, of being manipulative, secretive and coercive and there was a bunch of people who felt manipulated, coerced and excluded and then they experienced the deep trauma of saying to people, finally getting the bravery to say "You've excluded me" and then have those people go, "No I didn't, that's not true" and then you go "hang on, that's not great", doesn't do a great job for acknowledging all those deep buried feelings of pain and the genuine hurt but also like it's quite painful to be told, for a voluntary group, that you've put as much of your heart into for so long, to then be told "really, you're a nasty manipulator", it's like "is that why I fucking work every Friday night to sort out your accounts?".

Int: Victor was part of it?

R: Not Victor, I said there's no victor. But then also there's a bunch of people who, again weren't deeply affected either way by it so a bunch of people who were just hovering around the edge thinking "some people are having difficult conversations, I

wonder what they are, okay, fine", and then a bunch of other people going, "this doesn't feel like a big deal to me".

Int: Was there something formal?

R: Yes, there were all sorts of things we tried to do with it but it's hard when you're an informal group, to do a formal intervention".

Int: You didn't have like a Sunday when you just talked about it?

R: We had a series on the community, we had special things that everyone was invited to, everyone was encouraged to talk to each other and meet up and talk, there was loads of really good work that went on and some people managed to process through that but a lot of people just went, "Well I'm so hurt, I'm not even going to turn up because I don't feel safe".

Int: Or "I just don't need to" …

R: And then if someone doesn't turn up but they've said something really painful to you, then you've not processed that and you've not had a chance to meet them and then you've got that resentment and then you've got … so I just think a lot of people, and then what's actually happened probably over time is that most of it's just subsided and settled and a bunch of people quite fancied leaving the Borough Common anyway.

Int: Or they were just in a different place in their life already now.

R: They just fancied leaving and it gave them a really nice excuse to leave and it's just a shame that it happened with a bit of trauma. But groups are like that, they're fucked up and also because when you don't have – and the other challenge of the group is because it didn't have any mechanism for, so one of my experiences through that process was of being, even through that process, of being sort of directly accused of trying to take control and be the leader and you're like, everything's fallen to shit and I think maybe somebody needs to step in and go, "okay guys, let's talk about this", not

like “I have this view and I'm going to manipulate all of you to say what I think” but you can’t have an unheld space, that’s why you don’t have …

Int: But who’s going to step up to try to be neutral or try to heal …?

R: Yes and it’s difficult because there’s no-one who wasn’t on different sides and blah blah blah, anyway but I …

Int: Or to value the group in itself.

R: Yes, so this taught me a lot about … what was needed for a group to be held, not to be necessarily controlled but to be held and the work of holding a group and I don’t, like at the moment I can’t imagine a scenario where you don’t have a group that’s held by a person or a small group of people and I think it’s like you can’t have a family without, it’s like Lord of the Flies, in the end we’re mammals …

Int: You can’t just assume that the group is there all the time.

R: Yes, we’re also mammals and I think we gather around people and we gather around, whatever that is, I think that’s how groups are, groups aren’t seven individuals that happen to be together, groups gather around people and I think that’s the Tyranny of Structurelessness as a concept, it’s a really short essay, it’s really good and it’s interesting because it’s about the women’s movement and all of that. What are your other questions?

Int: So negative qualities, negative experiences, that’s part of it …?

R: I think the other negative experience that isn't describing what we’ve talked about already is boredom and lethargy, it’s really boring to be part of a group where people are moaning or where people aren’t putting energy into the group …

Int: Actively engage in it …

R: Yes, but not just engage, there’s something about energy deficits, so some people love to bring, some people bring a lot of positive energy and some people don’t and I

think you bring positive energy, I think there's different types of positive energy, so there's like continuity is a real type of energy, so if you look at the energy that [name] brought to the Borough Common over the years, it's continuity and presence, he's always there, that's really important energy.

Int: Up until they left, he was going …?

R: Broadly and it was a bit of time when he was going less but there's also the energy that says things are possible, there's positive futures we can imagine and some people have those orientations naturally and some people don't and I think when we stopped being weekly, so we had mega planning or ultimate planning, whatever we called it and then everyone was like "Yeah, I really want to be part of this and make it happen", then actually a lot of the people who said that didn't have the energy to hold that together so the energy that they brought was overly controlling or just a bit , people were a bit boring. It was [inaudible 01:08:41] to be part of, it didn't feel like a vision or feel like a sense of possibility, it felt a bit like "I should probably go otherwise those people will be sad".

Int: The obligation side of it?

R: Yes and I think it takes, I think the job of a leader is to hold all of those ambiguous feelings and all of the criticisms that you're going to get for doing something and all of the fears that people are going to put onto you and all of that and still stand and go, "Here we are", and that I don't think a lot of people … and especially people who complain about leaders, I think a lot of those people haven't had to feel the burn of standing in the gap and actually going, "You would prefer to do it a different way would you? Great, why don't you lead?", "You fucking generate seven years of [inaudible 01:09:47]", do you know what I mean, "Why don't you give every single … why don't you meticulously plan how you're going to phrase an invitation to generate the most

interest? Why don't you ..?", so I think there's a little bit of me that now is a bit like … and I was quite insecure and very insecure about my role and was I being manipulative and was I being controlling and was I being all of that, I don't give a shit now, I don't care.

I think if anything I learned through that process is that the group didn't need less people who were guiding things, do you know what I mean? Because what happened is through that process, those people left and then the Borough Common deflated because the people who didn't step into those roles when they became available, but also I think you can't, anyway …

Int: I know what you mean, it revealed the sense of ownership or importance of the group to them and again like you're saying there's almost a complaining but there's no trying to .. it's almost complaining for the sake of complaining, nothing trying to restructure it, no solutions being offered necessarily.

R: Yes.

Int: It's not constructive in that way.

R: So the last three minutes, I want to slightly back away from because especially in the context that you're writing a thing where even if you don't name the Borough Common, people know the Borough Common, so I want to be a bit more careful than I have been in the last five minutes about what gets said about that because I don't want … a person who was the person that I'm like "she said that, what a bitch", I don't really want your PhD to be a home for that conversation.

Int: No.

R: Just be careful about the downsides or the negative sides of leadership in the Borough Common, if you can be careful with that side, I'd appreciate that but I trust you to do that.

Int: Okay, sure.

R: But yes, I think what's easy to say and what I can say openly and clearly without some of the slight hurt feelings that are probably still going on within me, is that my evolution of ideas is that a group like the Borough Common needs to be led, but the leadership needed is fundamentally different to a classic hierarchical leadership and I think the leadership that religious traditions need now, with how people's minds are wired, how psychology has evolved, how identity and self-identity and self-expression has evolved, what type of leadership's needed is a different kind of leadership and I don't really believe it's an ideas leadership because I think people have got their own ideas and I don't really feel like the realm of idea transfer is the fundamentals of religion and I think the idea of religion as ideas transfer, is a deeply impoverished view of religion and it's the impoverished view of religion that society's rejected.

Int: Yes, exactly or that's what people are looking at when they're using the words "religion".

R: Exactly, whereas actually if you think of religion as a set of practices that can deepen your spiritual life, a set of rhythms, rituals, linguistic patterns that can give you a lot, then the leader for that is a really different shape than the leader for let me tell you some ideas that I've thought that are clever, that are much cleverer than you because I'm a professional and I've studied the Bible.

Int: Almost similar to that detachment that you're saying people exploring other practices, for example? It's like of course there's still dogma but it doesn't have the slogans of "do you believe that?".

R: Yes exactly, so I would almost go we don't have to hide from practices that have beliefs baked into them, we don't need to hide from the crucifixion didn't really exist

because whether it did or not, I'm just thinking we don't have to worry about that within a practice.

I did a Borough Common a couple of years ago now and it was about, we would always get a bit trapped in this I think where we would end up just talking in the abstract about really vague things because I did one which was a meditation on Jesus being alive in your heart and I was like okay right, so what I want us to do for the next hour is not to try and decide whether Jesus is alive in our heart or not, I just want us all to accept that he 100% definitely is and then let's live with that as an idea for an hour and then at the end of this hour, let's all decide in our minds whether we want to carry that on as an idea or not and we're completely able to not but I don't want to spend this hour examining whether we should or shouldn't have Jesus in our hearts, I want us to have Jesus in our hearts for this hour and have him alive living in your heart and then I want us to, you can then after the practice has finished, you are an individual and this practice isn't going to infringe on your ability to decide again, that you don't think Jesus is living in your heart because that's not really how you conceptualise what God is and you see God more out there or over there or wherever, it's like "this is just a metaphor that we could live in for an hour and it's probably not going to do you any damage", your heart will remain intact.

That for me is about a more playful understanding of what an idea is, which is not something that you measure like a poem, it's like a poem, a poem is an idea, it's not true or false, we can have a poem and then we can read another poem that says the opposite and we don't have to decide which is the real poem because this one says that life is beautiful and this one says that they fuck you up, your mum and dad, they don't mean to but they do. But they do, they do fuck you up actually your mum and dad and we don't have to decide that Larkin's evil because he thought that, there's that version of the

Larkin poem that's the opposite, they tuck you up, your mum and dad, have you read that?

Int: No, I haven't.

R: Do you know the Larkin …?

Int: Yes, I do.

R: So there's one called, "They tuck you up, your mum and dad" and it's about celebrating mums and dads and how they tuck you up in bed and how kind they are to you and therefore you should have kids. It's a cute poem but what I don't like about it is it pretends that you need to create an opposite force to Larkin's poem, rather than going, you can have a really fucking dark poem and then you can have another poem that's light but it doesn't need to disprove the dark poem …

Int: It can just be what it is.

R: There's a dark poem and there's a light poem and humanity is a bit like that and a bit like that, like our parents are a bit like that and they're a bit like that, but you don't have to … I'm all about the "and" not the "or". But is God real or is God fake? Maybe God is real and fake.

Int: Depending how you talk about it …

R: What do you mean by reality, what do you mean by fakeness? What do you mean by God? How are you feeling right now? For me that's a more interesting conceptual world when we go, "maybe", "I don't know."

Int: It's going back to this initial part of this conversation too …

R: What's my job? My job is a person, that's my only job, I don't have to be an almighty visionary, I'm just a person and a person just lives in a house and has like two feet and walks around and talks to people and gets influenced by them. There's a beautiful study that was done on religious, it's like some Americans, it's like all good

studies but it was some Americans about religion and it was talking about borderline issues like abortion in the case of rape, stuff like that, ethically complex things where people tend not to come down 100% of this or 0% that, they tend to come down to 70% this and 30% that, or should you go to war in the event of a nuclear attack on an ally? Those kind of really complex situations that there's not an easy, "The Bible says", so maybe not even abortion right? But the mother's about to die, the baby's dead anyway, can you cut the head off? It's a bad example.

So they took those examples and they said, "What do you think?" and then people wrote down what they think and then they go, "What does God think?" and then they gave them an essay and the essay was a persuasive essay, one way or the other, then they read the essay and they said, "What do you think? What does God think?", and it turns out God changes his mind as well! What do you know? Because God, when you read the essay, God changed his mind because people aligned themselves with what they thought God said and that's like a great example of how we actually engage with religious ideas which is, all we're doing is giving it our best guess, any religious statement about anything is just like where I am right now with all my baggage and my experience is my best guess for what I think might be some spiritual realities. Or these spiritual realities feel consistent to me right now, that's what we're actually saying whenever say God is love or anything, whenever we say anything that's about trans- when we say global warming is a real problem, all we're saying is how I feel at the moment and the arguments that I've been recently exposed to, have prioritised things in my mind in a way that makes me feel like these are the bigger priorities and these are the smaller priorities, or whether I think Trump or Hilary or whatever, if I think that Hilary is out to get the core of American values, is determined that everyone in the world has abortions and actually I go, I just don't feel comfortable with that because I think of

the dignity of human life and what we can create together is amazing, like then I might vote for Donald Trump because that's a value that's valid, like I'm allowed to have that as a feeling.

So I don't think we ever have and religion is very interesting in declarations but I think the declarations are never actually what's happening, what's happening is people going, "I feel right now these things based on the things that I've read."

Int: And it can change … was this an experiment?

R: It was a psychological study.

Int: Do you remember what it was called?

R: No, it was a really great study, if you find it, send it to me and if I find it, I'll send it to you. There will definitely a journal article, literally getting people in a lab, giving them an argument, it's like I think they measured, they gave them a situation, measured their responses, gave them an argument, measured their responses.

Int: It was all about what does God think?

R: Ambiguous, it was God, it was like God changes His mind basically. That's the idea.

Int: I think you've almost answered this, how do you feel you fit in it? Is it important? How do you feel that you don't fit in?

R: I think it's hard now because a bunch of people that I love the most are no longer involved and so I feel a deep sense of sadness about that but I think of it more like a group now than a community. It was basically like, you know everyone has major psychological trauma when they're 27? Like the 27 club?

So my major psychological trauma at 27 was recovered through Borough Common and the energy of pulling together around a smaller group and so for a long time, a lot of my psychological health was tied up in this community that we were

creating together, it was the friendships that I most valued, having had some deep damage done to friendships that were outside of that, in my 27th year and really struggling to assimilate those into my life. So I actually think that there was an unhealthy obsession with Borough Common and what it was and what it was trying to do and all of that, so on one level, that's more balanced now and on another level, I miss the fact that a lot of the people that I love, who I know would benefit from some of what the Borough Common is and does but now they're choosing not to be part of it, that makes me a bit sad.

But then I'm also really enjoying the people who are part of it and I'm enjoying those relationships but those relationships, it's not like those aren't my best friends and they're not going to become my best friends, it's a different type of relationship.

Int: So before there was a lot more that endured …

R: All my closest friends were there. No-one gets to replace [name] in my heart, I just have to be sad all the time that he doesn't come near me anymore but that's part of being an adult I think, is to accommodate those sadnesses, not to replace them and when you're a child you go, "that person's gone, I need another best friend" but I think as an adult you go, "Oh my actual best friend doesn't live in the same country anymore, he lives in Wales" with his wife and almost two children and his wife also used to live with me and was one of my best friends and now I've lost them both.

Int: How is it different now? How do you have ownership with it? How do you fit into it now? Before there was the friendships, that's a little more explicit in terms of how you fit in but how is it different now? Those people aren't there but you're still kind of connected to it.

R: Yes, well there's still friends there, [name] is a good friend and he goes. [Name] and [name] go, they're my good friends, Jenny, I think she's really cool and she's going

through an interesting , just lots of nice people I enjoy being around but I guess it's less …

Int: They don't have the long history …

R: Yes and they probably don't have the deep future than some, it was a peculiar moment because I still hang around with [name], with [name], with [name], with [name]'s boyfriend [name], with [name], her husband [name], these are the people I see for brunch every weekend so I don't have these gaps in my life that used to be Borough Common things but actually we're just hanging out with people that I love the most and when they left the Borough Common, I realised that I was more attached to them than to the Borough Common, which I think is psychologically healthy rather than being pathologically attached to an abstract community, which is just an idea.

Int: I see what you mean and connecting that back to your 27 trauma?

R: Yes, it's good to be attached to people and I think most religious communities through time have been that, healthily, I am part of this religious community because I'm attached to these people and the idea that you'd be attached to the religious community in the abstract, is a super weird concept.

Int: We've discussed that, the whole thing about the idea base …

R: Yes, it's the practice and it's the people and it's the relationships and it's all of that.

Int: We're covering so much with that, do you like being part of it?

R: I don't even know where to go with that …

Int: That's it, the last question is what we discussed already earlier on. Any last things you want to add or subtract like earlier you said be careful about that topic?

R: I don't think there's probably a bunch of conversations that still need to happen or maybe they don't or maybe they do, about the transition of the Borough Common from

a group of 25 to more like a group of 10 or 15 and the movement from an every Sunday to a once month, those transitions which are about people's life stages and about a whole load of different changes in people's lives and they're about deeper realisations about what people really care about and moments in life and relationships and where people live and where people can afford to buy houses, like all of those things and a little bit about a difficult experience that we had together, some difficult feelings that were brought up and maybe not fully resolved, like so often difficult feelings aren't and I just feel like the playing out of that isn't in the paper , the playing out of that is in a room or in lives whereas loads of stuff can play out in the paper and can play out in the theory and is a wonderful place for it and that is things that people are drawn to and not drawn to, people's spiritual lives and stuff like that but again, [inaudible 01:29:51] back you to navigate that.

Int: It's good to cap it at that transition because so much of it, there's been a transitional moment and there's been a shift and we've got it covered!

R: The fact that it's like now a monthly community isn't a hidden idea but I think the because, I think also because whatever because you put on it, "it's this because of this traumatic experience", that's not the because, there's no because, there just is a this is what it was, this is what is what it is now and the because are all very subjective and I think it's like the beliefs, it's like I can say that my story is that the Borough Common is because of these things but what's true about the Borough Common is that we meet once a month, that we deal in spiritual matters in the broadest sense, that we socially connect, that we offer some sort of meaningful support to each other but probably with a slightly tighter parameter than we used to around what that actually looks like or what the promise is, I think the promise of the Borough Common has changed, I think at one point

there was kind of a utopian promise which probably was unrealistic for what it actually …

Int: But a lot of people shared that too.

R: Yes, exactly, it was a promise to each other rather than a promise from someone to everyone and I think what we did really well is we did embody a very different way of holding a space and I think that's got a lot, there's a lot of value in that and for me it was, I think the idea of it as a collaboration is an interesting idea.

Int: Which will be their next conversation, off the record!

R: Yes.

Elle (The Borough Common: Spirituality Group [SOUP])

Int : Can you just say your name and then the community that you're involved in?

R : Elle, Borough Common, loosely.

Int: Yes, I mean I guess that's one of the first things that we can discuss? Do you identify Borough Common and SOUP as separate things?

R: Technically SOUP is a part of the Borough Common activities. But it's the only Borough Common activity I am a part of. I think it's the only Borough Common activity that several of the participants are part of, and therefore it has its own what feels like an independent identity as well as technically being either a spring off or a part of Borough Common. But it's still, I think referred to on the Borough Common pages as a part of the Borough Common activities and it refers people onto SOUP if they're interested in coming.

Int: So there is definitely feedback?

R: Definitely yeah it's still a part of it in some sense.

Int: I guess there is complexity in certain questions that I ask, I mean I guess it would be up to you, can you just specify if your SOUP based or more Borough Common based?

R: Sure.

Int: Just to make it a little bit more clear in that sense. So if you just encountered a general audience, a stranger, new person, whether religious or not, how would you describe Borough Common?

R: Borough Common is a church-like experiment for people who are dissatisfied in some way normally with the mainstream church and are interested in experimenting with doing church in different ways. So it's a community of people where there is no hierarchical structure or particularly appointed leaders or teachers. Where they have

some shared aims, which are to do good in the world, to grow together spiritually and to share the community and all its aspects as common property.

Int: That sounded like it was rehearsed almost?

R: It's so drummed into me.

Int: I know sometimes you just get so used to it, because you see it in the beginning of every ...?

R: Yeah well that's partly we wanted to do that, so it becomes a bit like a mantra and we remind ourselves of what our purpose is every time, at the beginning of every session. Unfortunately it's not something we do at the beginning of SOUP, which is why I was trying to remember it, because I hadn't actually said it for a while not having been to any specific Borough Common thing for a while.

Int: I think my first SOUP, Donna said a little introduction?

R: Did she?

Int: Yeah I was like, "Oh wow, say it ..."

R: We don't do it every week.

Int: So I kind of pick that up.

R: Perhaps it was because there was someone new?

Int: Yeah I think that was Lou's first week too, like she's always been in that, but she never actually stayed for the actual meeting. I mean would you describe if somebody were to ask you about SOUP, would it be different or ...?

R: Yeah it would be different, I would say SOUP is a small weekly gathering of people wanting to engage on a spiritual level and explore the deeper questions of life together in a safe space.

Int: Yeah so not everybody that is interested in going to Borough Common may be interested in the things that SOUP's doing and vice-versa?

R: No SOUP is specifically focused on the more experiential spirituality side of things, whereas Borough Common is a broader scope and people might be interpreting growing spiritually together in a more broad sense. It might encompass lots of different things, or it might be interpreting lots of different ways. Whereas SOUP is more focused on actually just engaging spiritually together, so that's like doing things like meditation and praying, maybe actually reading something that is directly aimed at helping us to grow or think or challenge or whatever. So it's much more directly targeted towards that aspect of the Borough Common, the growing spiritually.

Int: Yeah as the name of the group ...?

R: Yeah.

Int: So people on Borough Common might not go to SOUP, but would everybody in SOUP you think they would feel welcome to go to Borough Common?

R: I think they'd all feel welcome, but I don't think everybody goes. Some people have got to know SOUP independently and they don't even know Borough Common that well.

Int: Oh yeah Matt did say some people actually just found the Facebook group too in the same way that people would find the Facebook page?

R: Yeah or they're our friends for example who've come along just to SOUP through us and therefore aren't really linked to Borough Common. Which is why I suppose it has some kind of level of separate identity, but I suppose only in the sense that a house group might do to a church in a more mainstream context. So you might invite your friend along to your house group without inviting them to church. So it's like that comparison really.

Int: Yeah so there's the wider community, it's more broad, and then there's the more specific thing and you have kind of your own life together as well?

R: Yeah.

Int: That makes a lot of sense, I mean I guess if you come from that tradition to look more like that?

R: Yeah.

Int: You would make that easy comparison, like a home group?

R: Yeah and I think it has developed its own sort of sense of community as well. I think people who've regularly been going to SOUP have really developed quite a closeness. Not just in terms of, not particularly necessarily in terms of doing social stuff together outside of that group, but just when we're together in that group there's a level of depth that has developed from seeing each other on a weekly basis over and over again. So we feel very much connected to one another, free to talk about anything. It's very much become like a safe space, so that's really good.

Int: Yeah I mean it seems like everyone really knew ... There is that one, you know everyone just really talked about? I mean I get a sense everyone knew each other's milestones and then when a milestone did happen in someone's life like you made ...?

R: Mmm we know about it.

Int: Yeah you know about it and you make space for it in the actual meeting, whether it's in that informal kind of talk part or part of the actual spirituality side of it?

R: Yeah.

Int: What do you call that, would you call it like a service? What do you call the prayer side?

R: I don't know what it is, it's the more intentional spiritual engagement side of things. So it's where we do a liturgy or someone will give something ... Because you've only been to the summary ones, I don't think there's been many people doing much in

the way of leading in the summer. But what we normally do ... It was partly because I've not been there to coordinate and I'm normally the coordinator.

Int: Yeah you usually live there?

R: Yes and I usually live there and host it, so it's all been a bit weird. Normally one person will be appointed to kind of lead, and they will be the leading voice in the liturgy that week.

Int: So you call it the liturgy?

R: It's a liturgy yeah, the Celtic prayer thing that we do is a liturgy.

Int: Okay so you call it a liturgy, so that's like a service, you don't call it a service you call it a liturgy?

R: Yeah but then they'll add into the liturgy something of their own. So it might be a thought or a meditation or some kind of practice. It might be just another poem or a song?

Int: Yeah but I mean that was kind of like that?

R: It was like that?

Int: Yeah.

R: So that would kind of added in and done. Yeah Sheona did one last week.

Int: Sheona did one, she was ...?

R: That was quite a typical thing, so that was more like a thought that she presented and then we discussed it and went back to the liturgy to finish. So that's the kind of typical format yeah.

Int: Would you have more experiential things that you would incorporate, is that something that happens too?

R: Yeah we have done, so in the past people have done like arts and crafts and things. So we've done like making your own icon we've done. We've done meditative colouring.

Int: Oh yeah I saw that.

R: Yeah we've had a fire pit and done like a fire ceremony where we've kind of written things down on sticks that we want to get rid of and then burnt them together and done a liturgy around that. We've done physical liturgies, so where there are physical movements to follow particular words. We've done silence, we've done listening to songs, a whole mixture of different things.

Int: Okay it is a wide range of things?

R: Really different things yeah.

Int: Then that's maybe in-between the Celtic prayer thing or after that, like it's a different?

R: Yeah I mean we always say you could either do it before, in the middle, or at the end, where you want to. But most people tend to do it in the middle section where there's a break in the liturgy.

Int: Where you typically read whatever readings for that day or something?

R: Yes those we don't tend to bother with. When no one's had time to prepare anything to lead, that's when we might resort to doing those readings.

Int: But more often than not it's ...?

R: More often than not somebody's offering something.

Int: Yeah I mean there's always something that you might want to share with the group anyway right?

R: Yeah.

Int: I've heard that you do like a prayer part too, like when you pray over each other, but I haven't seen that yet. Is that often?

R: We're just praying with each other, not necessarily over each other. I mean sometimes it might be that way, but yeah we'll sometimes just share things that we want to pray about in whatever form that might mean for different people.

Int: How does that look like, I mean I guess I'll see one day?

R: Mmm, yeah maybe you will today.

Int: Yeah maybe today?

R: Again it just varies, it depends on the person leading, so sometimes we'll just ... We've just kind of created a prayer space as it were and then people have just talked about what it is that they want to bring to God and then that's been the prayer. Then we've just kind of closed with the sort of all of these things we place in God's hands, that kind of thing. Other times we have just shared the very particular things we want to be praying about then focused on actually praying for those things together more actively and vocally. Some of them just have been silent prayers where we name certain things and then just sit in silence and just hold those things together. So it really depends on who's leading in how it would look.

Int: So that's also part of the leader, whoever is leading that can also ...?

R: Probably yeah.

Int: There's not like a standard format for the prayer that you follow?

R: There's no standard format no.

Int: As I've seen it didn't happen a couple of weeks ago so ...?

R: Often it's quite organic as well, like the leader might not instigate it, someone might just say, "Oh could you guys pray for this?" Then everybody might gather round and pray for that person, it just really varies, it's very spontaneous.

Int: When somebody prepares something, whether it's part of the liturgy or the prayer, would it always be Christian in root would you say? Or would it be religious rooted?

R: There's no rules about it being Christian in root, but it's more often Christian in root than not I guess just because of the demographic of who's there. But there have been times where people have shared, like for example Michael has often brought like Rumi poems which are essentially mystic poems and has used them as meditation points. So there's nothing to say that the material itself has to be specifically Christian, it can kind of be anything.

Int: Or could it be ...? Yeah I mean you could have like a bunch of maybe meditative music that's not necessarily Christian either?

R: Exactly yeah. One time I did a whole thought piece and exploration around karma and the principles of karma and what are the strengths of those principles that we might want to incorporate into our lives, or what are the things we're not so comfortable with and that kind of thing. So it's not necessarily overtly Christian stuff.

Int: You might have some popular media as well sometimes?

R: Mmm yeah.

Int: Like when you did the colouring, that could be anything?

R: Yeah that was just some magazine or other I think.

Int: Yeah but it's meditative?

R: And we did a colouring our own mandalas I think one time, that was another thing we did.

Int: That was a different occasion from the meditative colouring?

R: Yeah I think it was. Was that different or the same, I can't even remember?

Int: Those are so big now, I kind of want to buy my family those colouring mags for Christmas or something?

R: Yeah they're really popular aren't they?

Int: Yeah. All right, I mean I guess I'll go ahead and just run through some of the set things. What are some positive qualities that you would say about Borough Common? You can do two answers or one answer?

R: Positive qualities?

Int: Yeah, what about if you do a Borough Common and a SOUP answer?

R: All right, Borough Common, there might be some overlap, but ... So Borough Common, positive attributes is gives a space and a voice to people who are disillusioned in the church in some way, but not ready to give up on their faith entirely. So it provides a space for those people who would otherwise probably just leave any kind of church or community altogether. So that's really important I think. Another strength is that in a city like London, it provides you with an incredibly wide network of people just almost immediately that you can access, that you can talk to, that you can raise awareness among, that you can get to know and do social stuff with. That's really great, I mean when I first moved here and didn't know many people I found that just engaging with that network gave me so many new contacts and friends, it was great.

Int: Yeah and similar interests too, I think you could kind of self-select in that way?

R: Yeah similar types of people, that's true. Then yes SOUP as a positive, is that closeness I think, that stronger bond of communityness, the close friendships that develop from doing that practice.

Int: Would you say it's more intimate?

R: It's much more intimate yeah. Then the kind of the rhythm of doing something regular that has something familiar every week. Even though there's a lot of variation in each week, but there's always one thing that's steady and that's the liturgy that we work

into. That just creates a pattern and rhythm in life as well as ... I guess it just makes it feel more like this kind of haven, like Tuesday nights are just this ...

Int: A consistency?

R: A consistent blocked out thing and a space for reflection and quiet. In a busy week that's just really valuable.

Int: Yeah and even if it's just like ... I feel like it's only been a couple of hours you have the soup and the chat and it has that ...?

R: Yeah it's not often that long actually.

Int: Yeah it's got everything you kind of need though?

R: Yeah and I like the simplicity of it, I like the fact that we always have soup, bread and cheese. Although we do have some people who like to throw in lots of other things as well every now and again and it ...

Int: Yeah we'll see how big it is today?

R: Yeah, but for me personally I love the simplicity of a simple meal and a set liturgy and then the variation and spontaneity ... You know the space to allow the people in the group to also form the night and shape it and to be able to be a bit spontaneous and just go with it. So I like the combination of those two things, I think there's a nice balance.

Int: There's like an intentional space for the spontaneity?

R: Yeah.

Int: How did you guys form that, how did you come up with that format? Was it immediately, did you have that format to begin with? I know there's a transition even in the group name?

R: Yeah there was, we didn't have a name for a long time, we were just like a spiritual group.

Int: Like growing spiritual together, the spiritual group and you're like SOUP?

R: SOUP, Spiritual Group. Yeah [name] came up with the SOUP finally and I was like, “Oh that’s genius.”

Int: Was that from the Borough Common?

R: Yeah that’s was during a ...

Int: Because he hasn’t even been right? He hasn’t been to a ...?

R: No but he would like it I think.

Int: I know I feel like he would, he's so close. I was kind of pressuring him, I was like, “Why haven't you gone, you live so close?”

R: You should tell him, tell him to come along.

Int: How did you come up with that format?

R: I honestly can't remember, I had a Celtic prayer book which had those liturgies in. I think we were just exploring to have something to have ... I think one of the things was that we wanted it to be non-pressured. So that if there was no leader, there was always something to do and someone didn’t have to rustle something up at the last minute to lead. As you've probably seen over the summer, if there's no leader there is the liturgy and the readings and the meditation that are all within that Celtic prayer book to use. So we have like a kind of then default template and then obviously we wanted the space for everybody to share, so it just kind of evolved naturally out of that, because I had that book.

Int: Was it from the very first meeting though that you used it?

R: I think it might have been yeah it was. I think I introduced it, I think I picked it out with a couple of other and then introduced it saying, “Hey what do you guys think of this?” We all agreed that well let's try it for a half-term or however many weeks and see how we get on with it. Then we kind of reviewed it at the end of that and one of the

things that ... Well we reviewed the whole of SOUP and then one of the things that everybody agreed on was ...

Int: So that was after how may meetings?

R: Oh I don't know, maybe six or something?

Int: Okay like a month and a half?

R: Maybe a bit more, a few months maximum. But yeah so when we reviewed it the one thing that I think everybody agreed on was the liturgy definitely. There seemed to be unanimous consensus that yeah let's keep the liturgy. So it has been with us from the very start actually.

Int: I also noticed though that you changed the language in the end, but not the first part of it, but just the second part of it?

R: I don't think there's anything on ...

Int: Well because you have like ...?

R: Are there other things that we should have changed?

Int: No, so you have like the sign of the cross right?

R: Mmm.

Int: For example and the end you have the inclusive version, but in the beginning ...?

R: We kept it the same.

Int: You kept it the same yeah?

R: That was my thing, because I just feel kind of a bit with the trinity and those ideas ... So I always had a little kind of – when I got to those moments. The thing that we end on is language that Dave Tomlinson uses in his church, and I just really like that language, because I kind of go to that church.

Int: I went to Soul Space this past ...

R: Was it good?

Int: Yeah it was really, really nice. Yeah I mean I don't know that it's always ... The thing is it's like that was my first one.

R: I've never been to Soul Space.

Int: Oh really? It was really nice, I mean it reminds me kind of ... It's got that Borough Common feel, but it was mostly him leading, but there was like spaces for everyone to share and things like that. There was an experiential side of it and there was drinks at the end. You know so it's a different demographic.

R: So yeah so I introduced using his language and sort of okayed it with the group. I threw it out there one day and said, "Hey Dave uses this and I really like it. I find it more comfortable than the Trinitarian language, how about we change one of them?" But I knew that some people were quite attached to some of the Trinitarian language, so I didn't want to change both. So I just suggested we changed one of them.

Int: Was that also from the beginning?

R: No that was actually not that long ago. That was more recent, that was within the last year. But the folk was changed really early on from the good men of old to good folk of old, that was changed really early, right at the beginning. No one was happy with that.

Int: I think we're probably a generation where most of our text books have already changed or whatever in that transition period?

R: It grates doesn't it?

Int: It does grate when you see men.

R: Yeah and folk just felt like the right kind of word for our group and it kept the rhythm of the liturgy.

Int: Yeah I thought it was interesting to use folk as opposed to people or humans or men and ...?

R: The men and women of old. Yeah you lose that nice flow, because it does have a flow, it's rhythmic. So we wanted to keep the rhythm.

Int: I've never seen folk be used as a sensitive word for that actually?

R: It's become a little bit of an expression amongst us. So sometimes when we put things up on the Facebook page and say, “Hi good folks.”

Int: It's an inside joke, that’s so funny, I love it. So those are the positive things, what are more challenging things? So challenging things about Borough Common and challenging things about SOUP you would say?

R: The challenging things in Borough Common are I think that because it was put together by people very jaded from their church experience and therefore part of that experience had been this feeling of obligation and just having stuff put on them and feeling like they just have to do stuff out of loyalty or out of responsibility to the church that they're a part of. So they very much wanted to avoid that in their culture of Borough Common. So it was very much a culture of you just do what you want to do, you participate ...

As much as it was like the power is in everybody’s hands or the say is in everybody’s hands, so are the things that have to be done. Like if nobody wants to do them things, they just won't get done. It's kind of deemed that that should be then self-selecting, so if things are not important enough to the community for anybody to step up and do them, then they're probably things that don’t need to be done. Which in theory could potentially work, but I saw that as a huge failing actually, because where people live very busy lives in London, you've not got anyone appointed who’s specifically in charge of making sure stuff happens ...

It's a very transient community, you've got a lot of people coming and going, picking things up and dropping them again, and things change a lot around London. I

think for those reasons people weren't in a place where they were just picking the thing up out of pure desire. So I started to feel a little bit as though ...

Int: It's not necessarily a bad thing to feel a little bit of responsibility?

R: It became a bit consumerist, I felt it became a bit like a consumer product that you come to take from it what you want to get from it. But there was no sense of putting into it, that was really a part of ... I suppose no sense of commitment, it didn't engender an environment or a culture of commitment and therefore of giving and therefore of serving and therefore of all of those other things. I agree duty and obligation and putting stuff on people and forcing people to do stuff they don't want to do is not good. But at the same time what happened in Borough Common as I see it was it just sort of dissolved into this everyone just do what you want and then everybody just wanting to get and nobody wanting to give and things end up falling apart and collapsing because nobody's putting the effort in because nobody's got the commitment or the ownership. So something fell apart in that sense in my mind. I think the other thing was the power of personalities was another potential flaw that we saw arise after the Greenbelt time, you probably remember some of the difficult conversations we had around that?

Int: Yeah, I mean I was already in Oxford, but I knew all about all that happening.

R: So I think the idea that there are no leaders and there's no one in charge and we all have equal say is wonderful. It's very difficult to make that happen in practice, particularly when you've got a small group of people who are the founders and who are the ones whose baby it is. So I think just because of how personalities work, some people kind of emerged as more leaders or louder voices than other people. That upset other people because it felt hypocritical, there were a couple of errors made along the way about exposing the leadership group as it was and it was kept secret for a long time. That was really hurtful for a lot of people, but that was a human error.

Int: I was still there when all that happened.

R: Yeah I know that was a human error, that wasn't a fault in the concept, but I think the fault in the concept to pick out would be that it doesn't account for this personality thing and while it's very well putting the words out there, there will only be a certainly type of personality who will jump up and leap and take them. Other people have to be given empowerment, they have to be empowered. They're not just told that they can empower themselves and then able to just do it themselves.

I think it didn't account for that, so it created another environment whereby just those people who were really strong and really confident had their voices heard on an equal footing. Those who weren't just disappeared completely, because there was nobody bringing their voices to the fore then because there were no leaders. So there was no one looking out for them in a pastoral sense.

Int: I mean there was some efforts to try to get those done, the whole checking in of people that hadn't come?

R: There were some efforts to try and make that happen.

Int: Also trying to open up the leadership thing, but do you think those are hand in hand? Like you were saying the trauma that people had experienced being in their own churches, so maybe even if the people wanted to delegate they didn't because they didn't want to put pressure on other people?

R: Yeah I think that was part of that same issue yeah.

Int: So maybe it would have been ... And there are certain roles that obviously would have been important, but they didn't ...?

R: But we're not necessarily talking about delegating, we're talking about empowering people. Just for example in a group, if you say, "This floor is open to everybody," certain people will speak and speak and speak again, and other people won't

speak at all. But if you were to turn to those other people, the aim of the facilitator was to turn to those people and say, “Hey what do I think?”, then they would have a really important opinion. But they wouldn't necessarily proffer it on their own. That whole thing was happening on a wider community level.

Int: I see what you mean, it's not just the individual meetings it was just the entire group itself?

R: No just the whole thing, like some people unless somebody literally puts in the hands the idea that, “Hey you could start a group,” or someone might listen to what they say quietly over a coffee and say, “Why don’t you take that forward and turn it into a thing?” Unless they have that encouragement or empowerment they might just ...

Int: They wouldn't do it on their own?

R: Yeah they just don’t feel that they've got the place to do that. So I think yeah it was wider than just the meetings, I think that was happening on a community level.

Int: Yeah and the fact that there was kind of a sense that there was a core or something like that?

R: Yeah this core group who were making the decisions, and that made the quieter ones again feel less empowered, because it felt like other people were in charge. So yeah it's difficult to manage that dynamic in practice.

Int: Yeah and there was also part of it was just organic as well, it like because it's an experiment people didn’t really know what was going to be the ... It's hard to know what your shadows are when it's your first time going through it?

R: It really is yeah, and it did well for a very long time, it's only just started to struggle now really.

Int: Okay challenges for SOUP though?

R: Challenges for SOUP are, there aren't very many challenges.

Int: That's fine.

R: I think a really simple challenge, which sounds very basic is just trying to get word from people in advance on whether they can come or not. It's that same thing about commitment. Like in London people don't want to commit until the five minutes before the event, they just don't want to say in advance that they're going to do something, because something else might happen. They want to be just be able to play by ear and see how they feel. So that can be difficult just in organising, because if you're making soup for everybody, it's very hard to logistically manage that if you just don't know on the day or the day before how many people are going to come. So it's a really minor challenge, but that's I would say one of the challenges.

Int: But every week is pretty much set, you don't find it hard to find people that want to lead for the week?

R: Sometimes yeah we do, but then we have the default thing to fall back on. So on those weeks we're not struggling, we then just use the passages that are there. Maybe just have a time of open praying or sharing or whatever. So we never feel like we haven't done anything or it's just ...

Int: And there's also enough people that want to share that, it's not like you always default to the default?

R: Yeah because we all know each other well enough, everybody feels comfortable to share yeah. So I feel like it works really, really well at the moment.

Int: It's been a couple of years now?

R: Mmm, two and a half.

Int: I was going to say we could scroll all the way down to the beginning of the Facebook?

R: It should say when it was created.

Int: Yeah I think that's where I looked to see it, the group name.

R: Although I can't remember if we created it at the beginning, the Facebook group.

Int: You probably had discussed it first?

R: Yeah I can't remember.

Int: I mean I feel like there's a natural transition too between SOUP and Waffle, except it's two completely different things?

R: Yeah really different aims, but there was a kind of natural ...

Int: Yeah it was like same neighbourhood, it's so funny, I was like, "It's almost like the exact same house." That's funny?

R: Yeah Waffle is much more intellectual.

Int: Yeah I know it was yeah.

R: I liked Waffle, it was a shame [name] dropped that.

Int: It did also attract people who were more like cerebral too didn't it?

R: Of course it did, that's the idea, I guess it attracted people who are interested in that kind of engagement yeah.

Int: So favourite things about what Borough has done?

R: I've enjoyed some of the away trips that they did when we went away, that was really nice.

Int: Was it John's house, John's family's house?

R: Yeah.

Int: I really like those.

R: It was great, and then SOUP some favourites. I enjoyed the fire pit stuff, I need to get the fire pit out again soon. I enjoyed when we just kind of had a social barbecue and then opened it up to lots of people and just all invited our friends and we all just got together and had a summer barbecue.

Int: But it was like a SOUP barbecue and then you guys invited ...?

R: Yeah we just opened it up and just had a Tuesday night barbecue basically where we kind of hosted. It was really nice.

Int: Oh fun, it's like one of those ... There's like a day in the liturgical year when you're supposed to bring someone to church, it's kind of like that?

R: Yeah but we didn't do a service-y thing.

Int: Oh you didn't do a service-y thing, it was just really a barbecue on a Tuesday night?

R: No it was just a social on a Tuesday yeah.

Int: You kind of touched on this a little bit about how with the challenges of Borough Common there's the sense of the leadership and there's probably not as natural leaders because of the personality type. So there's a kind of sense of like whether or not ... There is definitely a sense of people fitting in and not fitting in?

R: Mmm.

Int: Because they felt like they were part of the core group or not part of the core group?

R: There was a feeling of that yeah.

Int: Do you have personal experiences of that? Do you feel like you fit in Borough Common? What ways do you feel you don't fit in or you do fit in?

R: Well I'm not really part of that group anymore, but in terms of SOUP ...

Int: Yeah but you were though?

R: Yeah in terms of SOUP I definitely do feel like I fit in.

Int: Like it fulfils you?

R: Yeah just looking back in the past on Borough Common I think for the whole first year that I joined I never felt I fitted in, if I'm really honest. I just felt very much

like on the outside and I felt like I couldn't keep up. I wasn't cool enough, I wasn't hip enough, like there were lots of in jokes. Lots of talk about previous things they'd done where they'd all just laugh together that I was just excluded from automatically.

Int: Yeah because they hung out with each other during the week and ...?

R: They hung out with each other a lot and you'd just hear a lot about their socials, so you always felt like there was a group and you were on the outside. So yeah I did really struggle with it at first and at the beginning, because I went along because of [name], I didn't go along because I'd sought it out.

Int: Oh I thought you'd sought it out first and then you met [name] there?

R: No I met [name] at Greenbelt and then got dragged along to Borough Common. So for that reason it look me a bit longer to get the hang of it, like just figure out ... I think that was one of the reasons why they started this idea of saying what Borough Common is at the beginning of every meeting came up. Because I said it took me months to figure out what the guy was doing, it just felt like a weird grown up youth club. I was like, "What is this, it just feels so weird."

Int: So it seemed more like a social thing as opposed to a spirituality thing?

R: That's how it felt, it felt much more of a social club type thing where there are activities where people would come and do an activity, but it didn't feel driven by religion or spirituality.

Int: That didn't seem like the core of it?

R: Not at all, no I mean God was barely mentioned. Nothing Christian was barely mentioned, in fact they became ... I started to realise over time they were sort of dirty words in the community, that's how it felt. Which is really interesting, and that was

probably just the place of a lot of people in the group at the time. But it then became a place where I find it difficult to talk about prayer or what Jesus would say in that context.

Int: Like even if you wanted to use that language?

R: Yeah if I wanted to use that language I felt uncomfortable doing it in that environment. That was a part of the drive that led me with Matt's kind of encouragement, it was him and I really. I mean I did the actual announcement in the end, but it was kind of he helped to sort of set up the idea in our minds really.

Int: For SOUP?

R: For SOUP because it was all the things that you couldn't talk about in Borough Common, it was all the things that we felt our hands were tied with in Borough Common. We just wanted to be able to have a space where we could just do that stuff, where we could pray for each other. To mention God and call yourself a Christian, you can have and it's all right with those things. I started to realise through discussions that there were quite a few of us in Borough Common who were feeling that way and I thought, "Well there's enough of us to have our own thing."

We were all still people who have our issues with mainstream church, we were all still people who were in some respects or other on the edge of that or have different theological out-workings of what we believe and all of that. but not people for whom mentioning God or prayer will make us so uncomfortable that no one can do it.

Int: Would rather not say it or makes it uncomfortable when you hear somebody else say it?

R: Yeah.

Int: I mean I think that's good to know about how that transitioned, like about your experience with it. I mean I'm glad that you felt empowered enough to be able to start SOUP, because you did start going into the leadership things for Borough?

R: I did, I got ... It was really silly because I sort of got, just as I was starting to feel a sense of belonging in Borough Common and a sense of being part of the community and having a say in the community. And having a voice and having an actual role, it was not that long after that that [name] and I broke up. That kind of changed everything, because there was just a lot more to navigate, there was a lot to work out, we had to figure out how we felt. Just when we were kind of getting to a point where that was manageable then he got together with Christina, which added a whole other dynamic. Just the whole thing became very complicated and in the end I sort of backed out from ... That was partly why I backed out from the Borough Common side of things.

Int: Partly not the whole?

R: Partly because of all the reasons I gave before about the negative effects of it, I was getting a bit disillusioned myself with how it was going. Just I guess it was a definition of ... I loved it on paper, but how it was working out on the ground wasn't my ... It didn't match my idea of what I would want a community to be.

Int: There was not enough to make you passionate about it in the end?

R: No so I kind of lost some of the passion. I would have been willing to kind of fight to try and be a part of the thing to try and develop it into becoming more of what I envisioned it to be, but the whole break up with [name] just ...

Int: So the break up issues were in there maybe ...?

R: Combined with ... Yeah so it was that perfect storm really.

Int: And SOUP is enough for you? Do you do other churchy type things or other spirituality feeding things?

R: I haven't done for a few months, but normally I go to St Luke's on a Sunday morning.

Int: So you speak about Dave Tomlinson in such a casual way, so did you only know him from going to church there or did you meet him when he talked at Borough Common?

R: I met him when he talked at Borough Common, not met him, but ...

Int: That's when you first really chatted with him?

R: Yeah.

Int: And then you started going since then, or did you go before?

R: I started going probably when I was in that transition of leaving Borough, but still wanting something else. Then I shifted from Borough to St Luke's then.

Int: But you would go to what just the Sunday service?

R: I go to the morning service.

Int: But you haven't been to Soul Space?

R: No I haven't.

Int: Oh you should check it out, it's only once a month though so it's hard to catch it?

R: Yeah I'm tricky with the once a month things, I just find it hard to catch.

Int: Yeah it's hard to catch, but when you do it, like you think that's what's doable for people, but then you realise it's just hard to catch if you do it that way. Like if it's every week then there's more opportunity to catch it?

R: Exactly and that was exactly why I was determined to stick to once a week for SOUP even if there were weeks where only one or two people could come. I mean I'm determined to keep it weekly because first of all, when you're the host you have a lot more kind of power over that right? So as the host I can just say to myself, "Well if I make soup and nobody comes, I could just freeze it and use it for lunches over the next few weeks," it's no biggie. Then I could just have a night on my own, there's no problem

because I've not gone anywhere. I've not opened up and unlocked, it's at my house, so as the host it really doesn't ... I mean it's annoying as I was saying before, but it's no ...

Int: But it has to be manageable like because it's just soup, if it were like a big meal it would have been different?

R: Exactly and that's partly why the soup and bread thing is good, because it makes it manageable. It makes it not so tragic if nobody comes. It's annoying, I admit it can be annoying. It depends on how good a mood I'm in at the time. So yeah it works and I'm happy to kind of then just host it and allow people to come and to. Although I always try and get people to stay in a while.

Int: That seems to work really well?

R: It does seem to work really well and then people just always know it's there as a constant and then they can drop in and out and not need to feel like, "Oh I have to time my life around this once a month event." Because that always catches me out, you miss one and then you've missed eight weeks. Once you've missed eight weeks then you're out of habit, you don't develop a habit.

Int: That's actually really good to know, because I think when you're in the planning side of it you think once a month is like what's doable?

R: Mmm.

Int: You know with the busy lives, but then ...?

R: They will come once a month, but it has to be on every week.

Int: The once a week thing is actually really, really important, so it has to be a realistic once a week too though?

R: Yeah it has to be manageable, it doesn't have to involve one person sacrificing everything for everybody else and then being let down over and over again, because that's horrible. Because if I had to go to a church or to another building, to travel to

another building after work, set up, dirty loads of dishes that are not mine that I would then have to clean. You know do a whole thing elsewhere and then nobody came. If I'd spent hours preparing something, that would really, really suck.

Int: You wouldn't want to do it again?

R: Because like I say it's in my house, it's normally a small group, I could just ... If nobody's responded I could even just buy some little things of soup that I can just stick in the freezer if no one comes. It's not a biggie, so the format of it gives me the freedom to let it be that constant for people and that's what I think has kept it going and healthy touch wood, as long as it has.

Int: I'm actually getting inspired talking to you. I have this group that I started with my parish in Oxford and we're calling it Second Sunday, because we meet on the second Sunday.

But it's just once a month and yeah but I'm noticing the once a month doesn't necessarily work, because you just keep missing it. But if you just had something super easy and once a week and people get the rhythm?

R: I just think it's about rhythm.

Int: Yeah.

R: It's about rhythm, having something that's a constant. Then if you miss a couple you don't feel like it's the end of the world and you can just drop straight back in and that's okay. Because if you miss a couple and it's once months, then it's kind of awkward to go back, because you haven't seen people for three months. Then how do you develop the community and all of those things? I find it just works really well.

Int: Yeah and the thing is I think there's also that fear of thinking that maybe not everyone would be super into the spirituality side of it. Like I want it to be open for everybody who might be scared of that too, or people who might identify as atheist. So

Borough Common was easy because you might not be churchy at all and you can just invite somebody to it and it's like an easy thing to do. But I think if it's like a rhythmic pattern and it's like eclectic enough, you wouldn't necessarily have to worry about it being too ...?

R: Yeah I guess if I wanted it to be open to anyone, for anyone from any background to feel comfortable we would pick a different liturgy and one that didn't have so much of Christian grounding. Because the liturgy we use is pretty Christian.

Int: It is pretty Christian?

R: There's a lot of God and Jesus in there, but we could equally pick ... I'm sure that we could find a liturgy or even create our own based on something like that, but adapting the language or whatever that would make the group more open to anybody. But I guess the purpose or the drive of setting up our group was that we were missing that part.

Int: Yeah I know, I'm like starting to think of it like maybe it would be like meditation and a conversation or something. Like who knows, something that would be more open?

R: Yeah.

Int: But yeah I mean because the people that are going is a wide range, because they're just our friends. It's like there's me this guy named Sutan, we're like the only young people in the parish. But it's like we just invite all our friends to the Second Sundays?

R: You could do it more like Waffle where you just have it as a discussion group or meditation?

Int: But I want to be able to ... Like a lot of this is very social oriented to, so there's like a sandwich friend that we do, where we just give sandwiches to the homeless people in Oxford. So yeah I mean I don't want it to be one of those discussion groups

necessarily, but I think the support side of it is really important. I don't know we'll see how it goes, I'll talk to everyone about it. Second Sunday is coming up, I mean we just had one, but we have the whole month to decide what to do for next month. Last question and this is like I guess a typical one, how would you define your religious identity or spiritual identity? I don't know what terminology you would use?

R: I don't know, it depends who I'm talking to.

Int: Okay talk about that? Like what would you say to your parents, because if your dad was a pastor, are they Christians? It depends what kind of Christian too huh?

R: I guess it's so difficult. In my family I'm dubbed the liberal Christian, so I'm recognised as a Christian, but as a liberal. I don't really like the word liberal too much, but I haven't found a better alternative and it's kind of universally used to mean what part of the church I'm in. So therefore I kind of go with that.

Int: It's not perfect, but you know what it means?

R: Exactly, so I'm kind of cool with that. That's what language is like isn't it?

Int: Yeah.

R: To other people who don't know me at all, I'd probably identify myself as a Christian but then follow it up with saying I'm not a typical mainstream Christian, I'm quite on the edge of the mainstream church, but I identify as a Christian.

Int: So there's a little aquod yeah, but you're not afraid to use Christian?

R: No I still would identify as Christian.

Int: Good.

R: But I think in some context, some other Christians might not identify me as Christian. They might say I'm not, and therefore I then wouldn't know what I am. But to me my Christian heritage is the heritage I draw on in my religious practices and they

direct me in terms of where I get my inspiration. So like in terms of a person where I get my inspiration from or a kind of figure, it would be Jesus.

In terms of a concept of God it changes all the time, but I suppose that has been my background, so that's probably fed a lot into how I see that. I mean I guess at some point I just had to resign myself to embracing that I've been brought up in a particular culture and that just is where I'm always going to feel most comfortable. Therefore it almost just feels poncey to not identify myself within that somewhere.

Int: Like what are you trying to hide?

R: Yeah it's like well I am, I just am. But I guess I am in a place where the church has got such a bad name for itself in this country and conjures up such negative images in people's minds that that's why I will always follow it up with that caveat. I don't want to be identified with those institutions that ...

Int: Because you have very strong difficult opinions against us too and you align them?

R: Yeah and I passionately disagree with a lot of what they say and do. It's taken a long time to find any church that I'm comfortable with now, both theologically and practically. Yeah for those reasons I kind of don't want and I don't like it when people just go away with this idea of, "Oh she's a Christian," because I know exactly what's in their mind. I don't identify with that, with those people. So that's why I guess it's a difficult question to answer.

Int: I mean I guess it would be different if you were somewhere like Greenbelt where there's like a general assumption of what kind of Christian you are?

R: Exactly.

Int: So you wouldn't have to put in a caveat?

R: There is a safe place, that's why it's a nice holiday.

Int: You don't have to deal with that question?

R: Yeah everybody just knows who you are in a sense.

Int: You don't have to explain, I mean you could have obviously there's so many different variations still within that, but you don't have to give that caveat?

R: Yeah exactly.

Int: So it's more the mainstream Christian and the people that are just like not religious that you would have to give a caveat to?

R: Mmm.

Int: It's really a very specific ...?

R: Sometimes I think I've used the word I'm loosely Christian, I'm Christian in a loose sense and in a non-mainstream sense and very liberal sense and wouldn't identify with the mainstream institutions of religion. But would identify myself as Christian in my own way. I haven't even found a terminology yet that I'm happy with, it doesn't come up often enough actually for me to have really developed something I'm happy with. Last time it came up was fairly recently with some of Rob's friends.

Int: Rob's your boyfriend?

R: Yeah and ...

Int: Because he's atheist right?

R: Yeah he's atheist and I hadn't realised that some of his friends didn't know I was a Christian and it was news for them. Then I suddenly found myself in this position where I was like, "Yeah I'm Christian," and all of that stuff.

Int: So you don't have like a blanket statement though?

R: I need some simple way of saying it yeah, if you have one give it to me.

Int: So my thing that I always say, I always say, "Well I grew up Catholic, I'm culturally Catholic." So I always say that and alongside when people say, "Are you

religious?" I'm like, "That's a difficult question, but the easy answer is yes." But then I think when you give like a kind of a quirky statement like that they already kind of assume.

R: Yeah that you're a bit on the end.

Int: Yeah but I mean even just saying like culture like Catholic ...

R: And you've got the haircut to help you, to break some of the stereotypes.

Int: Oh yeah I know, my fore is coming out more and more. You see I think the cultural Catholicism I think everyone understands. But then there's cultural Christian?

R: But then you see I don't know if I could say that I'm a cultural Christian because I think you're right about Catholicism it has a different culture and background. But I feel like if I were to say I was culturally Christian or evangelical Christian that it leads you back to square one.

Int: So with the Catholic thing I think that's why I also get the next question is are you religious?

R: And do you practice kind of thing?

Int: Ask [name] he has an answer that's kind of very similar to you.

R: Does he, a non-conformist Christian, or a non-mainstream Christian or ...?

Int: Because he used to really like the whole progressive Christian, liberal Christian thing, but he doesn't say that anymore. You should ask him?

R: Yeah I should ask him what he calls himself?

Int: Yeah, but he has like a usual conversation thing that he says. So anyway was it challenging with Rob?

R: Mostly no, but we have our moments for sure. I can't say it's not ever been a point of contention.

Int: It can get heated in that ...?

R: It can in something that it can push some emotional buttons for both of us. Because he's an atheist and not just someone who doesn't give a shit, excuse my language. Atheists are people who have normally who've gone through a long process of working out and sorting out and really coming to this conclusion. So they are people who are well thought out and quite often they're atheism comes from quite an anti-religious perspective, the dangers of what religion can do.

Int: So much atheism now, or labelled atheism is anti-religious?

R: I know it is, so he's really struggling with how I can be a nice person, and how he can respect a lot of what I say and do and I can actually be religious.

Int: Isn't it funny how it's almost switched around now?

R: Yeah.

Int: It's like before atheists used to have to defend themselves, they were like, "You don't need religion to be a good person," and now it's like you're not a good person?

R: Yeah now it's like, "How are you a good person and you're a Christian I don't get it?"

Int: Or like how can you be intelligent and rational? I think it's more that yeah.

R: That's the thing, it's more, "How can you be intelligent?" I think he has associated the church with bad activity and attitudes as well.

Like his sister's a lesbian and so I imagine he's had a lot of not necessarily direct feedback, because they've never been part of a church. But he's picked up probably on a lot of the church's conversations about homosexuality over the last few years. That has been so negative in its treatment of ... Yeah they're not going around punching people in the face, but having the attitudes that it has and publicly slating them is actually really damaging for that community. So I think yeah he has seen a negative side of religion

and I think he does believe that it does more harm than good in most situations. So it does surprise him that there are people who actually use it for good purposes.

Int: I know I think I encounter that so much more in the UK and Europe.

R: In the states it's much more commonplace isn't it?

Int: Yeah.

R: It's much more accepted.

Int: Yeah but did he grow up with any religion at all? Is he like second generation, first generation atheist?

R: No his dad's a spiritualist and ...

Int: Really like proper spiritualist?

R: Proper spiritualist, he goes to a service every Sunday where they meet with the dead or whatever they do. His mum is what I would probably call a nominal Christian, so she goes maybe in times of crisis or if there's a particular festival she goes to church and maybe drag the kids along.

Int: Did they get married in a church?

R: I can't remember, I don't know that much.

Int: So nominal?

R: Yeah so for that reason he and I have clashed at points, because it's something that pushes emotional buttons for him and it pushes emotional buttons for me.

Int: Yeah and you're coming from different places or experienced different things?

R: Yeah and he does have this kind of idea that you have to be stupid to have faith, so that can be quite painful when somebody who you love and you want to respect can look at you with an attitude of just thinking that you're an idiot. That's horrible to accept you know?

Int: Yeah I think it is really harsh and I think that's what makes me more in the closet, just in the general public in the UK and in Europe. Because people think you're like stupid or something?

R: Yeah there's something wrong with you.

Int: But it's just experience.

R: That's one of the reasons why I say it, that's one of the reasons why I choose to purposefully say I'm a Christian because I almost want to change people's minds a little bit and make them go, "Oh well at least I think I'm relatively intelligent."

Int: Well people need to be able to see different faces of Christianity and then if people are constantly hiding ...?

R: They do and to know that that's still Christian and I don't want the church to win the battle of saying, "Anybody who doesn't conform to this, this and this theology, is not a Christian." I don't think that's fair, like they don't have the right over that label.

Int: Yeah you own the label just as much as ...?

R: Yeah I'm a Christian because I follow Christ, that's all it needs to be. No matter whether I believe he's God incarnate, whether I believe in the Trinity all of that is kind of irrelevant. Christian in my mind is defined by somebody who follows the way of life set out by Jesus. I want to reclaim that.

Int: Whether historical or whatever?

R: Exactly.

Int: Did he have an okay time at Greenbelt?

R: He did actually yeah, all apart from the last day we had a bit of a heated discussion, but other than that he had a really good time and he does say overall it was great.

Int: You guys were there the whole weekend?

R: Yeah.

Int: That's good, awesome.

R: It was really good.

Int: Did you guys run into anybody else in Borough there?

R: Borough, do you know what I didn't run into many Borough Common people. I don't know why.

Int: Did people go?

R: [Name] didn't do his ticket buying thing this year, which he normally does. So I wonder if that affected ...

Int: I know Drew played, did you watch that?

R: No because I had to leave early in the morning, he was on Monday afternoon, it was really late in the day.

Int: We can end there, thank you very much.

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