

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHURCH IN AN INDIVIDUALIZED WORLD

by

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Abstract

Many local churches in Britain have adopted a neighbourhood paradigm, in which the neighbourhood is seen as the primary locus of mission and ministry. Social change increasingly calls that paradigm into question. This thesis engages in a reflective conversation between the sociological context of neighbourhood churches in the United Kingdom and theological themes which resource the self-understanding of such churches.

Beginning with action research, and then through a review of literature from ecclesial sources, the neighbourhood paradigm is explored and then critiqued. The critique comes particularly through the sociology of individualization. Alternative models of church are explored as they begin to address these issues.

The action research, analysis of the neighbourhood paradigm, and the study of individualization all point to ambivalence and hybridity as key experiences in late modernity.

Theological reflection on individualization and ambivalence develops an understanding of Christian freedom which can engage with ambivalence and social change. This provides a theological resource for relating to the sociological context of local churches. This resource recognizes the essentially mixed and hybrid nature of contemporary lives and contemporary neighbourhoods, and provides a foundation for a renewed hybrid paradigm for neighbourhood ministry.

In memory of my parents.

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FIGURE

Figure 1

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Diagrammatic presentation of Whitehead and Whitehead's method

NOTES

Abbreviation: The Church of England report *Mission-Shaped Church* is referred to as *MSC*.

Bible version: Biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Gender-exclusive language: Some sources cited use gender-exclusive language and I have chosen not to point this out in each individual case.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*The church of Christ in every age,
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.*

Fred Pratt Green.¹

1.1 Beginnings

In 2003 I moved to County Durham after sixteen years of working as Methodist minister in urban areas. Bowburn, an ex-mining village typical of County Durham with about four thousand inhabitants, was to be my home for the next five years, and during the first two I worked part-time with the local Methodist congregation. It was during this period that I undertook the initial research which led to this thesis, focussing on church life within that particular context. One of the key things which came into the foreground very quickly was

¹ Fred Pratt Green, 'The Church of Christ in every age,' in *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymnbook* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1983), no. 804.

the sense of a church which belonged to a very definite and defined place: a neighbourhood. While I had always been aware that Methodist churches frequently thought of themselves as neighbourhood churches with a particular mission to the area in which they were located, in Bowburn this seemed to take more prominence.

However I found that not much had been written of the idea of ‘neighbourhood’. In this it might be contrasted with ‘community’, which has been analysed and argued over, while neighbourhood by comparison has been left relatively untouched. Maybe it is because community is more focussed on social relations that it has received so much more attention. Henderson and Thomas write of a poverty of neighbourhood theory, saying that there is no overarching understanding of what neighbourhood is.² This thesis sets out, at least in part, to address that lack, particularly with regard to the church in neighbourhoods.

Bowburn Methodist Church’s self-understanding of itself as a neighbourhood church seemed to come alongside a more general sense of belonging among many who lived in the village. Several factors about Bowburn pointed to this feeling of neighbourhood. First, the relatively clear-cut boundaries of the place. Looking at a map of County Durham I found it striking how many villages stood out as isolated spots of orange, each settlement separated from its neighbours by open space. Second, Bowburn’s history as a homogeneous mining village. This was a place which had been dominated by a single employer, and in which everyone’s life had been dominated by the coal-mine. While the pit closed forty years before my research started, the coal-mining history of the village has left a continuing print, through memories, allegiances, and symbolic events. Third, the small scale of the village. This is a

² Paul Henderson and David N. Thomas, *Skills in Neighbourhood Work*, third ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 5–6.

place of such a size that many people know one another. A pattern of relationships operated in which people were connected through business, politics, and local concerns.

While this was true of Bowburn, as it is to a varying extent in many other British contexts, more generally this focus on the local place is increasingly contested. It is both called into question by sociologists and also heralded in government policy. This contest has opened up as a result of rapid social change over the last half a century, social change which has loosened people's ties to particular places. As ties have loosened, a political need to emphasise 'community' has opened up. These factors were also evident in Bowburn. For example, government funding directed at neighbourhoods was available within Bowburn to renew and improve facilities. There were also groups active in the village whose *raison d'être* was a focus on the neighbourhood; a local history group, among them. At the same time we came across people who, although they lived in the village, participated little in its communal life. Even those who demonstrated some sense of belonging to Bowburn, worked, shopped, and pursued their leisure interests mainly outside the village. As a result one of the early questions I found myself asking was: How can the church positively engage with a contested neighbourhood?

It is because of this contested situation that churches which continue to understand and define themselves as neighbourhood churches need to be aware of the social grain with or against which they are working. The same can be said of church leaders who continue to encourage churches so to understand themselves. This research reflects on the way in which such self-understanding works against the grain of individual choice and freedom. To change the metaphor, there are currents which both draw people out of neighbourhoods (and they are very strong ones) and currents which draw people back into neighbourhoods. This means that being a neighbourhood church is nowhere near as simple as it might once have been. This

thesis seeks to map out the complexities of the backdrop against which we work. It explores ways of self-understanding which might help churches to make sense of this situation, and seeks to chart a shift from a paradigm based on a relationship with a neighbourhood which is strongly connected socially and economically, into one which recognises the heterogeneous and hybrid nature of late modern life.

This introduction will continue by considering briefly the kinds of social change which are affecting neighbourhoods, and churches within neighbourhoods. It will then give a short account of several key ideas used within the thesis. Finally, it summarises the structure and content of the thesis.

1.2 Social Change

Three aspects of social change will help to sketch out the backdrop against which the thesis is written: individualization; secularisation; and globalization. The first of these is dealt with explicitly in the text and forms a main part of the argument. The other two are significant in shaping neighbourhood churches and neighbourhoods, so should be mentioned here, although they are not treated in depth in the thesis.

A. Individualization

Individualization is a change in the way society is structured. It can be seen as occupying a place somewhere between neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on the autonomy of each person, and communitarianism which sees mutuality and connection as central. Between these two Beck and Beck-Gernsheim write that individualization '(a) is a structural characteristic of highly differentiated societies and (b) does not endanger their integration but actually makes it

possible.’³ These and other individualization theorists⁴ suggest a structural shift is occurring in which individuals become increasingly free from traditional patterns of living and forms of constraint. As freedom increases people shape social structures as individuals, rather than as members of particular classes, genders, or other social groupings. At the same time this does not mean that connections between people cease to matter.

Individualization is therefore about people taking responsibility for their own lives through choices and decisions which at the same time structure society. Society as a broad and reflexively organised⁵ connection between human beings does not cease to exist. Rather the way it is organised changes as individual choices become a more central part of its formation. At the same time this challenges communitarian visions of mutuality and community, as individuals choose for themselves, and pay less heed to the needs and desires of collectives.

At the same time there are contradictory aspects to this change, which make it far from unproblematic for individuals. The need to make choices can frequently be experienced as a burden, and the shift away from expressions of mutuality experienced as a loss. The human response to it is therefore frequently marked by ambivalence, another major theme of this thesis.

B. Secularisation

³ Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), xxi.

⁴ Other key texts referred to: Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity Press, 2000); Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992); Anthony Giddens: *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

⁵ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 20; Giddens, *Consequences*, 38.

Secularisation theory maps a shift in society away from a presumption of religious belief, towards a presumption against belief.⁶ The historical roots of secularisation are deep. The Enlightenment has been seen as a philosophical key,⁷ while there are also political roots identified by Martin.⁸ The contemporary outworking of this change means a shift for the institutional church away from a position of power and influence, and toward the margin. It no longer carries the moral weight and authority which it did in the past, having seen that ebb away over the last forty years. This has been described as a move from Christendom to ‘post-Christendom’.⁹

Yet a counter-discourse is now also expressed, which questions that inevitable progress. What is religious in society has not gone away, but instead seems resurgent. In the late modern world religion takes new and different forms. Its presence is far less homogeneous, and hugely varied.¹⁰ This does not bring any particular form of religious faith back to a position of socially central authority. Churches are seen as one among a wide range of possible expressions of spirituality alongside many others: forms of Christian expression from other parts of the world, other world religions, the return of pagan ideas sometimes connected to ecological themes, and the whole panoply of new age practices and beliefs. This de-secularising move is also reflected in popular culture, through films from ‘The Da Vinci

⁶ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularism 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

⁷ Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁸ Martin, *Secularization*, 4–5.

⁹ This critique can be seen going back to Kierkegaard. For example: Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 22–27. This has been developed more recently through works such as: Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); Jonathan Bartley, *Faith and Politics after Christendom: The Church as a Movement for Anarchy* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006); David B. Clark, *Breaking the Mould of Christendom: Kingdom Community, Diaconal Church and the Liberation of the Laity* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2005).

¹⁰ Peter L. Berger ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Christopher Partridge, *The Reenchantment of the West*, 2 vols (London: T&T Clark, 2004), particularly volume 1, chapter 3, 38–59; Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (London: SCM, 2009), chapter 3, 117–158.

Code’ to ‘The Passion of the Christ’, and as spiritual language and connotations find their way into adverts, music, books and art. Within such a secularising and de-secularising world ‘the religious leaders whose influence extends successfully into public life will need to have grounded their ethical and socio-political convictions in persuasive arguments as one perspective among many, rather than decreeing with authority from on high.’¹¹ They have to find ways of making their case in the market-place of such a varied world.

C. Globalization

From a situation in which local people had some measure of connection with the way their neighbourhood developed, we are now in a situation in which no locality can isolate itself from a wide range of influences operating at a global scale. Companies can withdraw from one place relatively quickly and easily if cheaper labour and conditions more favourable to profit are available elsewhere. Populations are mobile, and therefore almost every place has become or is becoming more heterogeneous. Cultural influences, for example through the food we eat and music we listen to, are far broader than in the past. Ecologically the pace and extent of predicted global warming caused by human activity leaves particular places with no way of escaping its effects. No neighbourhood is an island.

However, there are also questions being raised about a process which has been called ‘glocalisation’.¹² Three examples of this can be noted. First, the same global ecological issues of climate change are leading to those who want to see local places becoming more resilient and self-sufficient.¹³ Second, there are community development

¹¹ Rob Warner, *Secularization and Its Discontents* (London: Continuum, 2010), 115–116.

¹² George Ritzer, ‘Rethinking Globalization: Glocalization/Globalization and Something/Nothing,’ *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 3 (2003): 193–209.

¹³ Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (Totnes: Green Books, 2008).

workers, and academics working in the area of community development who work on the basis that connections on a local scale matter.¹⁴ This has also been picked up by politicians from different parties, being evident in the New Labour administrations of 1997–2010¹⁵ and in the theme of ‘the big society’ used by the conservative party in their 2010 election manifesto, where an ambition to get ‘every adult citizen being a member of an active neighbourhood group’ was stated.¹⁶ Third, contextual thinking, as one marker of post-modernity, is much more inclined to emphasise the possibility of localised meanings over against what is universal, a process which can be negatively described as fragmentation.

1.3 Other Preliminary Clarifications

The contradictions and contests of the processes of change described above are part of the pattern of the era. It is a period characterised by an increase in individual responsibility, a decline in authority, fragmentation, the end of grand narratives and the coming of what is relative. It has often been described as ‘post-modernity’, which implies some discontinuity between modernity and where we are now. Some, however, see this period as the natural outworking of modernity. This is where modernity has always been leading: thus the title of Anthony Giddens’ book *The Consequences of Modernity*. As a result this era has also come to be called ‘late modernity’, or ‘second modernity’.¹⁷ The case for such continuity seems to

¹⁴ John F. Freie, *Counterfeit Community: The Exploitation of Our Longings for Connectedness* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); Alison Gilchrist, *The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2004); Henderson and Thomas, *Skills in Neighbourhood Work*; Michael Pitchford, *Making Spaces for Community Development* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Examples include: United Kingdom, Government white paper, ‘Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation’, (London: The Stationery Office, July 1999), <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm43/4386/4386.htm> (accessed 8th August 2011); Social Exclusion Unit, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal: National Strategy Action Plan* (London: Cabinet Office, 2001).

¹⁶ The Conservative Party, ‘Invitation to Join the Government of Britain: the Conservative Manifesto 2010’, http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010_lowres.pdf (accessed 30th July 2010).

¹⁷ The term ‘second modernity’ is used particularly in: Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2006); e.g. 69–71.

me to be persuasive. Following Giddens I will refer to ‘late modernity’, and during the course of the analysis its continuities with its antecedents will be evident.

Against this backdrop of change churches under late modernity try to continue in faithfulness to Christian tradition. Affected by social change in many and various ways, different possibilities and solutions are tried. Some are more reflected on than others; some are retreats into older patterns, while others seek to work with the *zeitgeist*. Among the variety of possibilities I have identified one significant response in what I have called ‘the neighbourhood paradigm’. It is this paradigm which is the starting point for the thesis, and from which I will explore other different avenues of thought. The usage of the word ‘paradigm’ borrows aspects of Thomas Kuhn’s seminal work on the philosophy of science.¹⁸ For Kuhn a paradigm is a structure of scientific thought, a patterning of concepts and ideas, which both shapes and enables understanding. At its beginning a new paradigm is positive. It provides a framework within which scientific activity can take place, but through the course of scientific exploration the paradigm is placed under strain by continuing experimental results. Scientists discover exceptions to the framework, and facts which do not fit. The paradigm has to be bolstered and buttressed. Many scientists remain committed to the paradigm, because that is the way the truths of their scientific establishment view the world and make sense of it. However, eventually the old paradigm has to give way. It can no longer provide the structure which is necessary. Through a revolutionary process a new paradigm is presented by the *avant-garde* of the discipline; the old gives way to the new, to a paradigm which is better placed to explain the evidence which has been discovered. The use of the idea of paradigm in this context will be considered further in chapter 3.

¹⁸ Kuhn, Thomas S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Two further clarifications might be helpful at this stage. The first is that when I use the word ‘ministry’ I do so in an inclusive way. It refers to what belongs to ‘the whole people of God’ and is not the exclusive preserve of the ordained, or of any group of leaders or elders who are seen as separate or different. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* considers ministry in such a way, starting from ‘the calling of the whole people of God.’¹⁹ The British Methodist Church pressed it further, with statements such as: ‘The Conference affirmed lay ministry in the world as an essential form of the ministry of the Church.’²⁰ The Methodist position is therefore one in which ‘ministry’ is the verb for which ‘church’ is the noun. Ministry is what the church as a whole does together. The ordained minister or the church leader has a particular and representative role within that ministry, but the ministry belongs to all participants.

A final clarification is to do with scale. Already it will be apparent that I am working at both the small scale of a particular place, and at the larger scale of social theory. This will be a characteristic of my method, and an important one. The thesis will seek to allow a deliberate dialogue between the micro and the macro, to maintain a connection between what happens at the smaller scale of neighbourhoods and individuals and what happens at the larger scale of British society.

Both parts of the dialogue are important, as can be seen by considering how the conversation may begin with either partner. The larger scale provides general principles and overarching patterns, for which the smaller provides the detailed working out, including exceptions which arise because of local particularities. The established work of social

¹⁹ World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 20.

²⁰ The Methodist Church, *Minutes of Conference and Directory 1990* (Methodist Conference Office: London, 1990), 8.

theorists is used to provide an understanding from the larger scale which speaks to and explains the local. It helps to make sense of what is happening, and offers a framework within which to interpret experience at the smaller scale. Working in the other direction, the small scale provides the initial experience. Without it no general observations could have been built. It is a point of connection which allows the researcher to check out the conclusions of social theory, and ask whether it can provide an account of what is experienced at the small scale.

It is hoped that this method will show how the church working on both scales contributes to a new paradigm. Both the dialogue between social theory and theology and the experience of local congregations are part of what builds a new ‘constellation of shared commitments’ (to use Kuhn’s phrase).²¹ Working at both scales will thus allow the final conclusions to speak into local ministry, into the practice of local churches, their members and leaders, as well as contributing to an ongoing academic discussion.

1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

Following the Introduction, Chapter Two of the thesis describes the methodology used. This is taken from the discipline of practical theology and explains how a dialogue is drawn out between sociology and theology. The taxonomical work of Graham, Walton and Ward will be used, leading to an adapted form of the method of theological reflection put forward by Whitehead and Whitehead.²² Because of this method I have woven theological reflection and sociological reflection together through the various chapters.

²¹ Kuhn, *Structure*, 181.

²² Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005); James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980).

Chapters 3 and 4 work to remain grounded in contemporary church thinking, exploring the ‘constellation of group commitments’ which is evidence of the paradigm and the process in which it is being replaced. Chapter 3 defines neighbourhood, both through the example of Bowburn, and more generally. It provides a definition, and a consideration of the part which neighbourhoods play in social interactions, including the relationship with the idea of ‘community’. It also offers initial evidence of the neighbourhood paradigm from various contemporary sources.

Evidence for the questioning of the neighbourhood paradigm begins Chapter 4, both through an account of ministry in Bowburn, and from contemporary church documents. It will also explore the contest over neighbourhood already referred to above (Section 1.1). This draws on a range of writers from different disciplines. On one side of the contest a first look at individualization theorists such as Bauman and Beck; on the other side some recent significant reports from central government.²³ It will go on to consider how people feel about the local places with which they engage. Here the major theme of ambivalence will emerge, for many experience some degree of ambivalence about the places where they live. Chapter 4 concludes by exploring four alternative models of church which offer different ways of framing the relationship between the church and its social context.²⁴

The turn towards the general continues in Chapter 5 which develops the sociological part of the dialogue. Individualization, as a late modern working of freedom, is explored as a framework for understanding how neighbourhoods are changed and experienced

²³ For examples see footnote 13 above.

²⁴ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006); Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (London: SCM, 2009); Ward, *Liquid Church*; Church of England, Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

in late modernity. It portrays individualization both generally and as it applies to the neighbourhood. It is explored through the way in which freedom and constraint are now being experienced in such settings. This also continues to draw out the ambivalence which is felt by many living under late modernity. The key individualization theorists considered include Bauman, Beck, Beck-Gernsheim and Giddens.

Chapter 6 picks up the theme of ambivalence explicitly, and follows it through to connect it with hybridity. Bauman's writing on ambivalence is the starting point, which leads on to common strands in the writing of cultural analysts Said and Bhabha, who develop the idea of hybridity as a response to hegemony.²⁵ Chapters 5 and 6 each conclude with theological reflection which builds a theology of freedom with which to address individualization.²⁶

The final chapter seeks to draw conclusions for the situation explored in the more grounded early chapters, in the light of the theory explored in the later chapters. Returning to the alternative models explored in chapter 4, the theoretical exploration of the thesis will provide the basis for critiquing and drawing together elements of these models (and particularly to develop Christopher Baker's idea of a hybrid church²⁷) which form the basis for an emerging alternative paradigm.

²⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

²⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inza and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 1974). Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: the Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981); Joann Wolski Conn, *Spirituality and Personal Maturity* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989); Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996).

²⁷ Baker, *Hybrid Church*.

CHAPTER 2

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS METHODOLOGY

Now judgment is in the power of the one judging in so far as he can judge about his own judgment; for we can pass judgment upon the things which are in our power. But to judge about one's own judgment belongs only to reason.

St Thomas Aquinas.²⁸

2.1 Theological Reflection

This research is theological. As such it belongs in the field of the humanities. The methodology is explicitly one of theological reflection, and adapts a model developed by Whitehead and Whitehead described in section 2.2.²⁹ It involves setting up a conversation between three partners: the researcher's own experience; information from the culture in which research occurs; and Christian tradition.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas *The Disputed Questions on Truth* 24.2.

²⁹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*.

More generally theological reflection as described by Graham, Walton and Ward is a process in which theology is seen as practical, contextual, and dialogical. It is practical in that it must engage with the economic, political and social world. Theology which attempts to be purely theoretical will tend to separate faith perspectives from the world, when that world is the arena in which faith is lived, and in which theology must account for its perspectives. 'Theology emerges as a practical problem-solving and inductive discipline, which connects with practical issues in a way which illuminates and empowers.'³⁰

Theological reflection is contextual in that it is affected and shaped by the situation in which it occurs. Part of the theology is the theologian, working in a specific place or milieu which affects the definition of issues, the way they are addressed, the tradition chosen within which to work, and its interpretation. The person I am, my personal history and situation, affect the kind of theology I do; and so does the ministry context in which I do it.

We would wish to argue that theology has always been contextual. ... The earliest developments of Christian writing and talking about God, the beginnings of coherent and public communications about the meaning of faith and the nature of Christian truth-claims arose in response to very specific practical circumstances.³¹

Part of the context is also that of rapid social change, and one of the themes of this thesis arises from an analysis of aspects of that change. Practical theology is as affected by that change as any other part of life. John Reader has proposed that practical theology needs to be reconstructed, because it refers to and appeals to categories although they are dead.³² These are Ulrich Beck's 'zombie categories'; they include the idea of neighbourhood, while Reader extends this to the 'sense of place'.³³ Without accepting this argument in its entirety, it is clear that social change is having a profound effect on the context from which this research emerges.

³⁰ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 5.

³¹ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 10.

³² John Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1.

³³ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 203; Reader, *Reconstructing*, 19ff.

Theological reflection is dialogical in that it engages both with a range of experiences and with other disciplines. It seeks to locate faith in relation to the insights of lived experience and the search for human knowledge and wisdom, and ‘enables the connections between human dilemmas and divine horizons to be explored, drawing on a wide range of academic disciplines including social sciences, psychotherapeutic and medical disciplines and the arts.’³⁴

Because this is theological research I approach it from a point of view which stands against positivism. A positivist approach sees scientific method as normative. It begins from hypotheses which minimise and isolate variables, and seeks validation through repeatable experiments. Such approaches are entirely appropriate to explore certain aspects of the world. They are the methodology for natural scientists and for some social scientists. In contrast, my research grows from an impure, chaotic, rich and multifaceted situation. Here variables cannot be minimised or isolated without changing the very nature of what is happening. Where hypotheses are used, the variables cannot be controlled with any rigour. There is also no way of repeating what has been done; the same conditions cannot be reproduced. This approach is influenced by the work of Donald Schön who suggested that a move away from the positivist approach of ‘Technical Rationality’ was needed. Schön writes of our becoming increasingly ‘aware of the importance to actual practice of phenomena—complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value-conflict—which do not fit the model of Technical Rationality.’³⁵ and argues for a move to ‘Reflection-in-Practice’.³⁶

³⁴ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 6.

³⁵ Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 39.

³⁶ Schön, *Reflective Practitioner*, 49–69.

The research also has a philosophical basis in phenomenology. Phenomenology takes experience as fundamental and unique, bonds together the experience with the one who experiences, and sees reflection on this bond as an essential part of our humanity. Experience is the source of knowledge. This is the point at which the self and the world meet. Idealists seek meaning in the self, in the thinking of the mind; empiricists seek meaning in the world, in the sense-data which inform our mind; but phenomenologists see understanding as co-constituted by self and world in experience. It is recognised that as we experience anything we are involved with it. The experiencing subject and the experienced object are not separated, but seen as relating to each other. Meaning is constituted by ourselves and the world in relationship, by a back and forth interaction between ourselves and any phenomena—whether resulting from some thing, from a person, or from a complex experience.

More than experience lies at the root of this research: action provides its genesis. This research began in active ministry. Its source lies in reflective practice within the village of Bowburn where I worked part-time as Methodist minister. Within that situation, I looked for a movement towards change and renewal, through understanding. The research therefore aims to be applicable to the practice of the ministry of the people of God, by reaching understanding through reflection in order to achieve change.

The research was also shared. For the first two years I worked with a group of nine residents of Bowburn (hereafter called ‘the site team’) first in reflecting on our local area, and our experience as Christians within it, and then in implementing a project in ministry together in the village.

2.2 A Theological Method

A. *Speaking of God in public*

Graham et. al. identify seven methods of theological reflection, each emerging from particular theological traditions. These seven methods are ‘ideal types’, sociological models used as a tool to analyse various phenomena. Rather than describing the world as it is, in all its complexity, they seek to abstract various patterns and relationships to present a simplified picture. As Graham et. al. write in their introduction: ‘Ideal types were necessarily more abstract than the realities to which they pointed; but they served as essentially heuristic devices to aid description and explanation.’³⁷ No one of the models can be found in isolation, unaffected by wider theological complexities, but they provide a useful tool for analysing and understanding the task of theological reflection.

These models or methods are described as ‘genuine, if stylized, representations of authentic theological traditions.’³⁸ So, in the work of any particular theologian facets of different models will be found, although one may seem to predominate. In the same way, in this thesis, there will be some interplay between different methods. Three particular models present different approaches to the issue of how theology relates to experience and culture: the methods of correlation, canonical narrative theology, and praxis.³⁹ This methodological description starts with its most prominent part, the correlative method, which Graham et al. identify with the work of the Whiteheads. A brief summary of the correlative method will help to indicate why it is significant for this thesis, but also why some counterweight is

³⁷ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 11.

³⁸ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 12.

³⁹ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, chapters 5, 3 and 6 respectively.

needed. This counterweight can be provided by aspects of the canonical narrative method and the method of praxis.

The correlative method is summarised in Chapter Five of *Theological Reflection: Methods* headed ‘Speaking of God in Public.’⁴⁰ Correlation occurs where there is a systematic understanding of the interrelation of two or more things; in this case theology and other publicly acknowledged ways of viewing the world. Graham et al. see an example of this public engagement in Acts 17:16–33: St Paul’s preaching in the market-place in Athens, before being taken to meet the city council. ‘Paul must necessarily enter into the cosmopolitan, pluralist world of the Athenians on its own terms, and consider if their ‘objects of worship’ are entirely spurious or contain the seeds of authentic faith.’⁴¹ Graham et al. suggest that Luke portrays Paul ‘as affirming the intellectual energy of the Athenians’ while being ‘in no doubt that, once explained, the good news of Christ crucified and risen will exercise a normative impact over indigenous world-views.’⁴² From the history of theology three other writers are chosen to illustrate the way theology relates to wider culture, from Justin Martyr to David Tracey.

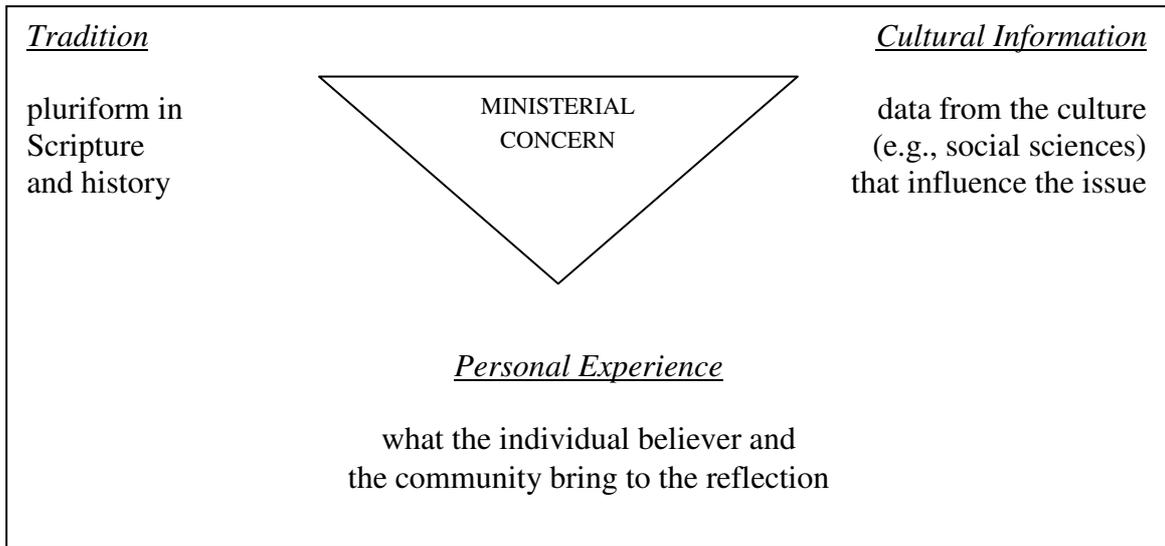
The Whiteheads develop this method as a conversation between three fields of perception: personal experience, theological tradition, and culture; with that conversation moving through three phases: attending, affirming, and action. The three partners in the conversation are seen as constantly relating to one another, with a triangular diagram being used to indicate this (see figure 1). First, each of these fields will be briefly described; this will be followed by an account of the three phases of the conversation.

⁴⁰ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 138–169.

⁴¹ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 142.

⁴² Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 142.

FIGURE ONE: DIAGRAMMATIC PRESENTATION OF WHITEHEAD AND WHITEHEAD'S METHOD⁴³



B. Three fields of perception

Personal experience is defined by the Whiteheads in three parts: as ‘that set of ideas, feelings, biases and insights which a particular minister and community bring to pastoral reflection’; as individual experience rather than ‘common human experience’ (i.e. cultural experience); and as showing ‘the strong influence of one’s culture and religious tradition.’⁴⁴ Even as this field is distinguished from the other two, it is therefore joined to them, and constantly interacts with them. The main experiential work of this research is based in the practice of ministry accounted for in Chapter 3, Section 3.3. The comments on phenomenology above give an indication of the philosophical basis behind the use of this material. While chapter 3 provides particularly concentrated input about experience, to maintain the conversation between the three fields other chapters also include aspects of experience.

⁴³ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 14.

⁴⁴ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 53.

Theological tradition is explored in a chapter of *Method and Ministry* written by Eugene Ulrich and William Thompson. Although described by the Whiteheads as ‘pluriform in Scripture and history’, Ulrich and Thompson focus much more on scripture.⁴⁵ However, this thesis will draw on the wider theological tradition as the primary source of insight. It will mostly engage with theologians whose writing has a bearing on the key theme of freedom, and particularly liberation theologians and those influenced by them. Scriptural insights are also involved, however they will be more in the background. This theological work is found in most concentrated form in chapters 5 and 6, but, as with personal experience, also appears substantially in other parts of the thesis, so that the conversation between the three fields of theological reflection is maintained.

Culture in *Method in Ministry* is first defined generally and broadly, summed up in the short definition ‘culture is the way of life of a social group’,⁴⁶ and by reference to a definition by Don Browning, ‘a set of symbols, stories (myths), and norms for conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally to the world in which it lives.’⁴⁷ The authors then focus in on the social sciences as providing ‘the intellectual perspective of the age’;⁴⁸ and ‘interpretive categories, research methods, and findings [as] important tools in understanding the contemporary situation.’⁴⁹ They are keen to point out in doing this that social science does not take precedence over theology: ‘What the social sciences provide for the community of faith is not answers but access to resources.’⁵⁰ This would seem not to give sufficient weight to social sciences within the boundaries of their own

⁴⁵ Ulrich and Thompson, in Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 41–42.

⁴⁶ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 69.

⁴⁷ Don Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 73; in Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 69.

⁴⁸ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 72.

⁴⁹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 76.

⁵⁰ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 76.

disciplines, and the importance of attending to social science will be evident as this thesis proceeds. It is found in more concentrated form in chapters 5 and 6, but also substantially in other places.

C. Three phases of reflection

Attending involves listening to the voices of all three fields openly, seeking to set aside our own priorities and perspectives. The Whiteheads refer to the skills of attending being: ‘to listen actively, alert to the content, feeling, and context of communication; and to respond accurately, demonstrating that I have understood its meaning from the communicator’s frame of reference.’⁵¹ This process involves a necessary awareness of the tentativeness of theological statements, a readiness to accept the provisionality of our own perspective, and an openness to ‘the truth that may reside, half-hidden, in my own and others’ ongoing experience.’⁵² This skill is needed with regard to all three poles of theological reflection. The language used here is borrowed from pastoral care and counselling. It is language about listening to people, particularly in situations when the psychological and relational need for a non-judgmental attitude is critical. I would argue that, in the context of theological reflection, something different is happening which changes the nature of attending—it needs to be more critical. The Whiteheads refer briefly to issues of relating critically to what we read or hear when writing about attending within the theological field, but this aspect needs to be strengthened and given higher priority.

With regard to experience the role of the participant observer includes both involvement and a critical approach. There is ambiguity in relating to experience as something to which I both listen and contribute. Attending critically is part of that ambiguity.

⁵¹ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 84.

⁵² Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 85.

Even as I attend, I am actively formulating my own interpretation of what is being said, and I cannot step outside this process, although I must engage in it with as full an awareness as possible. What is true of experience is also true of theology and culture. As I come to read theology or social science I do so from a particular personal and social context, and my attending—and thus my reading—is shaped by that context. We can say that attending implies a particular hermeneutic stance.

In the second phase the various voices are allowed to assert themselves ‘however much this challenges the other partners in the reflection.’⁵³ The task of the theologian is to enable each partner in the conversation to make its point. Whitehead and Whitehead draw a comparison with assertion ‘as an interpersonal skill’, in which individuals need to be able to find the maturity to take a stand between a non-assertive position in which personal views ‘always give way to others’, and an aggressive position in which ‘my own needs and views must always take precedence.’⁵⁴ Although they do not say so explicitly it seems that Whitehead and Whitehead are looking for two assertions to take place. One is the assertion of each partner in the conversation between experience, culture and tradition. The other is the assertion of the person engaged in reflection. We might therefore see two aspects to this process. First the work of critically articulating the partners in the conversation, thinking and writing in such a way that the conversation can be perceived by others; here experience, culture and tradition are allowed to assert themselves with the theologian acting as an advocate. Then the expression of a judgment, the outcome of the conversation, as the theologian expresses and asserts her or his own conclusions. These two tasks, of advocacy and of judgment, each play their part in assertion.

⁵³ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 95.

⁵⁴ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 92–95.

Assertion once again draws attention to the contextual nature of theological reflection. There can be no assertion which does not happen from a particular position. It is coloured by the particular background and understanding of the theologian. There are two general ways in which this will affect the outcome of this reflective conversation. First, because this is Christian theology, the field of tradition is given some priority. ‘The trilogy that this assertion stage instigates supposes some mutuality among the partners. This mutuality is not a strict equality; the Christian Tradition and its information enjoy a position of privilege and priority in theological reflection.’⁵⁵ In this my own approach agrees with that of the Whiteheads. Christian values, expressed through particular traditions and communities, are what shape this work. But secondly, that there is a parallel but different prioritising of experience arising from the situations in which ordinary people find themselves. Arising from the influence of liberation theology there is a sense of beginning from action, from the practice of ministry: practice first, and reflection following from it. This emphasis on practice is also evident in the end point of the reflection process, concluding as it does with decision-making, which points back to practice and action.

The contextual and practical outworking of theological reflection has already emerged through early parts of the chapter. It is an integral part of this that the process ends by providing a basis on which decisions can be made, and action taken. The Whiteheads conclude their method with decision making; this thesis can only make proposals. However, it will be a mark of the success of this work if it provides answers to questions about action, for example: How does this research lead towards effective action? In what ways can its conclusions be seen as workable?

⁵⁵ Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 95.

D. Adapting the method

Having reviewed this method as providing a framework for the research of this thesis, we can return to the characterisation of the correlative method by Graham et al., who draw out three main criticisms of this model at the end of their account. These criticisms are not intended to render the method invalid, but rather to indicate its limitations. Awareness of these limitations can then lead to adaptations in the way the method is employed to minimise their effects.

The first criticism questions how the source of the cultural or experiential partner is chosen. ‘What kinds of experience are referred to, and how will it be articulated? What disciplines and methods will be adopted to bring such experience to light? Whose experience is deemed authoritative?’⁵⁶ The second concerns critics such as Milbank who point to how social sciences ‘have attempted to supplant the overarching vision of Christian theology, to the extent that liberal theology absorbs secular values without realizing it does so.’⁵⁷ This seems to be about the relative status of the two sides of the dialogue, and specifically about whether some form of human experience is allowed to take precedence over the revealed story of faith. An example of this tendency is seen in Reuther’s work as she ‘argues that the Christian tradition stands in need of a radical corrective through the inclusion of extra-theological voices’ particularly because of the patriarchy and androcentrism evident in the tradition.⁵⁸ The third criticism relates to the cultural context within which much correlative work has been done, tending to address ‘existential dilemmas rather than political concerns. ... The danger is that a privatized, individualistic model of religious faith goes unchallenged,

⁵⁶ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 167.

⁵⁷ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 168; see also: John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

⁵⁸ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 163.

and that liberal theology simply baptizes culture without developing an independent critique.’⁵⁹ Ruether’s work is seen as an exception to this, and feminist theologians and others from the liberation traditions are seen to ‘offer a critique of liberal theology’s retreat into forms of personal, cognitive belief.’⁶⁰

This thesis, although using a correlative method to give pattern to its enquiry, seeks to address these criticisms by drawing on two other methods: the canonical narrative method, and the method of praxis. These provide a counterweight to the correlative method, helping to address its weaknesses. These criticisms will now be addressed, indicating how drawing on the other two methods can mitigate them.

The first criticism concerns how partners for dialogue are chosen, and the kind of experience to which attention is given. This has been addressed in the research process by giving attention to a number of different voices including those from the local neighbourhood scene. Among them: a group of Christians resident in Bowburn; various advocates of community action; and the people for whom neighbourhood continues to matter, including those who are disadvantaged.

The second criticism can be partly answered by recognising that social and cultural ‘partners’ can be criticised and called to account, as well as seen as supporting or criticising Christian tradition. While this thesis will attend to accounts from social science, it will also seek to explore their basis, consider alternative views, and seek ideas which both resonate with Christian tradition and suggest ways forward which resonate with Christian discipleship. In doing so it will seek to draw on the insights of the canonical narrative method, which places a high emphasis on God’s place in the process of discernment and reflection. At the

⁵⁹ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 168.

⁶⁰ Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 168.

same time it needs to challenge the criticism, by holding to the assertion that God's place in the process is not necessarily held by Christian tradition or by the Bible. These are the products of two things: God and fallible humanity. This means that while God is discovered primarily within them, God is not discovered solely within them, nor infallibly within them. This is why the whole idea of dialogue is necessary: so that a process of discernment and reflection can resolve questions of where God is to be found among the various voices.

The third criticism is that this method has a particular cultural setting of its own, which leads to it addressing individual existential concerns, rather than corporate political ones, so that it is not sufficiently open to political action. This criticism depends at least in part on the starting point of the process. If the issue with which we are concerned is one of corporate social life, the criticism is already partly addressed. By bringing in the influence of the praxis method as well, insisting on corporate experience as the starting point, and proposals for action as the conclusion, this criticism should be adequately addressed.

By following this method of reflection, the idea of the neighbourhood paradigm and the resources needed to replace it, have emerged. The various phases of the method have not been separated out in what follows, but rather provide the foundations to the finished thesis. The account of the outcome of the reflective process will start with the particular, considering the evidence for a neighbourhood paradigm, and the way it has been evident in Bowburn, and then similarly the way the paradigm has come to be questioned. After that the thesis will turn to more general themes, taking account of social science and theological perspectives, before returning to issues of neighbourhood ministry in the final chapter. So the next chapter takes us into the neighbourhood paradigm.

CHAPTER 3.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEFINED: BOWBURN AND BEYOND

In the Same Space

*The setting of houses, cafés, the neighborhood
that I've seen and walked through years on end:*

*I created you while I was happy, while I was sad,
with so many incidents, so many details.*

And, for me, the whole of you is transformed into feeling.

C.P. Cavafy⁶¹

Those neighbourhoods, which seem to be capable of carrying such emotional weight, 'created' through the course of life-cycles and 'transformed into feeling', can be explored in various ways. This chapter sets out to do so in three ways, before offering evidence for the shared convictions of the neighbourhood paradigm, convictions which view neighbourhood as

⁶¹ C.P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), 122.

the primary focus for mission and ministry. The first exploration is the description of a neighbourhood, the place in which I worked part-time as Methodist minister, the village of Bowburn, County Durham. I describe Bowburn as a neighbourhood, but what is a neighbourhood? The church's ministry within neighbourhoods can be illuminated by more precise understanding of what neighbourhoods are and what shapes human experience of them. Such understanding can arise from example, but it also comes from definition. The second exploration will provide a working definition of neighbourhood with something of the philosophy which lies behind it. Part of this definition lies in the particularity of neighbourhoods, and so the definition follows the particularity of the example. The third exploration is the account of a project in neighbourhood ministry within Bowburn, which took place between 2003 and 2005. That project was based on the neighbourhood paradigm. Those of us who took part in it began from a presumption that the neighbourhood in which we lived was the primary place where the church should act together. We prioritised the neighbourhood as the primary locus of ministry. That third exploration will therefore lead well into the fourth section which offers documentary evidence for that attitude being more widely shared, in a way which warrants the use of 'paradigm' language.

As a preliminary to this I will explore further the idea of a neighbourhood paradigm as a metaphor of the self-understanding of the church. There are two particular points of similarity between Kuhnian scientific paradigms and my own use of the word 'paradigm'. First, paradigms express the shared commitments of groups or communities. In his postscript to the third edition Kuhn gives some account of these communities.⁶² The communities of the church can be similarly accounted for. They include the policy makers and opinion formers within national churches, denominational governance structures, and,

⁶² Kuhn, *Structure*, 176–181.

influenced by these, the wider membership of local churches and the decision makers within them. I am suggesting therefore that ‘the neighbourhood paradigm’ is a shared commitment of these communities. Kuhn goes on to look at ‘paradigm as the constellation of group commitments’, which he identifies as ‘symbolic generalizations’, models, values and exemplars.⁶³ Such shared commitments also underlie ‘the neighbourhood paradigm’, and Kuhn’s language remains interestingly pertinent. Specifically, the shared commitments of the church can be seen as they are worked out through models of church, and through values based on community and connection. This thesis will spend some time considering models of church which are now challenging the neighbourhood paradigm, while theological reflection in Chapters 5 and 6 provide an exploration of some of the shared values which can contribute towards a new paradigm.

The second similarity with scientific paradigms is that the neighbourhood paradigm is a mindset which engenders commitment. Challenging and overcoming the paradigm involves challenging and overcoming the commitment. Just like scientific paradigms, the neighbourhood paradigm has now been put under pressure; but unlike scientific paradigms which come under pressure from the scientific process itself, it is forces of social change which act upon it. The ‘group commitments’ of the church concerning neighbourhoods are being challenged and need to change. Because of this, new ways of understanding the church-in-the-world are needed which take account of our changing social context. It is missional activity, rather than scientific progress, which needs a firmer basis from which to work. This paradigm shift is a necessary step for the continued functioning of local churches.

⁶³ Kuhn, *Structure*, 181–191.

Using such an idea of paradigm in theology is not new. Bosch (who uses the idea extensively himself) gives references to a number of other theological writers who have used it. In particular he notes Capra's suggestion that there are 'macro-paradigms', world views which change every few hundred years, and suggests that 'it is abundantly clear that the twentieth century ... shows evidence of such a major shift in perceiving reality.'⁶⁴ Bosch's work also follows Kuhn's in looking back into history to identify previous paradigms. In the case of the kind of social paradigm I am proposing there are also such historical examples which can be briefly mentioned here. Early house churches fitted their own multi-cultural urban context. Meeks describes how the cities of Asia Minor were the primary context of the early church. The churches were both ethnically and socially mixed, and not limited by trade or ethnic neighbourhoods or quarters.⁶⁵ The paradigm underlying this form of church would have fallen with the Constantinian establishment of Christian faith. Similarly, early mediaeval minster churches provided a missionary model among the scattered hamlets of Anglo-Saxon Britain. Organised around a tribal area the paradigm was one which connected with local political structures. A predominant minster church was the 'centre for missionary activity', with small communities of priests or monks going out into the *parochia* from there.⁶⁶ Later, with the rise of dissenting groups after the Reformation, gathered congregations became a frequent pattern. A dissenting chapel might be a focus drawing people from a wide area. With the coming of the new dissent many early Methodist churches would have taken this form.

⁶⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991) 185; see also Hans Küng and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, trans. Margaret Köhl (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989).

⁶⁵ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 29, 76–79.

⁶⁶ N. J. G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: the Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

So how is the paradigm found expressed in Bowburn and in the wider contemporary world? To explore this we must first look at the example of a neighbourhood, and then define neighbourhood more systematically.

3.1 A Particular Place—Bowburn

This research grew out of experience of ministry with a Methodist congregation in Bowburn, County Durham, and with other Christians in that village. With a population of about 4,000 at the 2001 census Bowburn is one of many ex-mining villages in County Durham.⁶⁷ The chapel had a more central place in community life during the coal mining years, but this changed through the final years of the twentieth century. The small group of worshippers who continue in that place largely come from the village. What continues to motivate them in their Christian practice together is partly a desire to see the patterns of life and faith in which they were brought up continuing; but it also owes something to a sense of connection to the village. The chapel belongs there, and is seen by the congregation as playing some part in the life of the place.

A. Place

This description of Bowburn has drawn on: a situation analysis of the village; interviews with people living there; and a research project undertaken over a period of six months in 2005. The researcher also lived in the village between 2003 and 2008, and therefore draws on personal experience.

This ex-mining village four miles south of Durham stands at Junction 61 of the A1(M) trunk road, which effectively cuts one end of the village off from the rest. The A177

⁶⁷ All census figures are taken from: United Kingdom Office for National Statistics, Neighbourhood Statistics, Key Figures for 2001 Census: Census Area Statistics, <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/> (accessed 13th August 2010).

runs from the motorway junction north through the larger part of the village towards Durham. Bowburn has a mixed housing stock; the oldest comprises terraces of two and three bedroomed houses built for colliery workers about ninety years ago. The most numerous housing groups are semidetached, three bed-roomed properties, along with a large proportion of single bedroom bungalows. Originally council built, many have subsequently been bought by individual residents. A further tranche of building has continued from about thirty years ago to the present, being mainly owner-occupied houses, with some shared equity, ranging from two to five bedrooms. Further land within the existing village boundary is now being used for new residential building involving a partnership of council, housing association and private companies.

House prices in Bowburn rose significantly prior to 2006 as housing in Durham itself became very expensive. This also led to a significant trend for buy-to-let purchases in Bowburn, much of it angled towards the student market. Durham has a high number of students compared to the national average. Until 2010 Bowburn was also in the catchment area of Durham Johnston Comprehensive School, a school with a high reputation among local parents, some of whom are willing to pay a premium to live within the area served by the school.

Community facilities and shops are scattered around the village, although with a significant concentration around the southern part of the main village (north of the A1(M)). These include a community hall (formerly a miner's welfare association hall), a new doctors' surgery, a youth centre, a library, a Junior school and an infant school, a Methodist church, an Anglican church, three pubs, a working men's club, and a variety of shops. Bowburn Hall Hotel has a restaurant with a good regional reputation. The part of the village south of the A1(M) is less well served, having a newsagents shop, a pub, and a couple of other commercial

premises. Bus connections are good, with four or five buses an hour into Durham for most of the day.

The Community Centre is well used. It opens on weekdays for a drop-in coffee morning. Because of its good central position in the North-East with excellent road links it is a popular venue for events covering the region. It is owned by the Coal Industry Welfare Board. One or two local groups meet, including a local history group, which has been active in raising money to renovate union banners and provide a memorial to miners from Bowburn who died in the course of their work. The local youth centre carries out well respected attached youth work. While this serves the needs of many young people, with a wide range of organised activities, there is a group of young people who fall outside its provision. These young people are those who seem to have opted out of organised youth work, and spend a lot of time outside the Co-op supermarket.

Bowburn has always been an industrial village, growing up around local coal mining. A first pit sunk in 1906 merged in 1931 with the nearby Tursdale colliery, among the biggest in the Durham coalfield. Employment reached a peak of around 2,350 in the 1940s, and was still as high as 2,100 in 1960, but the pit was closed as uneconomic in 1967. Now the village's location close to the motorway makes it a good site for industrial development. The land to the West of the A177 comprises two industrial parks. The southern one is made up of warehouses and small employers. The northern one is more substantial and includes several larger scale employers, the biggest of which is Henderson's, a garage door manufacturer employing over one hundred people and Bowburn's largest employer when the research was carried out.

Statistics from the census for Bowburn reveal a population which is almost ninety-nine per cent white, and over eighty per cent Christian. Bowburn North is ranked 116 out of

320 for deprivation within Durham district, while Bowburn South stands at 270 out of 320⁶⁸.

While there are other much more deprived areas in County Durham, there are significant factors which need to be taken into account, particularly in the north of the village. Figures for health, education and housing all suggest a more deprived population than the average either nationally or within the Durham non-metropolitan district. There are 5.7 per cent fewer people claiming to be in good health in Bowburn than in Durham, and 7.5 per cent fewer than nationally, while those in 'not good' health are 3 per cent higher than Durham and 4.6 per cent higher than nationally. There are also more with a limiting long-term illness.

Unemployment is slightly higher than national and Durham figures, but this is insignificant compared to the 12.6 per cent in Bowburn who are of working age but with a limiting long-term illness, 2.5 per cent above Durham and 4.5 per cent above England. Those with no qualifications are 6.9 per cent more than nationally and 8.8 per cent higher than Durham, while those with level 4/5 qualifications (first degree or equivalent) are 6.6 per cent lower than nationally, and 8.7 per cent lower than Durham. Out of all the households 26.8 per cent live in council rented properties, about twice the national average.

In their own conversations about Bowburn members of the site team commented that the local environment had seen noticeable improvement over the last few years.

Although there was also a feeling that the village is shabby and untidy, generally we felt Bowburn was a good place to live. There was awareness of a relatively minor problem with drugs, with some activity being based in land around the industrial estate. The site team noted that car insurance in Bowburn is fairly cheap, with car crime reportedly being very low.

Some areas of the village stand out as environmental eye-sores. On Prince Charles Avenue

⁶⁸ Durham County Council, 'The Index of Deprivation 2007: Report of Ann Campbell, Head of Corporate Policy,' Durham County Council Cabinet Papers, <http://content.durham.gov.uk/PDFRepository/ID2007CabinetReportandtables.pdf> (accessed 13th August 2010).

the building which houses the Co-op supermarket is owned by large property management company, with no other links to Bowburn, and the land around it is uncared for. The Coal Industry Welfare Board also have buildings and land locally, and they seem generally slow to respond to local needs.

Traffic has a significant impact on the local environment. Lorries to the local industrial estates pass through the village. In addition, although Durham is signposted from the motorway one junction further north, many people recognise the route through Bowburn as quicker and more convenient when arriving in Durham from the south. Bowburn is known by many in Durham as a place which they pass through. The village is increasingly dependent on a car culture, with many facilities that people use being outside the village. There is some social exclusion of those without access to private transport. The facilities affected include: adult education; a wider range of shops; children's play areas; and leisure facilities.

In Bowburn social change and economic change have both been evident. The closure of the pit in 1967 had a major impact on the village which entered a period of economic decline. However, this was mitigated by several factors. Continued coalmining in nearby villages provided some employment until the late 1970s, while in the late 1960s the A1(M) motorway was built. This helped to place Bowburn well for industrial development. In 1966 an asbestos factory opened, and in 1969 Henderson's started manufacturing garage doors on the industrial estate. The changing pattern of employment, with the community becoming less homogeneous, came just as the social changes of the 60s were also making themselves felt. This included changes in patterns of religious practice and observance. These various factors mean that Bowburn has gone through a period of profound change, and that change continues.

B. Churches

The connection between village life and the Methodist church in such contexts has been well documented,⁶⁹ although Bruce has argued that this can be overstated.⁷⁰ It seems fair to assume that the Methodist Church had a similar connection with the life of Bowburn, as is asserted by the perceptions and memories of local congregation members. Miners and their families shaped and were shaped by the local Methodist chapels. Aural evidence suggests a close community, with nearly every household in the village having someone within it who worked in the coal mining industry. People knew one another and were bound together by that common source of economic life.

There were two Methodist chapels in the village which came together in about 1964. The Anglican church's involvement in Bowburn was provided by a small chapel built in 1926, until a new parish church was erected in the centre of the village council estate in 1978. It was poorly built and used, although in a very poor state of repair, until September 2004 when it was closed out of concern for health and safety. The congregation continued to worship, using the Methodist Church for about four years, until they were able to open a new church in 2008.

We were aware of about one hundred Bowburn residents attending church each week at the time of the research: about twenty-five worshipping at the Methodist church, about forty-five at the parish church, and others worshipping outside Bowburn. There were probably others we did not know of. The site team included three people who either worshipped at churches outside Bowburn regularly, or had people within their household who

⁶⁹ See primarily: Robert Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁷⁰ Steve Bruce, 'Teesdale, Deerness and Peterlee: Methodists and Anglicans 1851–2001,' (lecture, St John's College, Durham, Church:North Conference, 26th February 2011).

did so. We also knew of others who worshipped outside Bowburn at: the nearest Roman Catholic church in Coxhoe; Emmanuel church, in the Newfrontiers group;⁷¹ the Baptist church in Durham; Elvet Methodist, a larger city centre church; and the Salvation Army in Cornforth.

The Methodist Church has a membership of forty-seven, however a number of these do not attend regularly. There is one service on a Sunday at 10.30 a.m. Sixty out of sixty-eight people on the community roll are drawn from within Bowburn, the others from neighbouring villages. Volunteers run a Thursday morning drop-in for parents with toddlers and older people, with about twenty-five adults and fifteen toddlers attending. There is also a small team running a Kid's Club for four to eight year olds on Tuesday evenings, attendance averaging twelve, and a small Women's Fellowship which meets twice a month during the summer, again with about twelve attending.

Baptisms are significant occasions at the Methodist Church. People who have very little connection with the church will come strongly supported by their family and friends. It is often the case that the visiting family outnumbers the regular congregation. Parents and those who come to support them can appear unsure of how to behave, unfamiliar with church worship and sometimes unable or unwilling to join in with hymns or prayers. Families who have had children baptised do not normally return to church for any other Sunday worship, unless it is a subsequent baptism. Those who attend regularly speak of this with some puzzlement. They want an open baptismal policy. They are glad that people want to come to church for their babies' baptisms, but they also feel overwhelmed, and lacking confidence in how to relate to these large family groups. Local funerals can also see the

⁷¹ See 'New Frontiers', <http://www.newfrontierstogether.org/> (accessed 13th August 2010).

chapel full of people, most of whom are not regular church goers. Because these take place during the week on separate occasions, there is less impact on the life of the local church.

Lay leadership in the Parish Church is strong, with fifteen lay people, including the officers, on the monthly Parochial Church Council. A worship committee meets monthly mainly to arrange service details to fit with the lectionary and the church year. The people are drawn mostly from Bowburn (sixty-one out of the seventy-five recorded). There are seventeen who live outside Bowburn. The church also has a social committee meeting to arrange events to raise funds. For a number of years at the time of this research these events focused on fund raising for the new church building which opened in 2008.

The parish has decided not to be open to the ministry of ordained women. It has been commented that although this is the case those who disagree with this position are able to express their views freely. This has caused some difficulties in finding a new parish priest, as the other parishes involved in the appointment do not take the same position.

3.2 Defining Neighbourhood

This brief portrait of a local neighbourhood and its churches provides a starting point for considering how 'neighbourhood' might be defined. Collins English Dictionary offers three definitions of neighbourhood: '1. the immediate environment; surroundings. 2. a district where people live. 3. the people in a particular area.'⁷² This immediately highlights two aspects of neighbourhood: the place and the people; the geographical and the social.

Although neighbourhood might sometimes be used in a purely geographical way ('in the neighbourhood of' can mean 'in close geographical proximity') the root meaning includes the

⁷² *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus*, s.v. 'neighbourhood'.

social aspect, and involves a consideration of what a neighbour is. Neighbourhood is a place which has significance for the people who live or work within it.

A. Particular neighbourhoods

There is a particularity about neighbourhoods. They are experienced in particular places and particular forms. Bowburn is a place with its own history and shape. There may be common themes and elements shared with other places, particularly other ex-mining villages in County Durham, but none will be identical. Philip Sheldrake has written of the particularity of place,⁷³ and his reflections can also be applied to the particularity of neighbourhoods. He refers to Duns Scotus who ‘attached great importance to individuality and personality. For example, to the category of leaf or place is added an individualizing form, or final perfection, that makes this leaf this or this place this rather than that.’⁷⁴ Sheldrake sees this as the basis by which Scotus develops a deeply incarnational theology. Incarnation, for Scotus, is the way in which God shares his life with creation. Incarnation is not limited to the single incarnational event of Christ’s birth and life, but extends to all things. Each particularity is created through Christ, giving value in each thing’s own individual form; it is a particular creation. ‘Because everything participates directly in God, each thing is a uniquely important expression of God’s beauty as a whole.’⁷⁵ This specific and individual value was expressed by Scotus through the idea of *haecceitas* or this-ness, which is that individual expression of a thing with which we come into contact. Our knowledge of things is always through their *haecceitas*, and it is only through that particularity of any object, expressed in the specific form it takes in a specific place, that we can come to know it. Sheldrake continues:

⁷³ Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

⁷⁴ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 25.

⁷⁵ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 24.

Scotus raised 'the particular' from being merely an instance of something of a certain type, a mere exemplification of a category. What is individual is just itself even if it is also related to similar but other realities. Thus for Scotus, what is particular and specific is more perfect because it is unique.⁷⁶

This says something about the ontology by which we will approach neighbourhood. We will not be looking for an artificial ideal, or for a generalised construct. Rather, it is the specific neighbourhoods which are primary. Within particular places we are able to engage with what neighbourhood is. As well as ontology, the particularity of neighbourhoods is also an issue about epistemology. At the simplest level we can say that we will come to know what neighbourhood is about through particular examples of it, not by way of an abstract concept. It is in Bowburn, and other particular instances of neighbourhood, in their individuality and *haecceitas*, that we come to understand it; and we move from the particular instances of it to the general understanding.

However, there is a more complex connection between particular instances and the meaning of a word. Wittgenstein begins his *Philosophical Investigations* with a critique of an oversimplified picture of language. He quotes Augustine of Hippo, who writes in his *Confessions*,

I noticed that people would name some object and then turn towards whatever it was that they had named. I watched them and understood that the sound they made when they wanted to indicate that particular thing was the name which they gave to it.⁷⁷

Yet this is only one very small part of language, one language game which is played. Even then, the meaning which is given to words depends on the context in which the game is learned.

⁷⁶ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 25–26.

⁷⁷ Augustine *Confessions* 1.8.

‘I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever.’—Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing.⁷⁸

The significance for understanding the meaning of words is that we understand them in very particular and rich contexts. The meaning is not established in a single step of pointing to particular instances and using the word, but grows through the whole context of discourse and the social world in which that discourse takes place.

One small part of that complexity Wittgenstein explores when he considers how many different things can all be named by a single word, even though they have no common set of defining characteristics. Musing on the word ‘game’, his final picture of this word’s meaning is not a list of absolute and necessary characteristics which must apply before a given activity can be called a game, but of a ‘complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.’⁷⁹ The point is that games come in many different forms: ball games, board games, sports, gambling games, nursery games, and so on. Our understanding of the word ‘game’ comes from learning the complex pattern of ways in which the word is used in different language games. This is the kind of process which links the particular instance of neighbourhood to the way we use the word more generally; and this is the way that the basis of our language use rests on the particular and individual nature of things. We can only learn about ‘bricks’ in general because we hold this brick; and in the same way, our understanding of neighbourhood rests on a foundation of particularity, but not in a simple way. Rather it is a complex pattern which relies on involvement in a life of neighbourhoods and language and behaviour within and about them.

⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 5.

⁷⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 32.

B. Neighbourhood as a place

This particularity also leads us into a consideration of the relationship between space and place. One of Sheldrake's starting points is to describe how place has come to be seen as more significant than space. 'Older scientific views of reality suggested the priority of space as absolute, infinite, empty and *a priori*. Place ... was a mere apportioning or compartmentalization of 'natural' space.'⁸⁰ But he tells us that this view has created problems and more recently various philosophers 'have re-embraced the conviction that place is prior to space. We come to know in terms of the particular knowledge of specific places before we know space as a whole or in abstract.'⁸¹ This relationship is complicated in the modern world by the changing significance of distance. Place may have prior significance, but the distances and spaces between places seem to have an increasing influence on the shape of modern life. Giddens uses the technical language of time-space distancing to describe the way in which, in a given society, social influences and structures are marked by presence and sometimes by absence, and that these two aspects remain connected. However, in late modernity time-space distancing increases greatly.⁸² The implications for the smaller scale of neighbourhood are reflected when he writes of the distinction between 'space' and 'place'.

"Place" is best conceptualised by means of the idea of locale, which refers to the physical settings of social activity as situated geographically. In pre-modern societies, space and place largely coincide, since the spatial dimensions of social life are ... dominated by "presence"—by localised activities. The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between "absent" others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction.⁸³

It is important to note that Giddens is writing here of processes which came with modernity, and which have therefore been at work for over two hundred years. He is

⁸⁰ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 6.

⁸¹ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 7.

⁸² Giddens, *Consequences*, 14.

⁸³ Giddens, *Consequences*, 18.

describing something of what went on through the industrial revolution (and a page later uses the example of the impact of the initial growth of rail travel to explain his point) but the book he writes is about the way these changes play themselves out in our contemporary world. He explores the way in which we are living through a distinctive period, one in which the consequences of modernity are making themselves felt, and one where we see 'the self-clarification of modern thought, as the remnants of tradition and providential outlooks are cleared away.'⁸⁴

Although Giddens does not focus on the scale of neighbourhood, what he writes describes the forces which impinge on neighbourhood. What we are seeing is the stretching of social relations, as what were once represented by face to face encounters are more and more replaced by relations characterised by distance and absence. In the case of Bowburn we can observe some examples. Family life, which once would have been more localised, with many extended families living within the village, is increasingly marked by distance. Employment, once focussed in a single local place over which workers had some control through the withdrawal of their labour, is now characterised by the mobility of capital in which a large variety of employers may or may not maintain their presence in the region. The closure of a Cape Unicem factory in Bowburn in 1989 (which had originally ameliorated the effects of pit closure) is a case in point. There is also a shift from local services within the neighbourhood itself to more distant providers, now being taken further by the increasing use of information technology by those who have it to access services.

One recent work on sociology has recognised the need to engage with people's feelings when thinking of place, but the work is instructive particularly because it begins with

⁸⁴ Giddens, *Consequences*, 51.

the notion of space rather than place. Peter Dickens is interested in precisely the face-to-face encounters which characterise life at the scale of neighbourhood; but he sees the social relations as being primary, and the space in which they occur as created by those social relations. In a chapter entitled 'The Experience of Locality' he writes:

There is a dimension to spatial or urban sociology which has largely gone missing from recent work. This is the 'expressive order'; how people in face-to-face contact understand society and themselves and express their feelings to others.⁸⁵

Dickens suggests that three concepts can help to put this right. The first is locale, which refers to a space defined by the kind of activities which take place in it. By this understanding different locales are seen as appropriate for 'front' or 'back' activities: activities which are following certain codes of behaviour being front activities (like actors in front of an audience), while back activities are where individuals can be themselves and not worry about what others think of them (what might be going on back-stage). The second is moral careers: where individuals shape their progress in life in relation to how they conceive of themselves and how others conceive of them. The third is ontological security, where people seek a place of identity and belonging which helps them to cope with the stretching of social relations.

What is significant here is that Dickens does not start from a geographically defined area, or from an area defined by whether people living there use it as a basis for their own identity, and then look for the social relations which work within that space. The space comes second, and is itself shaped by the social relations which happen between individuals. The front and back regions are a way of defining a space where a particular activity is going on, and the activity defines the space and not vice versa. The moral career followed is a series

⁸⁵ Peter Dickens, *Urban Sociology: Society, Locality and Human Nature*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 25.

of social relationships which map out space. And ontological security is not found in a particular space, but people look for ways of constructing and maintaining a space with ontological security as the main design criterion.

Neighbourhood does not figure directly in Dickens' writing, because neighbourhood only begins to matter if it is a front or back region, if it is shaped by the moral careers people are following, or if it is designed with the aim of ontological security, whether that is by conscious awareness or through behavioural routines. Dickens offers these three examples of social relations because he sees them as particularly helpful concepts; he makes no claim of systematically describing all social relations through them. However, social relations come first. Space is secondary. Similarly Duncan argues that there has always been a tendency (he calls it 'a fetishism') to see social action as determined by the space where it happens. He mentions a number of terms which have been used by sociologists in the past, such as *pays*, region, community, local social system. All these, he maintains, have been failures—'false turnings and dead ends.'⁸⁶ In summarising his argument he writes: 'These concepts were unable to distinguish between contingent and active effects and so ended up in the spatial fetishism of spatially determined social action.'⁸⁷ His claim, as with Dickens, is that social action is not generally spatially determined.⁸⁸

Yet if we bring to this analysis Sheldrake's point about the significance of place, and about place being prior to space, then we realise that neighbourhood is not space; it is place. As place it is partly created by precisely these mechanisms which Dickens outlines. Neighbourhood is the term we can use to describe a place of a particular scale where a certain

⁸⁶ S.S. Duncan, *Working Paper 51: What is Locality?* (Brighton: Urban and Regional Studies: the University of Sussex, February 1986), 17.

⁸⁷ Duncan, *What is Locality?* 28.

⁸⁸ Where Duncan considers the possibility of some spatial effect on social action it is at a much bigger scale than a neighbourhood.

range of social actions occur, but the way in which this plays out differs from one place to another. There is a shaped particularity about a neighbourhood which comes from the people who live there: from their history, from the way they have lived in and used that place, and from their continuing reflexive engagement with it.

C. Neighbourhood and community

This approach to neighbourhood based on its particularity as a place can be developed further by a comparison with some ideas about community. Ferdinand Tönnies writing in the late nineteenth century saw *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as pure conceptual types—what he called normal types—neither of which could be found in their pure form in reality.⁸⁹ He thus distinguished the world in which people lived out their different social connections, with the concepts which he saw as tools to understand and define reality. One can never see the pure form of either *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*; rather the world presents situations in which the two are both present in varying degrees. This contrasts with Weber's thought which has proved more enduring among sociologists, and who wanted to maintain a closer connection between conceptualising and the world. Weber's ideal types contrast with Tönnies's normal types, by being abstractions which draw from examples in the real world, forming an understanding of a phenomenon by building up an idea from common factors and elements present in real examples of human relating. Both of them would have said that to understand such phenomena some recourse to types was needed, and for both there is a distinction to be drawn between the types and what is experienced. The difference is more in the direction of movement: for Weber it is from phenomena to types, whereas for Tönnies it is from types to

⁸⁹ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris, trans. Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The German title *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* has been variously translated as community and association, community and society, or community and civil society.

phenomena. While community was a type which Tönnies saw as basic to understanding society, and it is his term *Gemeinschaft* which is frequently referred to, I am not referring to a normal type but to examples of the real phenomenon which we all relate to in a way which is closer to Weber's position.

One aspect of *Gemeinschaft* relevant to the understanding of community which I wish to contrast with neighbourhood is a strong prescriptive element, in which people do things which are required of them by systems. Tönnies saw the basis of *Gemeinschaft* as founded on 'natural will' in which people act in the interests of the group, while *Gesellschaft* is founded on rational will in which the group is seen as a means of attaining what the individual wants. Tönnies therefore understood community as something which drew people together in a common cause, with a strong moral element. This is not necessarily experienced as a compulsion—it can work unconsciously, or in a habitual fashion—but the sense of community requiring certain things of people if they are to remain within the community is significant. If people acknowledge their place in a community, then they live to certain shared norms or values, or to a shared culture. A community might have rules, written or unwritten, which govern what is expected of those within it. Certain behaviours become prescribed, and individuals might place themselves outside the community while still living in close proximity, by not living up to the accepted common understandings.

This kind of prescriptive behaviour can be seen to be weakening. An example emerged in a conversation with a church member in Bowburn. Now a grandmother herself, she told of how her own grandmother refused to accept any food or drink from her while her baby was unbaptised. She could also remember her grandmother refusing admittance to a friend who came to call after the birth of a baby. This refusal was an attempt to continue exerting the influence of what Tönnies called 'natural reason'. The fact that now there is an

open awareness of such behaviours, and of how they have changed, indicates that something has happened to *Gemeinschaft*. What was once an unreflected and ‘natural’ thing, has first become questionable, and then been overturned.

Another example comes from the reaction of people in Bowburn to the behaviour of young people. At one meeting in the village there was conversation about young people who hang around outside the supermarket in the village, sometimes drinking alcohol. This is experienced by many people as threatening, and people complained about it. They suggested that in the past this would not have happened; young people would have been ‘kept in check.’ There is certainly a sense in which, with a stronger sense of community, people might once have known those who lived around them better and felt less threatened by the behaviour of young people. If those young people misbehaved others knew there were parents or teachers to whom they could go. Now residents, the young people, and their parents do not know one another to the same extent. The sense of community prescribing their behaviour has become more distant. In fact the young people concerned rarely cause any serious problems; but their presence as a largely unknown and unrestrained group is perceived as threatening by many.

Alongside this sense of prescription, which can at times also be experienced as restrictive, community can be seen as aspirational. It carries, for many, a positive aura. Many people would say they would like to live in a community. John Freie writes of this phenomenon in the USA: ‘For various reasons (many of which are unknown) people have a need to be connected with other people: we have needs to be members of a community.’⁹⁰ He goes on to show how such desires for connectedness are used by those who see the potential

⁹⁰ Freie, *Counterfeit Community*, 2–3.

for making financial or political capital out of such desires. He also uses Bernard, who supports his argument:

Gemeinschaft is still the dream for millions of people, reflecting a deep longing. That *Gemeinschaft* in the longing sense is only a fantasy in no way detracts from its appeal. Untold thousands dream of living in a small, congenial, cooperative community of loving, understanding, noncompetitive relationships.⁹¹

This aspirational quality gives community an active feel, in which some individuals are willing to invest considerable personal energy. This is not true of everyone, but in Bowburn a small number of residents become actively involved in seeking to strengthen the sense of community within the village. This manifests itself through engagement in local committees and projects. Current among these are a local newsletter produced about four times a year, a group working to raise money to restore and display an old union banner, and a local community partnership engaged in dialogue with the local council about the way to spend considerable sums of money which are available from the sale of land in the village. This active feel is supported by professional community development workers employed by the council.

The concept of neighbourhood contrasts with this. As a category in the physical world, it is not a type, like Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft*, but something which structures the concrete world in which people live. It is one of the places where, Tönnies might say, both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are found. A neighbourhood can be seen simply as a place. It might be described in various ways: as an affluent neighbourhood, or a working class neighbourhood, or an urban neighbourhood. Nevertheless while people may aspire to live in a particular neighbourhood, neighbourhood is not itself the subject of aspiration as community can be. Community implies that people want to create something and involves

⁹¹ Jessie Bernard, *The Sociology of Community* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1973), 106–107.

some amount of effort and will. Neighbourhood on the other hand is more static; it can be seen as simply 'the place where we live.' Rather than being prescriptive neighbourhood seems to require a descriptive approach. Certain behaviours might still be experienced as prescribed within a neighbourhood, but this could be seen more as the result of *Gemeinschaft* being present within a neighbourhood. So, neighbourhood is often the focus and location of community, and the scale of place which concerns community development work. Neighbourhood is a location where community may or may not exist. Generally speaking, someone can move into a neighbourhood and become a neighbour, without accepting anything which would suggest that community was present. In many ways neighbourhood is a more modest idea, which demands less.

The possibility for confusing neighbourhood and community arises from the common desire for community. Some people think that there is an 'ought' about community, that their neighbourhood ought to be a community, and therefore is spoken of as a community, even if the characteristics of community are not very developed. Actually community is one of several things which might be going on within a neighbourhood. Perhaps neighbourhood, which can become a more neutral term, is sometimes used to avoid the complications of dealing with questions about whether community is present or not, and whether or not community is a good thing. It was noted in the Introduction that neighbourhood has not been widely researched, in the way community has. So, in the light of this lack and the analysis above, the phenomenon of neighbourhood can now be clarified as a local place defined by physical features and human relationships.

D. Neighbourhood as phenomenon

These two aspects, the geographical and the social are both significant, but with Dickens the geographical can be taken as secondary to the social. Much of the geographical shape of neighbourhoods is created by human activity, while the connection with a place normally comes back to memories of relationships, or stories about people. The geographical aspect of a neighbourhood remains important. It is another of the things which distinguish it from community, which does not have to have a geographical focus. There are those who argue for community having a geographical basis, seeing locality as one aspect of community which may vary in its importance, but what are referred to as communities can be spread over a wide urban area and have significant links abroad. Neighbourhood, however, is always bounded, always local; and the geography of a neighbourhood is one of the ways in which its particularity is shaped and part of what makes it unique and different. Neighbourhood is about what is physically present, shaped by streets, railways, rivers, bus routes, hills and patterns of housing development. The social aspect of neighbourhoods is also unique and different, and also contributes to their particularity. Each neighbourhood has its own history; its people have different stories to tell, and their own ways of being bound to this particular place.

Perhaps we can see something of this working itself out in two definitions of neighbourhood from American sources. Keller defines a neighbourhood in this way: 'A neighborhood is a locality with physical boundaries, social networks, concentrated use of area facilities, and special emotional and symbolic connotations for its inhabitants.'⁹² Each of these elements is something which defines particular localities: the boundary around it, the

⁹² Suzanne Keller, *The Urban Neighborhood* (New York: Random House, 1968), 128.

networks which exist within it, the facilities people use, and especially the emotional and symbolic connections people make. Each neighbourhood thus takes its shape through these aspects of its particularity. In another definition Rivlin stresses the importance of people recognising the neighbourhood through boundaries and a name:

The criterion for a neighborhood is the acknowledgement by residents, merchants, and regular users of an area that a locality exists. It presumes some agreement on boundaries and a name and the recognition of distinguishing characteristics of the setting.⁹³

These definitions begin to indicate some of the ways in which a place may begin to take on significance for people. Sheldrake has also come to the point of discussing the particularity of place by looking at the things which make a particular place significant. He looks at psychological participation and commitment to a place; he explores the way in which landscapes are viewed through memories and are shaped by them; and he recognises that 'place is also political because the way it is constructed means that it is occupied by some people's stories but not by others.'⁹⁴ These are the ways in which people become attached to places, and the ways people react both towards and against places. Memories, in the form of both associations and familiarity, play their part in making a place significant. All of the above characteristics come together in symbolic ways for particular places. Rivlin refers to 'distinguishing characteristics': those things which make a neighbourhood different from others, particular and specific to itself. That includes symbols which are physical (landmarks or buildings), and social (some kind of shared heritage, class commitment, or way of life).

So the phenomenon of neighbourhood can be explored through four facets: name and topography; social networks; area facilities; and the emotional and symbolic.

⁹³ Leanne G. Rivlin, 'The Neighborhood, Personal Identity, and Group Affiliations', in Irwin Altman and Abraham Wandersman, *Neighborhood and Community Environments* (New York: Plenum, 1987), 2.

⁹⁴ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 20.

Name and topography

Rivlin's suggestion that boundary and name are part of a neighbourhood's definition can be clearly seen in Bowburn. The name does not seem to be older than about one hundred years. The older parish name of Cassop-cum-Quarrington indicates the agricultural communities from the past which were present before the coal mining industry became dominant; but the name refers to a clearly identifiable place, and to a place with which people identify. As far as boundaries go, a map of County Durham shows a spattering of places, each a distinct spot of colour on the map; Bowburn is one of a series of discrete settlements. In that sense the boundary of the neighbourhood is clear. However, that boundary becomes a little more hazy on the ground. The A1(M) cut one part of the village off from the rest, so that Parkhill on the south of the motorway is now regarded by the Council as a separate place. While some Parkhill residents regard it as part of the next village of Coxhoe rather than Bowburn, others feel strongly that they are part of Bowburn. Another example would be a small new housing development which cuts into the middle of Bowburn, but which is entered by its own road from the east. This small group of larger detached houses seem to have a much looser relationship to the neighbourhood than other places, and were originally advertised for sale as Durham addresses. However, by and large the boundaries are reasonably clear.

Rivlin's suggestion can be broadened to include other topographical features which shape the community. Examples would include the roads: the village's location on a main road into Durham means that there are a number of bus routes which run through the village, while the A1(M) has made it a reasonably strategic location for industrial development. The way in which the community was built, around quite large green areas, has also been a factor, and one which the council is now capitalising on as it sells off patches of land for development and uses the proceeds for a variety of central projects, with some money

being channelled into local initiatives. All of these contribute to the way Bowburn is experienced by those who live or work within it.

Social networks

The social networks people experience include neighbourhood networks, but also spread far beyond. Giddens's idea of distancing suggests that the increased distances involved in modern social relationships are actually removing those relationships from specific local places; neighbourhood therefore has a waning influence. Yet people continue to live within neighbourhoods, and in various ways relationships on that local scale continue to matter. Dickens's work on urban sociology indicates some of the ways in which this is the case. Rivlin includes social networks as one of the features which define a neighbourhood. So what kind of relationships might be found?

Within Bowburn there are several examples which can be cited. First, there are loose relationships with neighbours, people living in immediate proximity. These relationships might be strengthened by children attending school together, or by limited neighbourhood initiatives (e.g. neighbours on the road where I lived had a regular 5th November event together). Second, there are family connections. Many people living within the village have relatives living there too; and there are a significant number of people who have spent their whole lives living there. Thirdly, there are economic relationships. While there is no longer one key employer, a proportion of people living locally are employed locally. Two large industrial estates provide a pool of employment opportunities which are taken up by people from beyond Bowburn, but also by local people. The relationships which are based on local shops are also significant. One person who was involved closely in the research owned a small newsagent's business in the village, and has a considerable

knowledge of local people, their needs and personal issues, from conversation taking place over the counter. Fourthly, there are relationships based on institutions within the village. These include the churches, schools, the local Labour party, the Bowburn Community Centre, and an active community partnership meeting. This is not an exhaustive list, but indicates the kind of variety of networks which exist between people, and which help to constitute Bowburn as a neighbourhood. All of these are places where people experience a connection with others which shapes them to some extent.

Area facilities

The use of area facilities varies considerably between neighbourhoods, depending on how well supplied the neighbourhood is. Often different places can see themselves as in competition for users of facilities. Inevitably these are also the places which provide nodes for the social relationships mentioned above. The local schools are important, as are Bowburn's churches, a small branch library, a youth club, local shops, and several take-away food outlets. We can add other more dispersed facilities such as parks, playing fields and allotments. The convenience of local amenities is important for nearly all residents, who appreciate having a supply of groceries or take-away food available nearby. They are also invaluable for those who are less mobile, including children, the elderly, and those without cars. These different facilities, with their patterns of usage which arise from varied opportunities, are another aspect which constitutes the sense of the neighbourhood.

Yet the experience of neighbourhood is also shaped by patterns of competition with facilities outside the village: with other local villages, or with facilities provided in Durham or beyond. Coxhoe is a similar sized place only a mile away and has been able to retain a broader range of shops; it has also been the sight of a new council sport centre with an

extensive children's playground and segregated equipment for three different age groups. The project which I have undertaken particularly looked at church attendance, and noted a number of people who make the choice to attend churches elsewhere in order to find a theological or ecclesiological outlook or ethos which is not represented in the village-based congregations. Another important example for competition would be found almost anywhere else in Britain: the prevalence of large supermarkets. The small Co-op in the centre of Bowburn has substantially higher prices and far narrower product range than those at a large Tesco store about three miles away on the edge of Durham. However, in at least one way Bowburn benefits from people coming from other places. Located as it is on a junction of the A1(M), its community centre is conveniently located for regional groups to hold events.

The emotional and symbolic

The emotional and symbolic aspects of neighbourhood describe the way people are attached to a place, and 'history or memory is ... a vital constituent of place.'⁹⁵ Sheldrake writes of a sense of belonging as being significant in a modern world where many experience a sense of rootlessness.

The most fundamental fact of human existence is that because people are embodied they are always 'somewhere'. In the West, most people are housed and so take for granted that they have a defined location and an address in some human environment.⁹⁶

He relates this to Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling', but comments that 'buildings do not necessarily guarantee that dwelling happens in them.'⁹⁷ We also need a sense of home, a place in which we can, among other things 'pass through the stages of life' and 'belong to a

⁹⁵ Church of England, Commission on Urban Life and Faith, *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice* (Peterborough and London: Methodist Publishing House and Church House Publishing, 2006), 61.

⁹⁶ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 9.

⁹⁷ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 10.

community.’⁹⁸ Sheldrake continues to give this symbolic connection to a place further content through briefly exploring the way we are committed to a place, and the way memory connects us.

In Bowburn this kind of emotional and symbolic significance for the neighbourhood is shaped in public ways. The history of the place is the main factor in this, with the memory of being a mining village, with a strong sense of common identity founded around people working in, or having relatives working in, the pit. This was what shaped Bowburn for the first half of its hundred year history. This continues as a part of the heritage of the place, because there are still miners and miner’s widows living in the village, and many who remember that their fathers and grandfathers worked in the coal mining industry. The continuing significance of this heritage is seen in the involvement of people from the neighbourhood in the annual Miners’ Gala in Durham, and in a local group who have been investigating ways of restoring and displaying union banners. Other historical happenings can also provide a focus for the village, as they can in any place: an annual remembrance ceremony, and government funding in 2005 of cross generational events to mark the end of the Second World War are examples.

This public side of emotional and symbolic significance is matched by a personal and family focussed significance. Memory shapes things as much through this personal level as anything else. The neighbourhood has resonances for people for whom all kinds of important events in their life have happened there: from births, marriages and deaths, to first days at school or work, to romantic or aggressive encounters, and so on. The connection

⁹⁸ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 10.

between place and an individual's stages of life can be strong, and sometimes these can be focussed within a particular neighbourhood.

Sheldrake sums this up:

It is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. Every place has an excess of meaning beyond what can be seen or understood at any one time. This excess persistently overflows any attempt at a final definition. A place can never be subordinated to a single valuation, one person's prejudices, or the assumptions of a single group. The hermeneutic of place progressively reveals new meanings in a kind of conversation between topography, memory and the presence of particular people at any given moment.⁹⁹

3.3 Ministry in Neighbourhood—What the Site Team did

A. Beginnings

The neighbourhood of Bowburn, so described through these four characteristics, was the place in which the site team did its work. Together we carried out a detailed analysis of the neighbourhood in which we lived, identified an issue which was a cause for concern, engaged in a project which addressed that concern, and finally assessed the results. We explored our experiences as those who had a strong sense of self-identity as Christians living within a particular place. Our work exposed what might be found in many contexts in twenty-first century Britain: a lack of confidence by members of congregations. This became the issue we sought to address in a practical project, and in that project the significance of the issue became clearer.

Throughout this the significance of the village, as a neighbourhood within which we sought to bring our Christian understanding and resources to bear, remained central. We saw ourselves as embedded in a place, a neighbourhood, and we made assumptions about it. With hindsight I can look back and say that initially we specifically deployed the

⁹⁹ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 17.

neighbourhood paradigm as we sought to understand how we related to Bowburn. However, along the way we also found that questions were raised about the assumptions we made regarding the neighbourhood. These questions arose out of issues about social change, the way that neighbourhoods are changing, not just in County Durham but across the country. This worked to raise my own awareness of the neighbourhood paradigm, and think about what relationship it had to the lack of confidence which we experienced.

It is worth noting in retrospect the ways in which the neighbourhood paradigm became part of this process. It is of the nature of paradigms as ‘constellations of group commitments’ that they are evident in the discourses that groups share. This paradigm was present in the site team as we met to talk; we were already used to the discourse of neighbourhood as the arena of Christian life and action. This was reinforced by the nature of Bowburn itself as a place with a traditionally strong sense of identity. A third factor was the process itself, which was specifically designed to focus on a definable small geographical area; this itself was an example of the expression of the paradigm.

B. An initial discussion

The site team began this work with a brief opportunity at the end of one meeting to identify any resonances with the Bible they could identify through the situation analysis we had undertaken. The first response was about gender. ‘Where are the men in the church?’¹⁰⁰ one member asked, noting that the village congregations were not representative of the residents around them. The mining tradition of the village was noted, and that miners are artisans and workers not unlike the fishermen of the gospels. Was there a likeness between County

¹⁰⁰ Quotations from the site team used in this section were recorded verbatim during our meetings.

Durham and Galilee, perhaps in aspects of the stability of local villages with known and constant communities?

At the same time the group recognised that this picture of ‘stable villages and known communities’ was pointing to the past. Although there was a desire to draw a parallel between New Testament Galilee and contemporary County Durham, the comparison was cast into doubt by our experiences in which Bowburn did not always hold together. We were aware of people who chose to opt out of any but the most peripheral social relationships in the neighbourhood, and of the choices which frequently took us out of the neighbourhood ourselves. Our discussion led us to ask how strong a focus the neighbourhood was for people’s lives. Bowburn was only one place among many to which each of us related.

This reflection on the stability of community and relationships brought out an awareness of class divisions within Bowburn. We were aware of different groups living close together but differently: some with difficult lives, some comfortable; areas of middle-income owner occupied housing not far from areas of council housing. We found ourselves questioning whether our churches were places where all kinds of people can come, or whether they are relatively homogeneous communities within one that is more diverse. Again, the churches were seen to be not fully representative of the neighbourhood.

C. Stories of God’s people

This initial discussion led to a sense of discomfort as to how the churches fitted in with the village population as a whole. At the next meeting I therefore invited the site team to consider resonances between how it felt to be a Christian in Bowburn, and some core stories of salvation history which articulate some understanding of the boundary between God’s people and other people. I sketched out eight stories, and then asked the site team to choose

two of them which addressed their own experience as one of God's people living in Bowburn. These are the responses of the site team, although the eight stories are not recounted in the order in which they were originally discussed.

There were two very different stories which no-one chose. On the one hand the conquest and settlement of the promised land, with the experience of coming to a place and finding a sense of belonging. The story has about it an air of confidence and home-coming, in which no-one on the site team sought to place themselves. Choice of this theme would have indicated a strong sense of being a part of the place, yet no-one in the site team felt able to adopt such imagery. Neither was there any resonance with the experience of Babylonian exile. No-one in the team felt any resonance with being exiled from home, or of living in a foreign place.¹⁰¹ In some sense people felt 'at home' in Bowburn, even while they were wanting to explore the awareness of difference between the general population and church members. It seems a marker of ambivalence in the team's experience that neither of these were chosen. Here are people neither fully at home, nor wholly apart.

Three members of the site team related to stories which were concerned with a movement away from a foreign place and towards home: the exodus from Egypt, and the return from exile in Babylon; both stories of liberation. Yet for these three people their sense of resonance arose solely within the context of the church. One of them referred to the liberation experienced in moving into a new church and community; and one to getting beyond a focus on ritual in church life, and into human relationships within the congregation. The third spoke of feeling welcomed 'back into the fold' by the congregation and by other Christians when they moved to Bowburn. All three of these experiences were focussed on the

¹⁰¹ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

Christian worshipping community, rather than about finding a place within the wider village population, and are therefore an expression of a sense of separation between church and others in the neighbourhood.

A further story also showed a disjunction between church and neighbourhood. One person chose the story of the nation of Israel under prophets such as first Isaiah or Jeremiah, threatened with the loss of a place of belonging. For this individual the resonance arose as a comment about issues of social justice; that 'I don't always speak out as a Christian when I should.' The connection with neighbourhood took shape as a sense that Christians need to be visible and audible in ethical issues, but is compromised by a lack of confidence.

The central New Testament story of discipleship, of being learners, was chosen by four people as representing a feeling of 'not knowing it all.' Two responses were (as the liberative stories above) very church centred, learning about church structures and beliefs. The other two referred to learning 'all the time', one of them referring to learning about people, and discovering things 'you haven't thought of.' Being a disciple was seen by the site team as a good and desirable thing, but it also brought people to recognition of what they saw as their weakness and ignorance. The desire to put faith into practice was weakened by not understanding enough.

Perhaps the most relevant story was that characterised by the experience of Abraham wandering outside of existing structures. Four people found resonance here. Three as a sign of uncertainty about their role in the community, although some also felt this was the right state to be in. One spoke of being 'prepared to wander and not focus on the Parish Church' but having to find 'other ways to get the message across.' Another had been thinking about his 'Christian influence' in the community, but felt he was 'still in the wilderness' about it. Another was unsure how faith fitted into community. The fourth person used the story

more with regard to a need to celebrate their faith in different places, not always worshipping in the same congregation.

The last story was the experience of the early persecuted church in Acts and the Revelation to John, of being innocent and yet threatened. Two people chose this story, both with regard to the church as an institution. One spoke of the church as declining and ineffective in reaching the community. The other spoke about it as a self-perception, that we are ‘doing all we can yet still feeling it’s not getting us anywhere.’

These final two stories build on a sense of disconnection between church and neighbourhood. Within this group it seems there is a desire for or approval of connection with the wider community, but this is alongside a *de facto* separation and the unrepresentative nature of the congregations. With this came a sense of being threatened and powerless to halt decline. There were also positive things: a continuing sense of belonging; a feeling that this wilderness is the right place to be in struggling to make sense of the church’s role; being deep in a place of discipleship where faith is important. So we came to an awareness of a shared ambivalence about our relationship to the place where we lived. This ambivalence was apparent in a lack of confidence, but also in a shared search for faith resources which might help us.

D. Needs

In the search for resources of faith I suggested that we might continue by thinking about the way that needs were met in the Bible. We could reflect both on need in our community, believing that we had some kind of vocation to engage with that need, and also on our own neediness as Christians.

We quickly listed a variety of Biblical stories and situations in which need was portrayed. We then worked through that list identifying the need, without doing any in depth Bible study, and talked through how each story seemed to connect with our situation in Bowburn. We tried to keep our responses spontaneous, rather than examining them in detail to check out whether any given passage would bear the weight of our comparison. This account of our responses is therefore necessarily brief. These are the issues which were raised in this exercise and the discussion that followed:

- a. Not knowing what to say as Christians. We were reminded of God's word in Isaiah which 'shall not return to me empty' (Isaiah 55:11), and of words being given in a time of need (Mark 13:11). But we did not feel this to be our experience.
- b. Fear about how others in the neighbourhood see and think of us. 'Will we be thought of as holier than thou?' Or some people might expect more than we are capable of giving.
- c. Fear is also present among those outside the church. One member mentioned an experience of distributing gospels where some had seemed frightened of being offered a free copy of a gospel. What is threatening about religious faith?
- d. A frequently used phrase, 'being in the world but not of it', which seems to be a summary of ideas taken from John 17:14–16, was discussed. How does this relate to the disciples, the team wondered, who were so much part of their own culture? Jesus is accused of partying and drinking and being too immersed among the common people (e.g. Luke 7:31–35), but we find it difficult to enter into a culture

which is not always our own. One of the issues which lay behind this was a distinction between working class and middle class cultures.

- e. Is our different 'church' culture, what makes us who we are as individuals and as Christians, essential to what makes us who we are as disciples? One person thought it might be baggage that gets in the way, and another commented of being a church goer, 'People think you're odd in this day and age.' One said that they felt others' response to them as a church-goer was summed up in the words, 'You're a nice normal person. What do you want to go and do something like that [going to church] for.'
- f. Members of the site team thought that there were many in the community who had some faith and belief in Christ but who don't feel any need for the institution of the church.

This led on to a wide ranging discussion about our self-identity as Christians in the village. The ambivalence we felt, and the lack of confidence was seen as coming from the fear of how we are perceived by non-Christians. Someone noted that we had no badge to mark us out, and therefore it was left up to us to identify ourselves as Christians if we chose to do so. We also talked about other aspects of our difference as Christians. For example: the historical change in the public face of religious observation, or the dissonance that was made evident by the language of liturgy between church culture and the lives of people who were not used to church. We were also aware of mostly being relative newcomers to Bowburn. Even the member of the team who had lived in Bowburn for thirty years had arrived ten years after the pit had closed. We wondered how that changed our experience, and were aware of the cultural and class differences at work. This all added to the experience of ambivalence, which called in question the underlying paradigm with which we had been working.

Further Biblical work took us into a more in depth study of the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6:30–46. We noted the eagerness of the crowd to respond to Jesus and his disciples, and that there is nothing comparable to this in our situation. If anything there is an unwillingness by people around us to listen to the Church. At a recent baptism in the Methodist church it was clear that, although the chapel was full, many of the congregation did not want to be there. The beliefs of a century ago had gone, along with some sort of church connection as a norm. There was discussion of the kind of beliefs we thought people once had, and our uncertainty of what people's beliefs amount to now.

Having said this, the site team also felt that people seem to want the church to be part of the landscape of their lives, and assessed this as a residual faith. One person referred to it as a 'safety net.' The site team recognised that these reflections were based only on our own perceptions, and would need research to back them up.¹⁰² However, they felt the question of residual faith was important. What, they wanted to know, was the motivation for people keeping some kind of tenuous link with church?

E. The impact of social change

It became clear to us in our work together that if we approached the neighbourhood presuming that it hadn't changed, and still exhibited the characteristics of a close working-class community, we would not explain the position in which we found ourselves. It wasn't just a question of the closure of a pit and the diversification of working practices, but a whole range of social changes affecting the place: the change in gender roles, an increasingly

¹⁰² This links closely to work on 'believing without belonging', a phrase coined by Grace Davie. See: Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Paul Avis, 'The State of Faith,' in *Public Faith? The State of Belief and Practice in Britain*, ed. Paul Avis (London: SPCK, 2003), 123–39; David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, 'Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging,' *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005), 11–28, <http://soc.sagepub.com/content/39/1/11> (accessed 18th August 2010).

heterogeneous population, the increase in mobility; all of these meant that Bowburn had changed and was continuing to change.

As we worked together I had begun to read a number of books which shed some light on this process of change, and this fed into our joint understanding. Sharing some of this with the site team took our discussions into the changes in British and global society over the last fifty years. These changes affected Christian life, witness and mission in Bowburn. Awareness was needed of the general issues, the particular shape and form which they took in Bowburn, and ways of working with them. Later chapters in the thesis will examine aspects of these social changes in greater detail, but at this point I will explain how the site team's understanding stood at that point.

First we were aware of a tension in contemporary human life. On one hand we are social creatures, needing one another and the communities we create. On the other the emphasis on individual choice and freedom makes such notions unfashionable or nostalgic, with nothing much to say to our contemporary situation. Yet while we face pressures to loosen our ties with one another, we cannot escape from our need as social beings, and the 'social capital' which accrues from those connections.¹⁰³ However, the idea of how we are connected as human beings has changed and mutated. With increased mobility and car use, and with the end of older styles of community, its focus is now less geographical, and is expressed through a variety of networks.¹⁰⁴ For example, one person consulted during the research lives in Bowburn, worships at a church in Durham four miles away, is actively

¹⁰³ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, vol. 1 of *The Rise of Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

engaged in working with Guide Dogs for the Blind which involves him in voluntary activity around the region, and frequently spends leisure time away from Bowburn in a caravan.

We were also aware of how Bowburn had changed from a more homogeneous working class village, to one in which there is a more substantial proportion of middle class people. Sometimes class divisions within the village can seem fairly pronounced (with one street of 'luxury homes' built into the centre of the village with separate road access), but in other ways they are expressed through a much more heterogeneous community. That heterogeneity means that people are affected in different ways by the growth of networked communities which depend on mobility, which is not available to everyone. Access to transport and the ease of relating to broader networks (beyond walking distance) make big differences to people's lives. There are those who are disadvantaged through this: people who are not able to travel. This includes elderly people with health and mobility problems, and households where there is no car; although while car ownership is below the national average in Bowburn, good bus connections mitigate the effect of this.

So the site team saw a tension between locality and ways of life which reach far beyond the local into the county, region and beyond. We wondered whether the boundary around Bowburn meant anything. Clearly it had become far more porous than it once was, but what significance did it retain in people's lives? How effectively can a geographical place of Bowburn's size provide a focus for significance and relationship, or do the pressures of car culture and the tendency to associate in dispersed networks mean that any sense of connectedness in Bowburn was only residual?

There seemed to be two diametrically opposed ways in which we might respond to this situation. One was to see the growth of connections based on neighbourhood as a hopeless project. Bauman writes: 'Far from being hotbeds of communities, local populations

are more like loose bunches of untied ends.’¹⁰⁵ From this point of view if any currency remains for church in locality it is fast running out, and the neighbourhood paradigm is dead.

Another point of view would be that connectedness and community is an essential part of human living. People need to relate to one another in the places where they live, and the big changes haven’t altered that fact. We must go on working at the local level. There is evidence for this point of view also: evidence which suggests that there are ways in which Bowburn retains a sense of place which is significant for those who live and work within it. The local councils clearly perceive it as a significant unit, and organise and plan accordingly. Consultation by the County Council and the direction of SRB funding towards the village illustrate this perception. Local people are also ready to join together in a common cause (opposing an attempt to open a large open cast mine on the edge of the village), while there are neighbourhood projects in evidence, including a quarterly local newspaper, and an active local history group.

The site team wanted to recognise the seriousness of the issues raised by the first point of view. No amount of protest or nostalgia for the past was going to make these changes go away. However, at the same time, we wanted to recognise the continuing significance of locality. This dichotomy seemed to mirror the ambivalence in our own feelings we had already identified. The interplay between locality and wider networks needed to be explored. We felt that connection with other people is an aspect of Christian living, whether expressed locally or through wider networks, and we should work to restructure community in ways appropriate to our context.

¹⁰⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 24.

While the church, as with any other institution, works within this tension, we felt that the effect of these changes on the church may be more severe because it has not paid sufficient attention to this opposition between locality and more extended networks. To some extent the churches have been successful in continuing to express something of the significance of the local scene, but maybe Christians could be more effective if they worked from a greater conscious awareness of the centripetal forces in people's lives.

F. The outcomes of a project in neighbourhood ministry

With all this in mind the site team planned a project together, which aimed to form a wider network among Christians who lived or worked in Bowburn but who might attend church in a variety of different places. The team would work to raise awareness of the kind of issues described above, and talk together about ways of acknowledging both the significance of neighbourhood and the wider networks of which we were a part. This project ran for six months, attempting to utilise internet resources, enable discussion, and build relationships. It was hoped that there would be evidence at the end of the project of growth for both the group and for individuals. In the event the project had some positive outcomes; but at the same time was far less successful than expected, involving very few additional people.¹⁰⁶

So what were the outcomes of this project? They were very modest. In reviewing them the site team saw that we succeeded in building some medium term relationships between ourselves and a few others. As a result a small group met to pray together for Bowburn regularly for about a year after the project ended. There was also an acknowledgment of personal change and growth, but even this was only tentatively stated by most members of the site team. Several found it difficult to distinguish between personal

¹⁰⁶ The Project Proposal which summarises what was planned is reproduced as an appendix.

growth which might have happened anyway, and personal growth which resulted from the project. One said unequivocally that she was not aware of any personal growth from the project.

Three members of the site team did speak of the way they had grown through the project. One, who owns a local village newsagent's, talked of the way she had felt a growing sense of confidence and awareness of how she could support people who came to the shop. She had assumed people knew she was a Christian, but the project had led her to realise that there was more she could do. 'I see more in people than I did before.' she said, later adding, 'The more you ask questions, the more they come in and unburden themselves.' Her growth had been in becoming aware of a pastoral role she fulfilled through her daily work, and greater confidence to initiate exchanges with people.

Another site team member spoke of feeling 'much more secure where I sit in the Christian community.' He spoke of how place had become more important to him, and how Bowburn was one of the important places. Reflecting on the Celtic image of thin places, he said, 'Thinness is in me, rather than in the place. God is everywhere. I feel more part of the Christian community, and it feels more part of me.' As a member of a congregation in Durham this seemed to be a significant shift in perspective. He also commented, as part of this, that he felt he had come to know some other Christians better than he did before. This was seen as 'something to build on. Not a strong network, but a start.'

A third site team member said that simply being part of the group had been a significant growth experience. This was said with the proviso that other things than the project had affected this, but as part of this she noted that she had grown into a more open acceptance and appreciation of different styles of worship, and that this had been 'really

positive.’ The same person also identified the friendship of the site team as positive and important.

These changes were certainly of the kind we had envisaged. However, it affected most those who had been directly involved in the site team; and these were people who had some appreciation of the neighbourhood paradigm already. We could not say unequivocally that people outside the site team had not been affected, but there was no evidence for such change. There were two significant things which did not happen. First, there was no obvious impact on the attitudes of the two local congregations. They continued much as before, and without apparently having any developed appreciation of the wider Christian presence in the village. Second, we were not able to draw into a network even modest numbers of those who lived in Bowburn but did not worship there. About three people came to join in with one or two events (the project launch, and some discussion groups) but that was all.

More surprising, perhaps, was the fact that some of the site team backed away from the project and, even though they had been part of discussions which set it up, did not become very involved. There was a reluctance on the part of several of them to take on board the consequences of the plans we made. This was particularly so with regard to networking. In the original project proposal I wrote,

The most important resource is the involvement of people and their readiness to engage with each other and with the issues, and also the personal gifts of the candidate [me] and site team in being able to promote that engagement. The process will be one of trying to remodel people’s experience and understanding of church life and mission. It therefore requires explanation, persuasion and encouragement and the building of relationships.¹⁰⁷

But that resource proved to be much thinner than I had anticipated. One member of the site team barely engaged with the project at all. Another offered practical support at events on the

¹⁰⁷ See in Appendix, 271.

level of preparing rooms and cleaning up afterwards, but no more. Two were more noticeably active in their support, although only one showed a real willingness to seek to build relationships beyond existing circles of association.

This raises an important issue about the experience of ambivalence which people bring to the neighbourhood. What we had learned about the way neighbourhoods are changing was that they have become very mixed up things; but the site team's engagement with the project suggested that they were also very ambivalent in their practical response. The effects of a mixed and heterogeneous neighbourhood seemed to have left people feeling mixed about whether it was worthwhile, and about how to respond to it.

I write this without wishing to imply any judgment of the site team members. In fact the way in which they found difficulty in engaging with the process was also reflected in my own feelings. As I recorded my own impressions and reflections during the project there were some very negative responses including: constriction or lack of freedom, isolation, anxiety about how I might be perceived particularly with the possibility of failure, and frustration at other people. While I can account for those feelings partly from my own personality, and partly from the unfamiliarity of the village to me (having worked almost exclusively in urban settings before, to live and work within such a neighbourhood was a learning experience), I do not want to interpret them as purely personal reactions. Places and situations affect people and their feelings; which in turn affect the way those people respond to the places and situations of which they are a part. There seemed to me to be evidence that both the site team and I were affected by the situation of which we were a part. It is important to note this clear evidence of a strongly felt ambivalence. The significance and roots of such feelings, as part of the experience of late modern life, will need to be explored in greater depth in chapter 6 below.

We were a group of people trying to take seriously the claims of discipleship within a small neighbourhood setting. For me this also involved what it means to be a Christian leader in such a place. We were consciously adopting a particular identity, as those who feel a sense of call to a distinctive life-style of discipleship. Carried as part of this identity was the neighbourhood paradigm. Yet much about our own personal life-styles and the choices we made, the wider networks to which we connected, took our energy away from the neighbourhood where we lived. Some of my negative feelings might well have been experienced in similar ways by others in the site team, although they did not want to state that within the group. We were all people who had broad networks to maintain—at work, in leisure, in family—and the commitments of our life-styles made it difficult to engage with this local project. We all experienced tensions, contradictions, and uncertainties. It was an ambivalent experience, caused by the interaction between an aspect of our identities which we had chosen and the changing nature of the neighbourhood where we lived.

That, of course, is part of what the whole project was about. Can neighbourhood still figure for us as a significant focus of Christian discipleship? We had all been engaged in a project with a strongly counter-cultural aspect. The life-styles of many pull them away from neighbourhood relationships at anything but a trivial level. Whatever we might claim is our priority, the impact on our feelings and motivation of trying to work out those priorities, proves a far tougher task than we envisaged.

The process with the site team described above points to the need for further reflection about the nature of neighbourhood and neighbourhood ministry. In the following section the shared commitments of the neighbourhood paradigm are spelled out through a review of discourses within contemporary churches.

3.4 The Neighbourhood Paradigm

A. The neighbourhood paradigm in the Methodist Church

The discourses of ‘neighbourhood ministry’ extend well beyond contexts like Bowburn. They are found playing a part in the thinking of churches of diverse traditions and denominations, and are applied in various social settings, rural and urban, including inner-cities, council estates, suburbs and new housing developments. Among British Methodist congregations, particularly those which have some tie to a defined neighbourhood, it is articulated in terms of being there to ‘serve the community.’ This goes beyond the thinking of local congregations. As a true paradigm it is present as a ‘constellation of group commitments’ in the broader expressions of the church; it has not been researched by the church, but is widely used, often in a somewhat unreflected way.

As presbyters and deacons are welcomed into a new appointment in a circuit they are asked a question to which they and the congregation reply,

Will you hold before us
God’s commitment to human community,
to our neighbourhoods
and all who live within them,
and to the world that God has made?

Answer: I will.
I ask God to help me,
and I invite you all to join with me
in sharing God’s all-embracing love.

[All] May we respond to Christ in all we meet.¹⁰⁸

This places the neighbourhood paradigm at a defining moment of a minister’s relationship with the church. The presbyter has the tasks of their public ministry stated openly, with neighbourhood ministry articulated as one of three strands, alongside word and sacrament,

¹⁰⁸ The Methodist Church, *Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), 359.

and the call to holy living. It is also placed theologically as a reflection of God's 'commitment', and seen as part of God's 'all-embracing love.' This implies that neighbourhood ministry is one of the main ways in which we join in the *missio dei*. The response of the congregation echoes the theological theme of meeting Christ in the people around us, perhaps echoing the vision of the last judgment in Matthew's Gospel, as Jesus says to the righteous: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:40)

The Methodist Church scheme which assists congregations in reviewing their life and mission, *Pilgrims Way*,¹⁰⁹ also demonstrates the neighbourhood paradigm. The pack comprises a series of booklets to guide a local church through a review process. The principles behind the scheme are set out in the booklet called 'Why set out on the journey?', and the first principle is 'The local church is a primary agent for God's mission in the world.' This is spelled out in terms of the neighbourhood around the church as 'the immediate context [which] needs to be understood if mission is to be relevant.'¹¹⁰ The process of review is then explained, one part of it being the preparation of profiles of both the church and its neighbourhood. 'The Profiles are a vital part of the process, rather like painting a picture of your neighbourhood and your church,' it says in another booklet.¹¹¹ The profiles are to be presented to the congregation, before ideas of what the church should be doing are shared, and then a start is made at preparing a mission statement.¹¹² Inevitably such a process leads to two foci for mission: the life of the church itself, and the church's relationship with its neighbourhood.

¹⁰⁹ The Methodist Church, *Pilgrims' Way* (Manchester: The Methodist Church, Resourcing Mission Office, 2001).

¹¹⁰ *Pilgrims' Way*, 'Why Set Out on the Journey?', 4.

¹¹¹ *Pilgrims' Way*, 'How do we get from where we are to where we want to be?', 5.

¹¹² *Pilgrims' Way*, 'Catching the vision', 3-4.

This publication qualifies its focus on the local neighbourhood, but that qualification is very limited. First, *Pilgrim Way* notes that ‘the neighbourhood is unlikely to be a single cohesive community’, but offers no other strong ways of reviewing a church’s external relationships.¹¹³ Second, there could have been reference to the Methodist Church’s long standing commitment to the world church as a balance to the neighbourhood focus, but that is missing. Third, there is only passing consideration of what issues a gathered congregation might have, but this is not dwelt on as a significant alternative pattern for a local church. Fourth, no mention is made of the possibility of other personal networks which extend beyond the local neighbourhood (which, as we will come to see later, is a key contemporary factor for local neighbourhoods). So the neighbourhood paradigm is presented as a central factor and context for understanding the church; the church is primarily ‘local’.

Evidence for this paradigm might also be expected from two reports to the Methodist Conference. *The Cities* was prepared jointly with the children’s charity NCH Action for Children. This begins from a different vision of the city, taking them as a whole and seeing cities as single economic and social units. The report recognises the potential anonymity of the city and how people can live without developing any sense of belonging to a local neighbourhood. It notes that while ‘some feel they really belong to their local neighbourhoods and expect to stay for a long time, others are just passing through.’¹¹⁴ Later in part 3 the presence of issues such as urban decay, housing need, and the environment are explored, which affect the whole city life. Given this ‘whole city’ approach of the report the neighbourhood would only occur as a background theme, but it clearly lies behind some of the report’s writing. This is often covered by use of the word ‘community’ rather than

¹¹³ *Pilgrims’ Way*, ‘Why Set Out on the Journey?’, 4.

¹¹⁴ NCH Action for Children and The Methodist Church, *The Cities: A Methodist Report* (London: NCH Action for Children, 1997), 6–7.

‘neighbourhood’. Community is a complex term, used in a wide variety of ways (for example, it can be used of geographically scattered ethnic groups). However, one key focus of its meaning is for those living within a local geographical area, so it can be used synonymously with ‘neighbourhood’. The report specifically makes this link in defining ‘community’, although it does so at both a local level and city wide: ‘In the context of this report, “a greater sense of community” is connected to the way in which we relate to other people in our neighbourhood, or our city.’¹¹⁵

With this in mind, the neighbourhood paradigm is clearly evidenced in the report. It starts with a questionnaire which the report’s working party sent to Methodists living in cities. When it comes to the church in the city the questionnaire asked, ‘How do you think your church contributes to the life of your local community?’ and ‘In what ways do you think your church could improve the quality of life for the people in your local community?’¹¹⁶ Responses to these questions included a quarter who ‘thought that more could be done by their Church to develop better community links.’¹¹⁷ In answer to another question the most frequently cited improvement that respondents wanted to see in the quality of city life was more or better community facilities.¹¹⁸ The concern for local communities also comes out of the account of a day held in Newcastle about urban decay. Repeatedly the response is couched in terms of ‘the local community’. For example:

In the view of people at the meeting the local community was continuing to be eroded. They spoke of how whole streets could degenerate with extraordinary speed, as if urban dereliction was a virus spreading across neighbourhoods.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *The Cities*, 162.

¹¹⁶ *The Cities*, 241.

¹¹⁷ *The Cities*, 51.

¹¹⁸ *The Cities*, 48.

¹¹⁹ *The Cities*, 59.

The language shifts specifically to that of ‘neighbourhood’ as the report describes the stigmatisation of local areas.

Section 5.6, titled ‘Enhancing the Church’s role in community life’, develops this further. The section does not see church life as entirely local, and affirms the need for the church to be active at other scales,¹²⁰ however the vision of the church as a significant local agent is clear. Summarising what churches can do to encourage greater community involvement, the actions suggested are all focussed on the local. The initial listed items being:

- First, conduct a ‘situation analysis’ or ‘parish audit’ of their neighbourhood, to discover who is there, and to start asking people about their feelings regarding the area
- Take positive steps to find out whether local voluntary groups might be able to make use of any under-utilized buildings
- Make local alliances with a view to developing inter-faith work¹²¹

The report also helps to broaden the significance of the neighbourhood paradigm by seeing it as part of an issue beyond church thinking. Section 5.5, titled ‘Encouraging a greater sense of community in our cities’, considers how ‘community’ can be restored. One key action regards tackling inequality and social exclusion, with regard to which ‘in these disadvantaged city neighbourhoods, the Working Group has seen how local people are working in voluntary associations of various kinds, to improve life in their area,’ while grass-roots organisations ‘help people exercise the rights of citizenship in their area, by providing the conditions in which local people begin to engage in community-based campaigning.’¹²² They go on to quote Andrew Marr, writing in the Independent on 18th January 1996.

¹²⁰ E.g. *The Cities*, 180.

¹²¹ *The Cities*, 189.

¹²² *The Cities*, 168.

As globalization intensifies, almost every serious political thinker appears to be investigating the web of social relationships below the level of the state—religious groups, clubs, societies, campaigns—and concluding that this social capital is important both to economic success and to sustaining decent, low-crime communities.¹²³

The report comments on how such grass roots activism is attracting the attention of journalists, academics and politicians, and as a consequence local authorities are having to change the way they work: ‘The emphasis has to be on a local authority working in partnership with local people, to encourage their participation in regenerating their districts.’¹²⁴

Rural issues were the focus of another report to the Methodist Conference in 2004 called *Presence*. As the report reflects on social change in rural areas it tries to envisage what the rural church will be in twenty-five years time.

The churches will be local and led by lay people but enabled by ordained ministers who will be itinerant rather than parish-based. ... These churches will be keepers and sharers of the story of God’s grace in Christ and a sign in their community of the kind of people God calls all of us to be.¹²⁵

Again, the report demonstrates an awareness of the variety of communities of which people might be a part, but the main focus is on ‘villages’, small rural neighbourhoods, and how the church might retain a presence within them in the face of secularisation and decline.

Faithful Cities, another ecumenically produced church report, also includes a positive view of the churches presence within small geographical areas. In reviewing its predecessor report, *Faith in the City*,¹²⁶ it offers an upbeat view of the value of the Anglican parish system, referring to the church ‘retain[ing] a presence in some of the most marginalized

¹²³ *The Cities*, 169.

¹²⁴ *The Cities*, 170.

¹²⁵ The Methodist Church, *Presence: A Workbook to Help Promote and Sustain an Effective Christian Presence in Villages* (London: The Methodist Church, 2004), 12.

¹²⁶ The Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985).

communities at a time when many agencies were withdrawing.’¹²⁷ Later, referring to the contemporary situation, they comment on churches being ‘rich in social capital’ and ‘often hav[ing] strong historical associations with a geographical place,’¹²⁸ and to ‘long-term presence within a neighbourhood enable[ing] churches to give ... “patient attention” to people and to the issues that impact on their lives.’¹²⁹ While the report looks as much to city-wide responses as those of local congregations, there is no doubt that the neighbourhood paradigm is present here as well.

It is not surprising that this same paradigm is found more informally among ministers and congregations. Many ministers and church councils think about mission in terms of the place in which they are located. They ask themselves questions about what they can do ‘here’, ‘in this place’. Relevance and success are assessed informally, as well as formally, in terms of whether a church makes an impact on a local area: it’s visibility; the impact it has on local life; the extent to which it is working in and with other neighbourhood institutions such as schools and residential homes. To use the language of social capital, this is partly a concern with the extent to which they exhibit bridging social capital and extend beyond the most immediate circle in which their bonding capital is expressed; but for most churches this spreads into an affirmation of the geographically local.

B. Wider expressions of the neighbourhood paradigm

Faithful Cities begins to broaden the scope of this review, for the Methodist Church and its ministry are part of a wider discourse. This can be illustrated through two books which reflect the use of the neighbourhood paradigm. Neither of them are unequivocal about the

¹²⁷ *Faithful Cities*, 8.

¹²⁸ *Faithful Cities*, 12.

¹²⁹ *Faithful Cities*, 80.

neighbourhood. In both there is evidence of other pressures, or the flow of social change, but they both still keep the neighbourhood as a locus of some significance. Anne Morisy has ‘community ministry’ as one of the main focuses of her writing in *Journeying Out*, and *Building Utopia?* is a recent collection which explores the issues around church engagement in new housing developments in the Thames Gateway.¹³⁰

Morisy’s understanding of community ministry places it at the centre of what the church is about. Beginning from a story of churches in Hackney working together to provide winter night shelter for homeless people, she critiques conventional evangelistic understandings of mission through an exploration of what she calls ‘the principle of obliquity’: ‘To make the task of mission a focal awareness is akin to a business launching an advertising campaign which boasts that it intends to make huge profits.’¹³¹ Through this she comes to position community ministry as vital to the purpose of the church.

Community ministry can provide an oblique route that can carry a focal awareness without undermining our tacit intention. Community ministry calls out a commitment to our neighbour and in expressing this commitment other tacit or subsidiary skills and resources flourish in an unselfconscious way. The emergent, virtuous processes that flow are more than just a product of our efforts because in partaking of God’s economy of grace we become party to a cascade of grace that is far more generous and apposite than we could ever imagine.¹³²

While the ‘principle of obliquity’ seems to call into question the truthfulness of mission, it is evident that Morisy sees community ministry as crucial to mission. While ‘oblique’, at the same time it comes to occupy the centre ground in her view of mission. Although her work ranges widely, drawing on sociological and theological resources, and touches on other areas

¹³⁰ Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out: A New Approach to Christian Mission* (London: Continuum, 2004); Laurie Green and Christopher Baker, *Building Utopia? Seeking the Authentic Church for New Communities* (London: SPCK, 2008).

¹³¹ Morisy, *Journeying Out*, 16–17.

¹³² Morisy, *Journeying Out*, 16–17.

of ministry such as chaplaincy, it circles around the idea of ministry to local communities and returns to this repeatedly.

First, in a critique of unreflective community ministry, Morisy suggests that there has been a 'boom' in community ministry over the last 20 years: 'Especially in poor communities projects and participation in neighbourhood forums have become a major part of the ministry of the local church.'¹³³ However, she believes that such ministry is often engaged in without adequate reflection. Drawing a distinction between needs focused ministry and ministry which is 'based on a Gospel model of change and development' she develops an understanding of such a model using the idea of social capital.¹³⁴ She uses theology to challenge material comfort, open up the possibility of the disadvantaged teaching and leading the advantaged, and build the connections between people.

One of the most striking returns to community ministry in the book comes when Morisy considers 'apt liturgy', which is about finding appropriate words to voice hope about neighbourhood renewal. A suggestion for words which might be used includes these:

As we gather in this place we meet each other as neighbours, as friends, as people who work in this community. We meet as people who want the best for this community and yet we come together aware of the struggles and limitations that affect us.¹³⁵

Further on Morisy considers hospitality, focusing on churches as community centres, and developing community chaplaincy as a model of ministry.

Green and Baker address the issue of a new kind of neighbourhood in their concern about the development of new areas of housing. Based mainly on the Thames Gateway, the area to the East of London on both sides of the Thames estuary, where large

¹³³ Morisy, *Journeying Out*, 22.

¹³⁴ Morisy, *Journeying Out*, 34.

¹³⁵ Morisy, *Journeying Out*, 163.

volumes of new housing have been put up, they also use language more of ‘community’ than ‘neighbourhood’. *Building Utopia?* raises issues about both existing communities and those who move into new housing. Here concern for the local community becomes an expression of the neighbourhood paradigm. The book considers three kinds of church working within these new social spaces, the first two more ‘associational’ in their pattern. The third is demonstrated by

the much more local churches, often main-stream institutional churches, usually with a membership within walking distance who see themselves as local churches for local people and frequently define their roles in terms of being a focus for neighbourhood needs and concerns, and in encouraging members to live out Christian values in their local society and beyond.¹³⁶

While acknowledging the role which various different kinds of churches play, Green and Baker clearly see such locally focussed churches as having a socially important contribution in such places. Local facilities are often not well provided for in these new developments. The assumption of car use means that shops and leisure facilities are a distance away, outside the local neighbourhood.

What community facilities exist are often too expensive or too remote for the poorer members in the community, geared as they are to the market-place rather than the inclusion of all. The church may therefore be the only place where everyone can gain entry. ... The church can become a symbol of a new or emerging identity and if it flourishes, it can put ‘soul’ into a barren landscape. It can do this by spotting the story of the community emerging within the locality and celebrating it.¹³⁷

The chapter on ‘Shaping the Church’ closes with a passage which reiterates the importance to God of what is local.

Most important of all, the Church in the new urban area is there to celebrate, in worship and in its daily life, the very presence of the transcendent God in our midst. The presence of the immanent Holy One will oblige the congregation to engage with the ethical issues, but the invitation must go out to the whole locality to join in the celebration of the Good

¹³⁶ Green and Baker, *Building Utopia?* 132.

¹³⁷ Green and Baker, *Building Utopia?* 143–144.

News, for the Church must be the first to proclaim that, in our new urban areas, there is also something to sing about!¹³⁸

The idea of God being ‘in our midst’ places a theological weight behind the neighbourhood paradigm. It is in ‘the whole locality’ that God is immanent, and where the Holy is celebrated; while the ‘new urban areas’, which have been referred to time and again in the text as ‘communities’ as well as places, provide reason for celebration.

C. The neighbourhood paradigm and the Church of England

Continuing the overview of the wider expressions of the neighbourhood paradigm, I turn now to the Church of England, where it is perhaps particularly pertinent. Its parish system is based on the principle of a church and priest serving a particular bounded geographical territory. This system is a prime influence on the way the church goes about mission, and how it perceives its relationship to society. Unsurprisingly a strong sense of responsibility for the parish is instilled in ordinands in the process of theological education. Two collections will serve to show how the continuing discourse about the parish is legitimated.

Published in 1988 *The Parish Church?* develops an understanding of its subject through a comparison with the associational church. The book uses ‘parish church’ and ‘associational church’ as ideal types, which characterise a distinction which expresses ‘a more universal tension between two modes of engagement in Church and Society.’¹³⁹ One way the distinction is described is between churches which take an interest in the local community ‘because they see it as offering potential for church growth’; this is the associational church.

¹³⁸ Green and Baker, *Building Utopia?* 147.

¹³⁹ Giles Ecclestone, ed., *The Parish Church? Exploration in the Relationship of the Church and the World* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1988), 6.

Where, on the other hand, this interest has the effect of drawing out the members of the congregation into a concern for ministry to all members of the community, individually and collectively, then we see signs of the parish church.¹⁴⁰

The parish boundary becomes significant where it is seen as

a way of defining the extent of their accountability for the community around their local church, and if that is further expressed by the prayer of the congregation and the clergy, then it can become a powerful symbol of that accountability.¹⁴¹

This is developed in two ways. First in terms of representation. The congregation of the parish church ‘see themselves much more in terms of the whole parish, as representatives rather than simply individuals.’¹⁴² Second, in terms of relatedness as opposed to relationships. ‘For example, a newly appointed minister may have few relationships with the congregation, but he [*sic*] has a *relatedness* to everyone.’ Everything here speaks of a church which is embedded in a particular place. Church and neighbourhood cannot be separated because the first is a representation of the other. There is a relatedness between them which is not dependent on personality, which goes beyond interpersonal relationships, and which therefore continues even if some relationships break down.

It is unsurprising that some of the book’s contributors call this idea into question. David Martin’s paper outlines what he sees as its subtext. He points to the underlying social change since the beginning of the nineteenth century where, as ‘organic society’ has fragmented, churches have become ‘increasingly “denominational”, increasingly “congregational” ... increasingly drawing people together within limits which are set by social affinity rather than by local community.’¹⁴³ He questions whether ‘the “parish” ... may be a code-word for some kind of “communitarian” notion, even perhaps a “communitarian

¹⁴⁰ Ecclestone, *Parish Church?* 6–7.

¹⁴¹ Ecclestone, *Parish Church?* 7–8.

¹⁴² Ecclestone, *Parish Church?* 10.

¹⁴³ Ecclestone, *Parish Church?* 44.

nostalgia”.¹⁴⁴ What the book offers on the whole is an attempt to re-work the neighbourhood paradigm for the late twentieth century.

In a more recent collection a number of practitioners write of their experiences of parish ministry.¹⁴⁵ This collection works to demonstrate the variety of parochial life, and to view it from different perspectives, including mission, pastoral care, multiculturalism, and regeneration. The continuing issue is very straightforwardly expressed. While acknowledging some ambiguity of what ‘parish’ means, ‘understood either as territory or as congregation and building,’ the book presupposes ‘that the Church of England is fundamentally its parishes—for without the parishes there would be no Church of England.’¹⁴⁶ One contributor begins her article:

Whenever I am asked why I am an Anglican rather than, say, Methodist or Roman Catholic, I find myself explaining that it has much to do with the Church of England’s commitment to care for anyone and everyone in a parish, not simply those who come to church.¹⁴⁷

Whatever reaction this might provoke in those of other traditions (as though others do not have a commitment to care for those who don’t come to church), it is a powerful illustration of the way the neighbourhood (or in this case parish) paradigm shapes the church’s thinking.

Another contributor writes of

the strengths of the parish system. Living as part of the communities they serve, clergy and their families share in and are affected by local issues, the quality of local schools and health services, traffic, and crime. They are generally there long enough for trust to develop and for relationships to grow, not just with individual parishioners, but with civic institutions. Standing in worship behind the altar, facing a congregation, some of whose most personal joys and sorrows I have come to know and share over the years is, for me, one of the great privileges of priesthood. All that trust, all that history, all that experience of common humanity is made part of the sacramental offering. And this relationship and

¹⁴⁴ Ecclestone, *Parish Church?* 45.

¹⁴⁵ Malcolm Torry, ed., *The Parish: People, Place and Ministry: A Theological and Practical Exploration* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁶ Torry, *The Parish*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ Torry, *The Parish*, 27.

process, which might almost be called incarnational, is mirrored in the multi-faceted life of the congregation.¹⁴⁸

This very personal view echoes the kind of representative relationship described more academically in Ecclestone's collection, and even while the writer goes on to point out the questioning of the parish system, it makes clear how deeply rooted these ways of thinking are.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a three-fold exploration of neighbourhood: an example, a definition, and case study of a Christian group engaged in neighbourhood focused ministry. The neighbourhood paradigm, which operates in many churches, has been demonstrated. As yet this does not raise any particularly sharp questions. Here is a context in which parts of the church are used to working, and within which there is a strong sense of self-understanding. Theologically themes of incarnation, immanence and community give a foundation to that self-understanding. So why should this paradigm become a concern? The next chapter will consider the questions raised about that paradigm as a model for the local church, as the paradigm has become contested in the wider church. This chapter and the next describe two models of church. The one explored so far, under the neighbourhood paradigm, is familiar, perhaps even comfortable. Through the next chapter we will see another model which raises questions, and pulls the church into a tension as to where and how it should engage in its work and mission. Just as the site team found themselves ambivalent about their place within the neighbourhood of Bowburn, so the church finds itself ambivalent over its engagement in neighbourhood focused ministry.

¹⁴⁸ Torry, *The Parish*, 113.

CHAPTER 4

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF A CONTESTED PARADIGM

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand "I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!" or "I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!" "I am homeless, the Government must house me!" and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.

Margaret Thatcher¹⁴⁹

Margaret Thatcher's claim seems to voice a fundamental principle of some people's contemporary experience: the greatest we owe others is to live and let live. The emphasis on individual choice makes notions of social obligation, or even of community and neighbourhood, unfashionable or nostalgic, with little to say to our contemporary situation.

¹⁴⁹ Margaret Thatcher, interview by Douglas Keay, 'Interview for Woman's Own ("no such thing as society"),' Margaret Thatcher Foundation, http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/display_document.asp?docid=106689 (accessed 30th July 2010).

On the other hand, while we face pressures to loosen our ties with one another, we cannot escape from our need as social beings. The human animal is gregarious and sociable.

There is an ambivalence here, which is also evident as a tension between locality and ways of life which reach beyond the local. The boundary around Bowburn is far more porous than it once was, and the pressures of car culture and the tendency to associate in dispersed networks mean that the strength of Bowburn's neighbourhood is weakened. The extent of this weakening, and what can be done about it, are seen differently depending on who is consulted. We have already noted Bauman's comment that, 'Far from being hotbeds of communities, local populations are more like loose bunches of untied ends.'¹⁵⁰ Another point of view would be that the social relationships expressed in neighbourhood are an essential part of human living; that people need to relate to one another at that scale and social change has not altered that fact. This point of view is evidenced by recent government policy at national and local level, and by many people working and writing in the field of community development.

However, both sides of this ambivalence and tension need to be acknowledged. Late modern life is strung somewhere between the two. Social relationships are thus pulled in two opposing directions, both towards and away from the neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood paradigm is subject to the same forces. These are what challenge the neighbourhood paradigm, and make it no longer an appropriate way of modelling local ministry. This chapter presents the evidence which presses for a new paradigm for the local church, and explores some theological and ecclesial responses to that evidence. However, while it is the pull away from neighbourhoods which is strongest, the chapter concludes with

¹⁵⁰ Bauman, *Globalization*, 24.

four strands of thinking which offer the beginnings of new paradigms, and within these strands the potential for local neighbourhood ministry is retained to some extent. This poses the main question of this thesis: in the face of social change, are their ways in which the neighbourhood church can remain a locus for strong, authentic Christian ministry?

4.1 Ambivalence Found in the Experience of Neighbourhood

The significance of neighbourhood inevitably involves ambivalence, both within neighbourhoods and within individuals. Individuals might experience this ambivalence as a changing attitude, sometimes feeling at home and sometimes alienated within the same place. We have already seen this with regard to the site team.¹⁵¹ In terms of neighbourhoods it will be evident through some activities pulling apart from the centre, and some bringing people together. People in neighbourhoods have different needs and different intensities of need. For some their immediate environment matters a great deal; for others it is less significant. These feelings and needs will be affected, among other things, by whether people feel able to easily move beyond the neighbourhood and by the degree and nature of commitment they feel to the place. We can explore this ambivalence through considering various vectors which push people beyond neighbourhood, or pull them in. While what follows does not provide a complete account of such vectors, it brings to the foreground those which have the biggest impact on local neighbourhoods. Among the first and strongest set of vectors are perhaps those resulting from social change. They shape social relationships and are themselves expressive of ambivalence, but they principally draw people beyond the neighbourhood. Second, there are those which hold people within neighbourhoods, the most powerful being economic need. Thirdly, there are vectors arising from theological issues.

¹⁵¹ See p. 73 above.

A. Social and personal vectors drawing people out of neighbourhood

Tönnies classic picture of how people relate to one another in industrial society takes shape around the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. On the one hand there is the community, arising from natural connections, and a sense of what people need and want together; on the other, society shaped by the desires of individuals to forward their own personal aims, and particularly shaped through structures of markets and wealth. Tönnies analyses *Gemeinschaft* as beginning from ‘mutual affirmation’ found in the most basic of human relationships: that of mother and child, man and woman as a couple, and siblings to each other.¹⁵² From this beginning of community, based in blood relationships Tönnies sees *Gemeinschaft* as developing into community of place, which is expressed first of all as living in close proximity to one another. This in turn becomes community of spirit, working together for the same end and purpose.¹⁵³ The community of place is then explored in terms of neighbourhood which is ‘the general character of life together in a village.’¹⁵⁴ Tönnies later expands this, in terms of scale, by seeing the town or city as a potential site for *Gemeinschaft*, saying it can be ‘a self-sufficient house-hold, an organism living in a communitarian way.’¹⁵⁵

Given this movement from close blood relationships, into neighbourhood, and on to other degrees of connection, Tönnies saw *Gemeinschaft* as the fundamental way in which humans related in the distant past among primitive peoples. They were focussed on family, clan and land. At the beginning of his opening section on ‘The Theory of *Gemeinschaft*’ Tönnies writes that it ‘is based on the idea that in the original or natural state there is a

¹⁵² Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, 22.

¹⁵³ Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, 28.

¹⁵⁵ Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, 48.

complete unity of human wills.’¹⁵⁶ When trade developed the merchants were still bound into such patterns and *Gesellschaft* very limited in its expression, until industrialisation (and yet, according to Tönnies theory of ‘normal types’, even at that stage of human social development we would see *Gemeinschaft* as a construction, not able to be present in a ‘pure’ form).

Of course, Tönnies writes in the context of industrialisation, and with that process well advanced. It is precisely this which shapes his concerns. His context is one which involves a rural upbringing and a concern with a phase of urbanising society in which the balance between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* is particularly poised. That is part of the reason why he writes as he does and sees human interactions as he does. We should also note that at this point we can treat this use of ‘neighbourhood’ specifically as a location for *Gemeinschaft*. It is part of the overall picture of community which Tönnies paints.

Since he wrote change has continued. At the simplest level we might say that *Gesellschaft* has deepened while *Gemeinschaft* has receded. In our own times, of late modernity, we find writers such as Zygmunt Bauman writing of society becoming ‘liquid’,¹⁵⁷ and Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim writing of individualization.¹⁵⁸ They too are writing out of a particular situation which shapes their thought. Each of these might be seen as a vector drawing people away from neighbourhood. It is worth relating this specifically to the example of Bowburn, as a particular late modern place.

Bauman writes of the liquidity of social structures; of what was once solid and relatively fixed now being fluid. People’s lives are affected by structures which are not

¹⁵⁶ Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, 22.

¹⁵⁷ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*.

¹⁵⁸ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

restricted by place in the same way. They are not held in the same fixed form, but are constantly shifting and changing. The whole image of liquid, in which things are constantly changing, is the key metaphor for his book *Liquid Modernity*, and he writes of fluidity as being ‘a fitting metaphor when we wish to grasp the nature of the present ... phase in the history of modernity.’¹⁵⁹ What is seen in Bowburn at this stage, with on-going change making it difficult to pin down social structures and realities, is typical of this liquid modernity. The image of liquidity is particularly relevant here because of what it does to the idea of place. While what is solid remains in one place, or has to be consciously moved, what is liquid is constantly changing, mixing, and place loses its meaning. One can see how, in liquid modernity, neighbourhood might be seen as something which melts away.

So, as noted in the last chapter, at a local level in Bowburn social connections have been changing and mutating. At an individual level there is increased physical and social mobility, and people’s connections are now less geographical and their social relationships are expressed in other ways through a variety of networks. On a more collective scale Bowburn has become more heterogeneous. That heterogeneity means that people are affected in different ways by the growth of wider social networks. Patterns of life which depend on mobility are not equally available to everyone.

While Bauman does not write of neighbourhood as such, he does raise issues which clearly show the way old style institutions are seen as on the way out, and he quotes Ulrich Beck who refers to neighbourhood as a ‘zombie institution’.¹⁶⁰ Later, when writing of community, we find:

¹⁵⁹ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 6; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 203.

To say “It is nice to be part of a community” is an oblique testimony of not being a part. ... In order to fulfil the communitarian project one needs to appeal to the selfsame ... individual choices whose possibility has been denied.¹⁶¹

The reason, he suggests, that people wish to appeal to community values is because community has ceased to have the meaning it once had. His argument goes further in seeing this appeal as self-contradictory. Maintaining community today, he suggests, involves on the one hand an appeal to reject individual choice as people are asked to tie themselves into obligations to others, but on the other a call to exercise that individual choice precisely in making the appeal or responding to it. He goes on to comment that ‘communitarianism is an all-too-expectable reaction to the accelerating “liquefaction” of modern life.’¹⁶² This claim of a self-contradictory character to community needs to be challenged, because community has always grown out of individual and corporate needs coinciding. Processes of legitimation may have needed to become more overt or explicit to bring to the surface what is natural or organic (to use Tönnies’s terms), but an individual choice to locate oneself in community is still possible if more fragile, as can be seen from some of the choices people make in this regard. Within the site team there were those who had consciously chosen to make the neighbourhood of Bowburn a greater focus of their daily life, through voluntary, leisure and church activities.

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim write of individualization, and Ulrich Beck in particular sees neighbourhood as having ceased to have significance as part of this. In conversation with Jonathan Rutherford he speaks, as mentioned above, of ‘zombie institutions’, which are dead and yet go on living.¹⁶³ We talk about them, refer to them, and yet they are actually emptied of significance. He refers specifically to the example of family,

¹⁶¹ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 169–170.

¹⁶² Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 170.

¹⁶³ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 204.

and later to that of class, but another of these zombies which he mentions only in passing is neighbourhood. We can refer to Bowburn to see how this understanding works, and compare it with Beck's comments on family.

At one time Bowburn was an important marker which people used to define themselves. This was especially so in the village's early days, when living there also meant having a family member who worked in the pit, or in local shops which were economically dependent on the pit. Life consisted largely of face to face meetings: in the home, the chapel, the union, the working men's club; these were all local places and part of the village. People knew one another. The content of the idea of a neighbour was clear. However late modernity is different. There is no pit at the centre of the village to pull things together, and most residents own cars, making it easy to go and shop at Tesco three miles away. Some still frequent local pubs and the working men's club still functions, as do church and chapel. None of these institutions however make much impact on the new residents who have moved into Bowburn. The community hall which is still called, by longer term residents, 'the miners' welfare' is more often used for regional meetings, toy fairs, and dog shows, than by most of the new residents. With the dwindling of the old institutions the sense of neighbourhood declines too. People no longer define themselves as belonging to this village, this pit, but define themselves in other ways. Where those older realities are still significant they are seen in terms of 'heritage', a concept which places significance firmly in the past. So the traditional union banner is restored by a local history group, many of whom did not live in the village when the union branch was active. The ways people now define themselves are not locked into a local area, but are network based. Whether it be family, leisure, employment, or church, it is more likely that people will find what is important to them

outside Bowburn than inside it; and if they do find it inside Bowburn that may be just chance and doesn't necessarily carry any significance.

Beck speaks of people being aware of the changes which are going on, profoundly affecting institutions; but meanwhile the institutions carry on. And people maintain an outward commitment to the institution. So he says of family: 'there are huge problems in family life, but each person thinks that he or she will solve all those problems that their parents didn't get right.'¹⁶⁴ We can see this paralleled in Bowburn with regard to neighbourhood, where there are many residents who maintain a belief in the importance of their neighbourhood, and work for it through various groups and political processes. A local history group, a well attended community partnership, and a regular local newsletter delivered around the village, all attest to this. There is clearly continued belief in the institution of neighbourhood, just as there is in the institution of family.

Beck however sees family as an institution under considerable stress, and even attack. He speaks of 'parenthood ... beginning to disintegrate under conditions of divorce' and goes on to use grandparenthood as a particularly strong example. While parents and children exercise their choice as to which family members they relate to, grandparents find themselves without any choice.

They get included and excluded without any means of participating themselves in the decisions of their sons and daughters. From the point of view of the grandchildren the meaning of grandparents has to be determined by individual decisions and choices.¹⁶⁵

So there is no choice for some; but this comes about because of choices exercised by others. This same vulnerability of old institutions to the personal choices made by individuals is seen in the ways residents of Bowburn exercise their choice through mobility. Many choose to go

¹⁶⁴ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 204.

¹⁶⁵ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 204.

elsewhere for various things, whether shopping, leisure, or worship. This whittles away at the breadth of possibilities for the neighbourhood and changes the nature of the local area. In a similar way, the commitment of individuals to more dispersed networks means that they do not have time to relate to more immediate neighbours.

Beck sees both negative and positive aspects in this change. On the positive side he sees it as a process of democratization.

The tension in family life today is the fact that equalization of men and women cannot be created in an institutional family structure which presupposed their inequality. ... Conflicts are initiated by the opening up of possibilities to choose: in conflicting needs over careers, in the division of house work and child care. ... With the lack of institutional solutions people are having to learn how to negotiate relationships on the basis of equality.¹⁶⁶

On the negative side, when speaking of the institution of class he says: 'Capitalism without classes does not mean less inequality in the future, it will mean more.'¹⁶⁷ The older style of neighbourhood which might have been found in Bowburn during the early and mid-twentieth century certainly exhibited inequalities, being mainly a working class mining village. The inequalities which exist now take on new forms, and are characterised not so much by the particular forms of employment in which people find themselves, as by the capacity which some have to exercise choice compared to others, such as the infirm elderly, or single mothers who don't own their own car.

The radical changes going on in Bowburn as a neighbourhood are exactly what Beck speaks about. Yet at the same time that some of his imagery sounds as though second modernity (to use his expression) is destructive of these institutions, he then goes on to also use language of transformation. There is an ambivalence in his handling of these zombies, in

¹⁶⁶ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 204.

¹⁶⁷ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 207.

which on the one hand he seems to desire a hastening of their complete demise, but on the other hand he seems to want to find the new form they are to take. As he shows that they are subject to forces which strike them or put them under tension, he also affirms that some institutional form is necessary for human social life. The transformed institutions, the things which family and neighbourhood are becoming, may look different and need fresh understanding and analysis, but something will still be there. None of this however lessens the thoroughgoing change which he sees occurring.

In this second modernity, we are heading for not only minor changes in, for example, personal relationships, but for a different form of capitalism, a new global order, a different type of everyday life. We have to begin by asking very basic questions about how to live, how we can respond to these changes and how we can analyse them in sociological terms.¹⁶⁸

Bowburn is certainly a neighbourhood undergoing some kind of profound change. From being an old style pit village, with terraced streets and a single major employer, it has moved through intermediate stages. Large areas of council housing were added in the 1950s and 1960s, and employment broadened as some residents worked in pits further from the village. Then, with the closure of the pit in 1966, employment diversified further, with new employers coming and the construction of industrial estates. Further change came with the building of private housing and the selling off of some council stock. These changes continued from 2005 to 2010 with large scale replacement of some of the post-war housing with private and housing association properties. These changes echo other cultural and social changes. Within this situation some wish to maintain what they see as older values through neighbourhood groups and structures; others are content simply to use the village as a base for their more wide-ranging lives.

¹⁶⁸ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 206.

Another point to note from Beck's thinking is that the transformation of the old institutions is very uneven. In a discussion about class he recognises that German and British society are at different points, with British thinkers still seeing a place for class in their analysis, while in Germany the 'conventional Marxist analysis of class' bears no relation to his students' experience; 'they could make no sense of it.'¹⁶⁹ So what we see happening in Bowburn may be at a different stage from that seen in other places. Even within the Durham coalfield I have seen other villages which seem to demonstrate this by being at different stages in the transformation of neighbourhood. At Blackhall, a village on the Durham coast at which the pit closed fifteen years after Bowburn's, the changes seem to be a step further back, with a stronger sense of community and stronger local institutions.

So in the writing of Bauman and Beck *Gemeinschaft* is not a category from which to start. Indeed, community is called into question by Bauman, as a category which no longer has significance. Beck would undoubtedly include it among his 'zombie categories', as a principle behind neighbourhood. Yet what they are arguing is simply a step down the line from Tönnies, with *Gemeinschaft* weakened and *Gesellschaft* strengthened. One of the marks of *Gesellschaft* is individualization: the shift from corporate shared will, to individual rational will. Similarly with liquidity. Liquidity is a shift to increased mobility of capital and labour. This is the strengthening of *Gesellschaft*, the same principles deepened.

Now we need to lay this picture over neighbourhood. And the image we lay it over is that particular, specific, context which has been defined in chapter 3. What does this picture do to neighbourhood? How does it relate? At what points do lines reinforce one another, and where do they go in different directions? Because neighbourhoods are particular,

¹⁶⁹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 206.

different patterns of interaction can be seen. Here are some possibilities which begin to build up a picture of the ambivalence experienced around modern neighbourhood.

- + The strong historic connection between *Gemeinschaft* and neighbourhood means that neighbourhood is seen as a place where *Gemeinschaft* can be held onto; neighbourhood can become a symbolic or actual bastion against the progress of individualization and liquidity.
- + Neighbourhood is seen as a product of urbanisation and part of the whole process of individualization and liquidity; it is what replaces 'village' as *Gesellschaft* advances. It might, by people like Beck, be seen as a transient, interim step between *Gemeinschaft* and full blown individualization.
- + Neighbourhood is experienced as a place where something is missing; where people experience a lack of connection. People feel they should know their neighbours, but they do not. The process of individualization is itself an ambiguous one, and neighbourhood is a place which reminds people of that ambivalence. It may be that the individual focus of life is now far more significant, but neighbourhood hangs around like an echo of what once was, an echo of *Gemeinschaft* which nags at individualized people like the gap where there was once a tooth.
- + Neighbourhood is the place from which people go out into networks, and return to base. Here it provides a connection which, although it has receded, continues to matter to people. It isn't the place of deep relationships, but it might still be some kind of an ontological anchor for people. This vestigial connection can be seen as the place for convenience shopping, where children play and go to school, and

possibly where someone walks their dog; particular resources might be significant for people: a corner newsagent, a post office, a petrol station.

- + Neighbourhood is the place where fundamental needs are met (or are not met, but remain needed). This is so for those who are unable to move beyond the neighbourhood with ease. It doesn't necessarily mean that neighbourhood is significant for these people: for a house-bound person home may be a place isolated even from the most immediate neighbours; but for others it is the place where they have to buy food and find the relationships which sustain them. Here neighbourhood may be experienced positively, or as a trap.
- + In a purely vestigial way neighbourhood is the place defined by some natural patterns of living, because people only relate to a certain amount of geography. This is our natural area of association.

This is sufficient to establish neighbourhood as disputed territory: its significance debated by social scientists, and questioned within the experience of different people. Nevertheless it is also helpful to note an alternative view point from Christian social analysis. Gallagher is writing more in terms of community than of neighbourhood, but his suggestion challenges the way in which neighbourhood and community are dispensed with by some sociologists. He suggests that 'postmodernity can mean a retrieval of resources neglected through the lopsided triumph of modernity—old anchors like community and spirituality.'¹⁷⁰ In lived postmodernity (as opposed to postmodernism, the more negative approach of academic disciplines) and particularly in its more creative side (as opposed to its more narcissistic and nihilistic side) there is a re-evaluation going on of modernity; part of this

¹⁷⁰ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 108.

involves this reclaiming of notions including community. At this stage we can note that neighbourhood might find a place within such a reclamation, and also that in terms of Gospel values, neighbourhood institutions and structures can enrich human living and provide a possible arena for this to happen.

B. Social and personal vectors into the neighbourhood

Within the variety of experiences of neighbourhood in late modernity it is clear that neighbourhood matters more to some people than to others. Community development studies recognise that neighbourhood is important to a number of people, particularly in some social settings. There are several groups for whom it matters more. Of course, everyone in a neighbourhood has at least a limited interest in it. The quality of a local environment affects the quality of life people can enjoy; for owner occupiers it will also affect the value of their property. It can also matter to people in terms of convenience; being able to buy a pint of milk locally, or a newspaper. Neighbourhood, in terms of the local geographical area, continues to be a significant issue for many people. But there are identifiable groups of neighbourhood stakeholders to whom it matters more. During the research in Bowburn we identified four such groups.

First, neighbourhood matters increasingly among those with less easy access to transport and poorer mobility. Groups particularly affected are: children and young people; the elderly; those without ready access to family transport during the day; and those without independent transport. The concerns of such groups are that they need a healthy environment, and that environment is provided mostly by their neighbourhood. This emphasises the neighbourhood as a geographical construct; the neighbourhood's size depends on the distances that people can, or are willing to, travel on foot.

Second, neighbourhood matters in some areas to those who see significance in the historic heritage of a place. There are those who look back to a past way of life which has significantly shaped a neighbourhood, and want to maintain the neighbourhood for a variety of reasons connected with that past. In Bowburn this is a significant issue for some people. Indicators of its importance can be seen in the local history group, but also among a number of long term residents who either worked in the coal industry or had relatives who did so. This last group will inevitably slowly shrink and their perspective will have a declining influence.

Third, there are also people who see neighbourhood primarily as the appropriate location for community. Community which is shaped around the values of solidarity is seen as important for the neighbourhood. In Bowburn this third group may be long term residents, but there are also some among them who have moved into the village more recently. For a variety of reasons they have chosen the values of community as significant to them, and seek to put those into practice in a variety of ways: volunteering; becoming active in local party politics; or attending a local church. We might also include among this group those who come to work in the village in community focused roles as workers in education, health, social services, or youth services.

Fourth, there are people with an economic interest in a neighbourhood. While capital is mobile in late modernity, just as individuals are affected in different ways, so are businesses. For small companies, moving is not necessarily a viable option, while corner shops, pubs and food outlets are tied into their local area. This is true wherever the business is accessed primarily by those living in the neighbourhood.

The first of these groups points to the impact that deprivation and poverty has on the experience of neighbourhood. This is perhaps the most significant issue to consider when

thinking about the way neighbourhood matters more to some than to others. Recent thinking about neighbourhood in the UK has been shaped by government policy which prioritises neighbourhoods most affected by deprivation.¹⁷¹ There has been a tranche of initiatives focussed on neighbourhood, especially since the Labour government came to power in 1997. The Social Exclusion Unit, Department of Health, and the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions have encouraged and funded initiatives which have been based on small scale local areas.¹⁷² One example will help to illustrate how this neighbourhood focus has been concerned with deprivation.

The idea of ‘healthy neighbourhoods’ first emerged through a U.K. government green paper ‘Our Healthier Nation’ in February 1998 followed, after consultation, by a white paper, *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation*. In this paper it is recognised that health is affected by deprivation and poverty, with statements such as, ‘We believe in working across Government to attack the breeding ground of poor health—poverty and social exclusion;’¹⁷³ and later, ‘Across a range of Government policy, we are focusing on the factors that increase the likelihood of poor health—poor housing, poverty, unemployment, crime, poor education and family breakdown.’¹⁷⁴ In the green paper healthy neighbourhoods were identified as one of three focuses for tackling such inequalities (with neighbourhood recognised as particularly

¹⁷¹ The research took place between 2003 and 2008, during the time of the Labour governments, so the focus here is on the policies of those administrations.

¹⁷² Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Local Strategic Partnerships: Consultation Document* (London: DETR, October 2000); Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance* (London: DETR, March 2001); Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, *The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund: A Consultation Paper* (London: DETR, October 2000) ; Social Exclusion Unit, *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (London: Stationery Office, 1998); Social Exclusion Unit, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: A Framework for Consultation* (London: Cabinet Office, 2000); Social Exclusion Unit, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Policy Action Team Audit* (London: Cabinet Office, 2001); Social Exclusion Unit, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Policy Action Team Report Summaries: A Compendium* (London: Cabinet Office, 2001); Social Exclusion Unit, *New Commitment*.

¹⁷³ *Saving Lives*, 1.7.

¹⁷⁴ *Saving Lives*, 1.37.

significant for older people). While this central role for neighbourhoods is scaled down in the white paper, there is still a place for healthy neighbourhoods, while the alternative term ‘community’ is widely used. The section on healthy neighbourhoods no longer focuses solely on older people and includes references to major government funding initiatives aimed at local neighbourhoods. For example:

The close link between regeneration and health is reflected in our New Deal for Communities initiative—a key part of our work to turn around our most deprived neighbourhoods. Under it we have set up a new fund, worth £800 million over three years, to help improve the poorest neighbourhoods and encourage local people and agencies—public, private and voluntary—to work together to overcome the problems of multiple deprivation and to make a lasting improvement to their neighbourhoods.¹⁷⁵

Mention is also made of the growth of the Single Regeneration Budget, the Local Agenda 21 initiative, and planning policy with statements such as: ‘We shall continue to use the planning system to support local shopping facilities which are accessible to non-car users.’¹⁷⁶ Other neighbourhood focussed initiatives have been the responsibility of the department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Social Exclusion Unit. The language of neighbourhood tends to be rather loosely used, and sometimes interchangeably with community, but through it a clear concern for local places comes through, where environment and other factors affect the quality of people’s lives.

The neighbourhood is a local area which can profoundly affect the quality of life of residents. This is so in all kinds of neighbourhoods. It is true that in places where people are wealthy enough to access a rich variety of networks neighbourhood may seem to be less significant. But these areas are also where the local environment is probably of a much higher quality (no boarded up properties; good well maintained shops and facilities; people motivated to act when road disrepair looks like it might become a problem). Just where the

¹⁷⁵ *Saving Lives*, para 4.36.

¹⁷⁶ *Saving Lives*, para 4.40.

neighbourhood is well-maintained people are likely to need that neighbourhood less, and easily travel beyond it to access whatever variety of services they need: large supermarket, private dentist, cinema, etc. But the care given to that local environment is a further indicator of how people see their immediate environment—their neighbourhood—as a priority. Even in such neighbourhoods as these there will be at least some people who depend on their neighbourhood more than others. Older people are spread around different kinds of neighbourhoods, and some in less deprived areas will have the same problems of mobility as older people in deprived areas. These issues, however, are far more sharply felt in areas of deprivation, where local amenities are poor, and many do not have the means to easily access facilities beyond the neighbourhood. There is also an accumulation of problems in some such neighbourhoods, where crime, vandalism, unemployment, poor support networks, and other social problems combine. Government priorities have shown a desire, at least in principle, to act to improve the situation of such places. Beside this analysis of social ambivalence over neighbourhood we might also consider how two particular theological issues take us beyond neighbourhood.

C. Theological vectors

Faith can also provide motives which act on those for whom they are significant values. One of these is the flip-side of particularity as explored by Sheldrake; the other is the way the word ‘neighbour’ is used in the New Testament. Both of these remind us that the boundary around a neighbourhood should not become a reason for exclusivity, or for forgetting the needs of people who are outside the neighbourhood. They draw out the limitations as well as the extent of neighbourhood.

At the end of his chapter entitled ‘A Sense of Place’ Sheldrake writes:

In Christian terms, a theology of place must maintain a balance between God's revelation in the particular and a sense that God's place ultimately escapes the boundaries of the localized.¹⁷⁷

He goes on to suggest that spirituality involves a connection to what is catholic and universal as well as with what is local and particular:

The divine presence cannot be imprisoned in any contracted place or series of places. The divine is to be sought throughout the *oikumene*, the whole inhabited world (or, indeed, eventually the *oikumene* of the cosmos whatever that may ultimately mean).¹⁷⁸

This is an expression of the fundamental theological theme of the balance between God's immanence and God's transcendence. Our own experience of God occurs within particular places, but it is also an experience of God who 'fills all in all' (Eph. 1.23). Even while a local church finds the expression of its faith in the concerns and people of a particular neighbourhood, it also lives on the largest of maps: aware of the needs of people around the world, of its place as part of a world-wide community of faith, and of its call to worship the creator of the cosmos. This is perhaps partly borne out by the way the New Testament uses the word 'neighbour'.

The modern English word 'neighbour' and the New Testament πλησιος have comparable etymologies. Neighbour is a compound word from Old English meaning 'near dweller', while πλησιος at its most basic is an adjective meaning 'near', and this use is extended when used with the article to mean 'neighbour'. Yet what comes across etymologically as simply 'someone who lives nearby' raises questions about the extent of its application. An important part of Jewish teaching was the injunction to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev. 19.18). It seems from several commentators that Jewish teaching around the time of Jesus had seen this as having a broader application than other Israelites, and was

¹⁷⁷ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 30.

¹⁷⁸ Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 31.

also seen as one of the most significant commandments by some Jewish teachers. Anderson, in his comments on Mark 12:31, writes,

There was a tendency in late Judaism to extend the meaning of the term ‘neighbour’, which in the OT refers only to the Jewish citizen, to include the resident alien, and even all men, as in Philo.¹⁷⁹

How late this extension was seems to be open to debate, but there are certainly clear injunctions in the Hebrew scriptures regarding love of the stranger as well, and later in the same passage from Leviticus comes the parallel saying, ‘you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt’ (Lev. 19:34). The saying about love of neighbour is also presented in several rabbinic sources as a summary of the law, or of primary significance, although these sources all come from after the time of Jesus.¹⁸⁰ In the Gospels ὁ πλησιος occurs twelve times, of which seven come in the context of discussion about Leviticus 19:18. The injunction to ‘love neighbour’ is repeated eight times in the New Testament; three times in epistles; four in paralleled Gospel accounts; and once in Matthew 5:43 where it is coupled with Jesus injunction to ‘love your enemy.’ Of these eight occurrences four are specifically presenting this as a summary of the Torah. In Matthew 22:39 (paralleled in Mk 12:31–33) Jesus is recorded as seeing two commandments as the basis for the law and the prophets: the love of God (Deut. 6:4) and the love of neighbour in Leviticus 19:18. Luke uses a similar discussion as the setting for the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the idea of neighbour is extended with an example surely designed to shock. The neighbour is not just other Jews, not even just others who live nearby including resident aliens, but anyone whose need becomes apparent. The use of a despised Samaritan as an exemplar adds a sharp twist to the story, implying that the Samaritan is also to be included as

¹⁷⁹ Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1976), 281.

¹⁸⁰ Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (London: Continuum, 1991), 288.

neighbour. The occurrence in Matthew 5:43 pushes this extension even further: while not specifically calling the enemy a neighbour, it implies that the same duty of love applies.

The epistles seem to retreat from this extension, and use ὁ πλησιος as a term to apply to fellow church members. Of five passages, four (Rom. 13:9–10, Rom. 15:2ff., Gal. 5:13–14, Eph. 4:25) explicitly link ‘neighbour’ with language about ‘one another’; while the other (Jam. 2:8) implies it. This suggests that in the early church other church members were regarded as neighbours, and that is where the language was used, maybe because this is where the most significant conflicts broke out. Three of these use the neighbour commandment, and are providing some kind of exposition of it. The other two can be seen in a similar light, as part of the pattern. It is also worth noting that in Luke’s gospel neighbours are those with whom people celebrate. Three times (Luke 1:57–58, Luke 15:6 and 9—twice in the linked series of parables about lost things) neighbours rejoice with someone: with Elizabeth, the shepherd, and the woman with the coins. In Luke 14:12 those inviting others to celebratory banquets are told not to invite their rich neighbours, but the poor.

These passages can be seen to do two things. First, they affirm the centrality and importance of the commandment to love the neighbour. But secondly, rather than relating this specifically to neighbourhood situations where people living at close quarters might need to be reminded of their duty to one another, they extend the term, in some instances in a radical way. So Jesus’ teaching about neighbours and our relationship to them can be seen to both strengthen and limit the significance of neighbourhoods.

D. A note about conflict

One final issue needs to be mentioned in dealing with the ambivalence which is experienced with regard to a neighbourhood, and that is about conflict, which can play a powerful role in

the way people relate to neighbourhoods. Places are owned in different ways by different people, and that ownership is a source of power. It is clear enough at a larger scale how places are contested and different groups seek to wield power over those places. Sheldrake writes about place and conflict:

The French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre offers an analysis of place that also reminds us that systems of spatialization are historically conditioned. Spatializations are not merely physical arrangements of things but also spatial patterns of social action and routine, and historical conceptions of the world. These add up to what Lefebvre calls a 'socio-spatial outlook' that manifests itself in our every intuition. The metanarratives of those with secular or religious power at any given time take over public places and thus become stories of dominance and repression.¹⁸¹

So the ambiguous experience of neighbourhood might be expressed in terms of conflict. As the things that people consider significant and important differ, and the values expressed in the importance of neighbourhood can themselves be grounds for disagreement, who is it that has power in the neighbourhood and how is that power expressed? Sometimes the conflict may be evident between groups within the neighbourhood. As the significance of a particular place is found through relationships to other people these relationships will sometimes lead to a degree of mutual commitment and regard, but will also be characterised by the possibility of disagreement, or of some groups having power while others do not. Neighbourhood can be a contested place internally. We can also identify a contesting of neighbourhood which comes from outside. Political and commercial power often resides outside of a neighbourhood, but its impact is felt within a neighbourhood. This issue of conflict is significant if we are to understand the way people experience their local neighbourhood, and will be reflected on further in chapter 7.

¹⁸¹Sheldrake, *Spaces*, 21.

4.2 Some Ecclesial Responses to Social Change

The above analysis goes some way towards putting the ambivalence and uncertainty experienced by the site team into context. Caused at least partly by these various vectors which draw people both into and away from the local neighbourhood, with the ones drawing people away being for many the stronger, such ambivalence has led others to question current models of church. The questioning often has another focus than being about neighbourhood churches as such. Sometimes the focus is on the assumption that neighbourhood is the primary context of church, sometimes on raising the profile of other models of church, and often with a concern for the mission of the church in a time of rapid social change. Voices which articulate this recognition of a change in patterns include church reports,¹⁸² writing on changing forms of church such as the emerging church movement,¹⁸³ and books which are looking specifically at social change and the church.¹⁸⁴

In some ways these various texts offer different models of church; in other ways they seem to be moving towards alternative paradigms: a turn to articulate new ways of thinking about the relationship between church and society. This section will therefore explore the perspective of churches on social change, note the development of new models (or ‘expressions’) of church in Britain, and consider the direction they give regarding alternative paradigms.

At this point a brief recapitulation of the idea of a paradigm will help to relate this to models and expressions of church. There is a close working connection between theory and practice. While paradigms sit on the theoretical side, they have an instrumental, practical

¹⁸² Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church*; NCH and The Methodist Church, *The Cities*.

¹⁸³ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*.

¹⁸⁴ Baker, *Hybrid Church*; John Reader, *Blurred Encounters: A Reasoned Practice of Faith* (Vale of Glamorgan: Aureus 2005); Ward, *Liquid Church*.

effect. The theoretical paradigm to which a group is committed changes the way in which things are done. For a group of scientists it will change the hypotheses they formulate and the experiments they do, as well as their interpretation of the results. For a church the paradigm will change the way the social milieu is perceived and the mission which is subsequently carried out.

Several recent pieces of writing about expressions and models of church focus, to varying extents, on either the practical or theoretical side. Common to all of them is a concern to connect paradigmatic thinking about theology and the social milieu to practical outcomes for the church. There are different ways of going about this. Part of the Fresh Expressions movement seems to be about mapping Fresh Expressions of church (which might be seen as the experiments of the church), and formulating theory to fit. Pete Ward in *Liquid Church* starts more theoretically, and then asks what practical forms of church this might indicate. In a way these are both caricatures, because neither is wholly dominated by a movement one way or the other. These comments indicate tendencies, but both involve a two-way connection. Sometimes between these two there come models of church, theoretical pictures which describe an ideal of what is worked out practically in far messier ways. Kuhn himself identifies models as part of the ‘constellation of commitments’ that make up a paradigm.¹⁸⁵ ‘Model’ would seem more appropriate when writing of idealised types, ‘expression’ where describing specific instances of church practice and organisation. However, there are places where the distinction is less clear. The interpretation of a specific ‘expression’, can move towards ‘model’; and a model can be demonstrated through one or a series of examples of particular ‘expressions’.

¹⁸⁵ Kuhn, *Structure*, 184.

A text like *The Cities* report raises questions about the way the neighbourhood is significant. *The Cities* describes trends which undermine ‘the feeling of community.’ These are: ‘the growing importance of home and home based leisure’ including ‘the advent of television’; ‘increased mobility and transience’; and ‘long working hours’ which have developed because of ‘the pressures of globalisation and technological change.’¹⁸⁶ It then moves on to identify a ‘fourth factor which compounds the effects of all the others’; this is ‘the growth of inequality and social exclusion.’ While challenging forms of urban development which are individualised and exclusive, the report goes on to articulate an essentially liberal view of citizenship which builds community ‘characterised by tolerance, acceptance and respect between people of all faiths, cultures and creeds.’ At the same time it acknowledges that ‘these values are hard to retain in a society of growing inequality and fragmentation.’¹⁸⁷ As has already been seen above poverty is one of the factors which make neighbourhood of continuing significance for people. *The Cities* uses this account of social change as a foundation on which to build its own view of the importance of churches relating to their neighbourhoods and communities.

If ‘neighbourhood church’ is about both ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘church’, *The Cities* approaches the issues more from the point of view of ‘neighbourhood’ or ‘community’. In other places churches have perhaps shown themselves keen to approach the neighbourhood paradigm from the point of view of ‘church’. *Mission-Shaped Church (MSC)* raises similar concerns to *The Cities*, but from a primary concern with the mission of the church. Presented to the General Synod in 2004 and to the Methodist Conference in 2005 *Mission-Shaped Church* became the foundation of the Fresh Expressions initiative, which sought to assist the

¹⁸⁶ *The Cities*, 162–164.

¹⁸⁷ *The Cities*, 167.

development of fresh expressions of church within the Church of England and the Methodist Church. Its opening chapter dwells on a whole raft of social changes. After noting some of the social trends including changes in employment, mobility, divorce and family life, and fragmentation, the report goes on to shape this through three key ideas: ‘the power of networks’,¹⁸⁸ consumer culture,¹⁸⁹ and the end of Christendom.¹⁹⁰

The first key idea is that of network society, taken from Castells’s work in which ‘the importance of place is secondary to the importance of “flows”.’¹⁹¹ What flows is principally information (particularly through the internet) and capital. *MSC* goes on to comment on the ‘comparative loss of local and national power’ but carefully qualifies this by noting that ‘this does not mean that the “local” is no longer important, but it does mean that it is subject to considerable change and is less free to shape its own future;’ and so while ‘Networks have not replaced neighbourhoods ... they change them.’¹⁹² *MSC* goes on to note a number of ways in which networks and localities interconnect. It should be noted that, in doing so, *MSC* is moving away from the large scale networks with which Castells is primarily concerned. However, one interconnection mentioned is of community being ‘often disconnected from locality and geography.’ This is overstating the case, as many networks are still governed by geography, just by geography on a larger scale than the small neighbourhood; even some ‘virtual communities’ are reinforced by non-virtual engagement requiring some geographical proximity (such as organisational intranet sites, local government web-sites, or a website such as Bowburn.net).¹⁹³ Their ties to locality are loosened, but they are not disconnected. Other interconnections are that: ‘typical towns will

¹⁸⁸ *MSC*, 4–7.

¹⁸⁹ *MSC*, 9–11.

¹⁹⁰ *MSC*, 11–12.

¹⁹¹ Castells, *Network Society*; *MSC*, 4–5.

¹⁹² *MSC*, 5.

¹⁹³ Bowburn.net, <http://www.bowburn.net/> (accessed 10th August 2011).

have an array of networks;’ ‘some of the networks may be based around a locality, particularly among poorer people who are less mobile;’ and ‘any one person may be in several networks, but some will now be in none—due to the collapse of the neighbourhood as a friendship base.’¹⁹⁴

Of the second key theme, consumer society, *MSC* says: ‘Where previous generations found their identity in what they produced, we now find our identity in what we consume.’ Along with this shift, consumer choice has come centre stage as ‘emblem and ... core value’ of consumerism.¹⁹⁵ This affects not only those things which are most readily viewed as consumer products. It spreads first to ‘health care, educational provision, patterns of work, or association, of relationships, and of course to religion,’ and will then ‘affect the ways in which people evaluate truth claims.’ Citing John 17:15–18 *MSC* refers to consumerism as ‘the dominant idolatry’ of consumer society, and suggests ‘we are called to be the church “in” consumer society [although] we dare not let ourselves be “of” consumerism.’ In this consumer society the poor are excluded as ‘those who cannot buy things.’¹⁹⁶

The third key theme concerns the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom. ‘The Christian story is no longer at the heart of the nation.’¹⁹⁷ Interestingly *MSC*, as a principally Church of England publication, makes no mention of church being marginalised. Although the opening quote is from Callum Brown’s *The Death of Christian Britain*, which presents an unremittingly pessimistic picture to the Christian reader, the perspective in these

¹⁹⁴ *MSC*, 5–6.

¹⁹⁵ *MSC*, 9.

¹⁹⁶ *MSC*, 10.

¹⁹⁷ *MSC*, 11.

paragraphs focuses mainly on social change.¹⁹⁸ The consequences for the church are mentioned with regard to locality, however, in which the need to question the neighbourhood paradigm is expressed.

The Church of England bases a significant part of its identity on its physical presence in every community, and on a “come to us” strategy. But as community becomes more complex, mere geographical presence is no longer a guarantee that we can connect.¹⁹⁹

Such passages in church reports make a start at questioning the neighbourhood paradigm and presenting the issues of social change. Yet these reports, as official church documents, are also committed to some extent to maintaining the life of the church. While they express the changes which make life for the church problematic, they do not express them as trenchantly as they might. Elsewhere, theologians have gone further. John Reader, an Anglican priest, has picked up on the language of social change from sociologist Ulrich Beck, and used it in a proposed restructuring of practical theology. Beck has referred in one place to ‘zombie concepts’, things which behave as though they are alive but actually are dead; and controversially the three examples he cites are family, class, and neighbourhood.²⁰⁰ Reader describes these as concepts ‘that no longer do justice to the world we experience and yet which are difficult to abandon because of tradition and also because they are not yet totally redundant.’²⁰¹ It is interesting that even in writing this he refers to ‘tradition’, which could arguably be seen as another zombie category. Later he comments: ‘Practical theology is in danger of being based on zombie categories if it assumes that nothing has changed.’²⁰²

Reader’s concern is clearly with similar areas to that of *MSC*. He accepts Beck’s suggestion that social change is so profound that categories which have been used for years

¹⁹⁸ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*.

¹⁹⁹ *MSC*, 11.

²⁰⁰ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 203.

²⁰¹ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 1.

²⁰² Reader, *Reconstructing*, 23.

past are no longer of any utility, and suggests that practical theology has based its work on just such zombie concepts, which now need to be challenged and alternatives found. His first main example comes through a chapter titled ‘A Sense of Place.’ He puts a strong case for the continuing weight of what I have called the neighbourhood paradigm, although for him it is more of a parish paradigm:

Even at the point where the parish system in the Anglican Church could be interpreted as being at breaking point with staffing levels and financial support unable to sustain a pattern of ordained presence in single parishes, the underlying supposition is still that this relationship between people and a specific building is the ideal configuration.²⁰³

He goes on to challenge the way in which ‘a sense of place’ is used theologically and ecclesially. ‘It is assumed,’ he argues, ‘that attachment to a building or even a churchyard is of psychological significance and that this remains constant despite other cultural shifts;’²⁰⁴ he goes on to describe the importance of telephone pastoral care of farmers during foot and mouth outbreaks and the frequent need to organise weddings and baptisms by e-mail. He suggests that a ‘myth of community’ is an ‘understandable attraction’ to people, but actually local places are shaped by global changes. ‘Variety, diversity and difference are the consequences of global forces among most if not all communities.’²⁰⁵

Reader in some places overstates his case. Telephone pastoral care does not happen face-to-face ‘even though it may have developed relationships which had been established in that way;’²⁰⁶ the ‘even though’ points out that many non face to face relationships are possible only because they rely on prior or other face to face relationships. The issue of weddings organised at a distance are present, but not, in my pastoral experience, to the extent that he suggests. Later, he lists various motivations for identifying with the place

²⁰³ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 19.

²⁰⁴ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 22.

²⁰⁵ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 25.

²⁰⁶ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 22.

in which one lives: economic, sociological, political, and psychological. Although he doesn't say that these are mutually exclusive, he separates them as though they were alternatives. In fact within any person several such motivations are likely to combine, and it is very hard to see how they can be treated separately.

However, overall Reader provides a welcome summary of the changes which are affecting people's relationships to places, and raises the issues which profoundly affect ministry and church life. Without denying the fact of a continuing 'sense of place', he points to the way that such a sense has changed and continues to change: lives are 'less stable';²⁰⁷ boundaries become 'open and porous';²⁰⁸ there is a 'huge diversity of experience' of the effects of globalisation;²⁰⁹ and so on. Our theological response must take account of these changes. Even as he draws our attention to them Reader does not write off the local place. At this point he doesn't actually quote or support Beck's use of 'neighbourhood' as a zombie category. What he offers is an approach which recognises that place continues to have a role, but one which is no longer central, and one which is made complex through inter-relationships with wider systems. The significance of such a position will be explored through the following chapters. At this stage it is enough to note that, however central the neighbourhood paradigm is to the church, it is being called into question. The neighbourhood model of church is almost certain to continue in use; it will either be used blindly, or with awareness of the kinds of issues Reader raises.

Pete Ward is another theologian working to articulate the implications of social change for the church. He finds a number of sociologists using the metaphor of 'liquid' to describe cultural change, citing Beck and Castells as well as others. He particularly picks up

²⁰⁷ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 21.

²⁰⁸ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 25.

²⁰⁹ Reader, *Reconstructing*, 28.

on Bauman, in *Liquid Modernity*, who characterises solid modernity as ‘a culture of production rather than consumption’ and exemplified by ‘the Fordist principles of expansion, size, plant, boundaries, norms, rules and class-oriented affinities and identities.’²¹⁰ Now society has moved into a liquid phase, in which ‘capital has been released from location,’ ‘individuals can no longer expect to follow a safe career within one organisation,’ ‘large social collectives based on class and identity have been eroded,’ and ‘who we are is something to be achieved rather than learned.’²¹¹

Ward believes that ‘solid modernity has spawned a solid form of church that has internalized some of the core values of modernity in its early phase.’²¹² The marks of this he sees as: emphasis on attendance at church on Sunday mornings; that size of congregations matters (although this is qualified as far as the British context is concerned); that many different people can ‘do the same sort of thing together’; that church becomes a self-contained club, where some people are able to create meaning for themselves.²¹³ He concludes,

The ability to connect with modernity in the various ways has been a significant factor in the life and energy of today’s church. The challenge for solid church is that culture has started to change toward a more fluid form of modernity. When the waters are moving around it, solid church finds itself in a very different place. ... We share a common liquid culture. This means that we not only see the church differently; we also relate to it differently. So while solid church looks roughly the same as it always has, under the surface it too has started to change and mutate.²¹⁴

4.3 Towards New Paradigms

Given that the neighbourhood paradigm is being called into question the rest of this chapter will give an account of four texts which have engaged specifically with different expressions or models of church. Each of them points in a different direction as far as a possible

²¹⁰ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 16.

²¹¹ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 16–17.

²¹² Ward, *Liquid Church*, 17.

²¹³ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 17–20.

²¹⁴ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 21.

alternative paradigm is concerned. They also deal with issues of location and neighbourhood differently. At this point they will be described and critiqued; in the final chapter they will be reworked and brought together. The first book is a study of what have been called ‘emerging churches’ by Gibbs and Bolger; the second is *Mission-Shaped Church* with its portrayal of ‘fresh expressions of church’, thirdly a further look at Pete Ward’s *Liquid Church*; and finally the idea of ‘hybrid church’ proposed by Christopher Baker.

A. A counter-cultural church

Gibbs and Bolger’s book is based on research with church leaders scattered around Britain and the United States, who are all involved in what are described as ‘emerging churches’. The book uses interviews with these leaders, and observation of their church practices, to form a view about what emerging church is. They are working with a paradigm of church which consciously develops the counter-cultural aspects of Christian faith. They work primarily within an understanding of church as a distinctive community, which contrasts with the values and ways of the world around it.

Emerging churches seek to respond to the social changes of late modernity from within the Christian tradition, or as Gibbs and Bolger define it: ‘Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.’²¹⁵ These churches are responding specifically to the social changes evident within Western society, what is referred to as a ‘liminal time of change.’²¹⁶ It involves a strong critique of inherited patterns of church life which are seen as ‘simply not viable in postmodern culture’ because ‘Western Christianity has wed itself to a culture, the modern culture, which is now in decline.’²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 44.

²¹⁶ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 28.

²¹⁷ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 28–29.

While there is perhaps an over-simple dichotomy here between modernity and postmodernity, the kind of church life which they portray is dealing precisely with the social changes of late modernity.

Central to their understanding of emerging church is the idea of community. It is in the title of their book, and present again in their definition of emerging churches (above). When they come to expand their definition it is present again as a key component. They specify nine practices which they see as implicit within the definition: three defining activities, followed by a further six consequent practices. The first set of three are that 'Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives.'²¹⁸ It is perhaps unsurprising that a communal view of church should be strongly expressed in late modernity. Community has emerged as an important social theme, with many different understandings of community becoming evident. Delanty writes about a need to reappropriate community being expressed in different ways: through communitarian political thought, through various forms of multiculturalism, and through new ideas around virtual community. Central to his analysis is the search for community, and the desire to rediscover community.²¹⁹ It is hardly surprising then to find church leaders using the model of community to describe the church.

This theme is spelled out in a chapter which specifically explores the nature of such Christian communities. The community of the church is described as 'a servant and a sign of the coming kingdom' which 'is always the "pilgrim" or the "becoming" church.'²²⁰ It is therefore a community which is not complete or perfect, and yet, from its source in Jesus

²¹⁸ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 45.

²¹⁹ Gerard Delanty, *Community* (London: Routledge, 2003), particularly chapter 1, 7–27.

²²⁰ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 90.

Christ, it offers a model which is essentially different from the world in which it exists. Gibbs and Bolger write of the need to

give up old loyalties in order to create a space for the kingdom to come. Nationalism, individualism, and consumerism are a few of the ideologies that must be reappropriated or completely abandoned in the light of the coming reign of God.²²¹

Much of the argument which follows is presented in terms of a struggle between individualism and relationship. The sovereignty of the individual under modernity is questioned,²²² and relationship is seen to be what matters as the church is conceived as a family-like community. This family model is not a simplistic or wholly uncritical model. Its primary point of comparison is that ‘families consist of relationships that are not based on choice,’ so that the church is similarly to be viewed as a community which binds people into it through a conviction that they belong together no matter what.²²³ They quote an interview they conducted with an emerging church leader who says that people should ‘find the church you feel God is calling you to and stay there until you are called onward.’²²⁴

However, what is described is not a complete description of late modern families. Gibbs and Bolger’s starting point is that families are a given which cannot be denied. Yet this is questioned by commentators on family life. As we have seen above, Beck has referred to family as a ‘zombie institution’, and has highlighted their changing nature.²²⁵ Contrary to the idea that family relationships are not based on choice, Beck specifically develops this argument through the example of grandparents, suggesting that often when they want to choose to stay in relationship with grandchildren, have this opportunity taken out of their hands. In a society where so much family change is going on it is by no means clear that

²²¹ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 91.

²²² Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 92–93.

²²³ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 97.

²²⁴ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 98.

²²⁵ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 204; see also: Reader, *Reconstructing*, 81ff.

families ‘are connected ... whether they like it or not’; in fact, they may sometime be disconnected ‘whether they like it or not.’²²⁶ Bauman would extend the critique to any notion of community. Communities are ‘fragile and short-lived ... “peg” communities, a momentary gathering around a nail on which many solitary individuals hang their solitary individual fears.’²²⁷ However overstated Bauman’s argument may be this raises questions for Gibbs and Bolger’s family-like emerging churches. How can we judge to what extent they are able to buck such a trend? How long must a group of people remain together in order to become a convincing model of community?

This raises a question about the nature of the glue which holds people together. This question is not specifically addressed by Gibbs and Bolger, although the implication seems to be that a church which is founded on relationships with Jesus Christ will have a quality of relationships which provides a motivation for long-term connection. This is implied when they write of emerging churches having ‘strong family ties that remain strong in the face of adversity and in spite of differences’ and that one church community ‘rises and falls depending on the quality of relationships.’²²⁸ While the same might ideally be said of families they can also be dysfunctional, violent, and deeply damaging to their members. The glue which holds families together is different in at least one important respect: that it includes strong economic factors, with family members gaining some kind of financial security through staying in relationships. Where relationships are good, that can be a positive thing. However, families can sometimes remain connected in damaging circumstances. While emerging churches hold together *because* of the quality of relationships, families sometimes hold together *despite* the quality of relationships. Bolger and Gibbs do not

²²⁶ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 97.

²²⁷ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 37.

²²⁸ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 98–99.

acknowledge the possibility that, whatever the glue that holds them together, religious communities can also sometimes hold people together to their detriment. Again, the extent to which emerging churches can really hold together in healthy ways in the long term is yet to be tested.

If church is conceived as community, then what is its relationship to those who are not part of that community, or to other communities with which it connects or overlaps? The churches used for Gibbs and Bolger's research are very diverse, and conceive this in different ways, so what is drawn from one example will not apply to all. Their account is also inclined to idealise emerging churches. That being said, on the whole there is a strong sense of communities which are open, and connect with wider patterns of life through people's networks. Sometimes this kind of activity is described as connecting with a local neighbourhood. A focus on 'serving with generosity', another of the practices involved in Gibbs and Bolger's definition of emerging church, is described as something which frequently takes place within what is termed 'local community'.²²⁹ Anna Dodridge, leader of a church in Bournemouth, is quoted describing the contexts in which members of the church are active in evangelism: 'For some of us it's mainly the clubs. Others are into the housing estates where they live or places where they socialize.'²³⁰

One counter example is worth noting. Emerging churches are described as having an important focus on small groups and evidence is presented that for some such churches proximity is important. The connections made possible by neighbourhood, by living close to one another, are first presented as being directed inwards, rather than outwards to any community beyond the church. So Mark Palmer, another emerging church leader, is quoted:

²²⁹ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 142–144.

²³⁰ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 79–80.

‘We’re really committed to proximity. The majority live within walking distance of one another.’ Many live in communal housing arrangements. ‘Amy, my son, and I live in community, and many in the three churches live in community together.’²³¹

In this case proximity seems to count because it makes community easier; not open community, or strengthening a wider community, but simply that between group members. Proximity makes it easier for church people to relate to each other.

What surfaces from Gibbs and Bolger’s portrayal of these churches is a counter-cultural paradigm which they share. It begins from what is seen as the distinctive challenge of Christian faith, to leave behind ‘old loyalties.’ The language of community is itself the language of drawing distinctions: the church defines itself as the community which lives by distinctive values. That community is described not so much by the boundaries which it sets around itself, although these are implicit, as by the bonds which join it together: a common commitment to a specific and different way of living. This counter-cultural paradigm rests on understanding the church as the exemplary community. It has a considerable history in the church through various reforming groups, including the Mennonites, and is recurring in much late modern theological writing. Examples include Stuart Murray from within the Anabaptist tradition who sees church as a counter-culture in response to post-Christendom thinking,²³² and the theological ethics of Stanley Hauerwas in which there are similarities in the values described as belonging to the church.²³³

Neither is this kind of model exclusive to the Christian church. True, Delanty writes of the way classical views of community have favoured the status quo, and are not radical; they seek to place community within the existing framework of society. However, he

²³¹ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging*, 112–113.

²³² Murray, *Post-Christendom*.

²³³ For example, Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 73.

goes on to describe ‘the radical dimension of community as expressed in protest, in the quest for an alternative society or the construction of collective identity in social movements.’²³⁴

B. A network paradigm

The understanding of social change in *Mission-Shaped Church (MSC)* has already been described above. For this report three key social changes form the context of fresh expressions of church: networks, consumerism, and the end of Christendom. It is networks which seem to provide the basic paradigm with which *MSC* is working. It refers at some length to an earlier report. *Breaking New Ground* argues from the basis of network, but actually has very little in the way of theoretical presumptions.²³⁵ It is more concerned with issues raised by the territorial jurisdiction of parishes and dioceses. It does, however, affirm the place of networks and suggests that the growth of their importance is a rationale for engaging in church planting which sometimes crosses boundaries.

MSC goes well beyond this, ‘from cross-boundary to non-boundary’ as it puts it.²³⁶

It challenges many of the basic starting points of *Breaking New Ground*, including the fundamental idea of a ‘congregation’.²³⁷ The case it makes for networks has already been described above and does not need to be repeated here. At the same time it should be noted that *MSC* steps back from a thoroughgoing adoption of the network principle. In one section titled ‘parish and network are both valid’ it concludes,

We are to serve those who reside in the geographical area of each parish, care for those who live in neighbourhoods that may overlap with parish geography, and minister to

²³⁴ Delanty, *Community*, 112.

²³⁵ Church of England, *Breaking New Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England*, (London: Church House Publishing, 1994).

²³⁶ *MSC*, 19.

²³⁷ *MSC*, 22–23.

those who inhabit networks that are disconnected from the notion of parish or territory. Each is equally our responsibility and our care.²³⁸

Later, in the examples of different types of fresh expressions, several are still either neighbourhood based or open to being so, including base ecclesial communities, churches arising out of community initiatives, and school-based and school-linked congregations and churches.²³⁹

Churches conceived as networks will find their patterns of relating already existing in other networks. In some ways what *MSC* is proposing appears to involve network church riding piggy-back on other networks. In a way this is a development of older parish models, where the local community and the church community were seen to coincide. However, where that came about as a gradual historic development, here it becomes a specific methodology. The network church sets the scope and boundaries of its activity so that they coincide to some extent with a pre-existing group of people.

In considering methodologies *MSC* considers the question ‘who is the plant *for*?’ Here it openly acknowledges that there are similarities in this network approach and McGavran’s Homogeneous Unit Principle. ‘People like to become Christians without crossing racial/linguistic/class/cultural barriers.’²⁴⁰ By working on the basis of an existing network of like-minded people, the church will be planting an expression which is itself homogeneous. *MSC* goes on to consider the objection to this principle based on the model of Christ as a reconciler who broke down barriers, quoting Galatians 3.28: ‘There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.’ It responds to this critique quite robustly, giving three replies to it: that God is the ‘creator of

²³⁸ *MSC*, 19.

²³⁹ *MSC*, 47-49, 57-59, and 67-69.

²⁴⁰ *MSC*, 108.

specific and diverse cultures’; that the example of Jesus shows him being born into ‘a specific culture and time’; and that where two cultures mix ‘one tends to dominate the other.’

This demonstrates a significant difference in *MSC*’s approach from that of the emerging churches of Gibbs and Bolger. Whereas the latter set out to shape communities distinct from the world around them, the network church follows the more traditional pattern of affirming the value of the context in which they are set. It has a more communitarian approach, while Gibbs and Bolger’s model is more radical. It may be argued that both are seeking to hold a tension between these two, but they undoubtedly approach it from different poles.

C. Liquid church

The way in which Ward sets up his alternative model, in opposition to ‘solid’ church, defines it against congregational patterns. The main feature of solid church is its congregational form, and therefore the first point that Ward makes is that liquid church is not structured around a congregation. Grounding his model in theology Ward takes the phrase ‘in Christ’ as fundamental. This, of course, cannot define liquid church for many forms of solid church would place a similar priority on such theological ideas. However, Ward uses this as a way into defining liquid church as being about what is communal or corporate. ‘The shared experience of the Lord unites into one body all of those who are in Christ.’²⁴¹

Moving beyond this theological basis, Ward then offers characteristics which are more sociological in nature. Two things: first that ‘movement and change must be part of its basic characteristic’; second that liquid church is given structure by ‘a series of flows.’²⁴²

²⁴¹ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 35.

²⁴² Ward, *Liquid Church*, 41.

This brings him to networks, for Ward aligns the idea of ‘flows’ closely with that of ‘networks’. Both activity and information flow around networks. The model of liquidity is then clarified through to four ‘lessons’ about ‘flow’. First, that relationships are the central connections in church networks, and ‘informal contact between individuals and groups will replace monolithic meetings and formalized friendship.’ Second, commodification enables flow; here Ward brings consumerism into the heart of liquid church, because the circulation of commodities is part of the structure of liquid modernity. ‘Liquid church will need to develop commodities that can circulate through networks.’ Third, the flow will not be controlled by church leaders, which means that liquid church will be decentralized and unpredictable. Fourth, that language about ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ ceases to carry any important meaning as people come and go, so edges will be ‘fuzzy’.²⁴³

There are contrasts and points of contact with both the previous texts. *MSC* also picks up on Castells’s language of flows; although it is critical of consumer society, which Ward embraces as part of the context of the church. The more decentralized image of church is closer to Gibbs and Bolger than to *MSC*, but the kind of community Ward envisages without ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ is quite different from the closely-knit communities which they describe. This suggests that Ward is offering something which relates to the same issues as the other two, but which is distinct from them.

Returning to theology, Ward has a chapter focussing on Trinitarian theology, likening the perichoresis of the Trinity with liquid flows of relationships. Again, as with the ‘in Christ’ motif, he then returns to sociological themes. There are two significant aspects of liquid church explored here. The first relates to the style of community. Referring to Davie’s

²⁴³ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 47–48.

book *Religion in Britain Since 1945*, Ward suggests that her tag of ‘believing without belonging’ is a starting point for liquid church. Thus he equates ‘belonging’ as fitting into solid modernity, implying that people do not belong to networks. As, however, he has put emphasis on community, it would seem strange not to consider what it means to belong to a network. This is the route that Ward takes into further consideration of the consumerist nature of liquid church.

‘What we have then,’ he suggests, ‘is a new spiritual marketplace with a vast array of beliefs and practices for sale.’²⁴⁴ In this marketplace liquid church takes its place. Ward analyses consumerism as being about consuming meanings, rather than consuming things. ‘Consumption is ... about finding who we are in the world.’²⁴⁵ We do our meaning making through purchasing products of one kind or another. The church needs to become flexible enough to be able to offer different products to different people, meeting the needs of a variety of consumers who wish to define themselves in different ways.

Needless to say this connection to consumerism has led to criticisms of Ward’s model. The two most significant problems are: whether diverse consumerism can accommodate space for community, if both are part of Ward’s vision; and whether consumerism is not essentially exclusive, keeping those whose consumption is limited by poverty, or those who lack sufficient skill or understanding to know what to consume, out of the church.

Interestingly, in his espousal of consumerism Ward strikes out in a very different direction from Bauman. *Liquid Modernity*²⁴⁶ is largely critical and pessimistic of the role

²⁴⁴ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 58.

²⁴⁵ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 60.

²⁴⁶ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*.

played by consumerism. It is described as an addiction: ‘everything in a consumer society is a matter of choice, except the compulsion to choose—the compulsion which grows into addiction and so is no longer perceived as compulsion.’²⁴⁷ At one point he even says it needs exorcising, and writes of ‘the gruesome apparitions of uncertainty and insecurity which keep haunting the nights.’²⁴⁸

Why such a strongly negative view? What is the harm which is done by this addiction? Bauman writes at the end of his chapter about freedom. This is ‘the kind of freedom which the society of shopping addicts has elevated to the uppermost rank of value—freedom translated above all as the plenitude of consumer choice and as the ability to treat any life-decision as a consumer choice’ but which ‘has a much more devastating effect on ... unwilling bystanders’ than on the elite. He sees freedom of choice ‘trickl[ing] down the social hierarchy’ until it is ‘stripped of most of the pleasures which the original promised to deliver—instead laying bare its destructive potential.’²⁴⁹ He uses the example of Giddens’ ‘pure relationships’, which offer considerable freedom for the ‘high and mighty’ for whom wealth goes ‘some way towards alleviating the insecurity endemic to until-further-notice partnerships. ... But,’ he concludes,

there is little doubt that when ‘trickled down’ to the poor and powerless the new-style partnership with its fragility of marital contract and the ‘purification’ of the union of all but the ‘mutual satisfaction’ function spawns much misery, agony and human suffering and an ever-growing volume of broken, loveless and prospectless lives.²⁵⁰

Although this is the source of Ward’s writing about liquidity, he does nothing to answer Bauman’s pessimism.

²⁴⁷ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 73.

²⁴⁸ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 81.

²⁴⁹ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 89.

²⁵⁰ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 90.

Liquid church also fails to take into account some of the complexities of individualization, as will become clear in the next three chapters. Individualization does not mean that there is universal comfort with the consumer-led choices with which people are continually confronted. How can the ambivalence people feel over the meanings assigned to consumer products, and the suspicion consumerism engenders, be dealt with in a church structured by the flow of commodities?

D. Hybrid church

Baker writes specifically of urban situations and particularly from the context of Manchester, although drawing on international examples and writers.²⁵¹ He begins with the concept of ‘Third Space Hybridity’ (the background to which will be explored in more detail, particularly in relation to ambivalence, in chapter 6) which is about a post-modern fusion of cultural realities. The hybrids are created by our globalised world, especially in large cities, as those who are different from the cultural hegemony bring their diverse practices into new kinds of urban space. As he puts it when commenting on the work of Sandercock, they ‘provide an alternative way of reading the social and cultural processes of the city.’²⁵² These urban spaces are explored through four ‘clusters of current thinking ... Network City, Mongrel City, Bohemian City and Locally Liveable City’, each of these being a way of describing the kinds of urban space which are taking shape in late modernity.²⁵³

However, an important part of the weight of ‘Third Space Hybridity’ lies in a shift from the cultural to the political. Third Space is a place in which the cultural hegemony can

²⁵¹ As well his book *Hybrid Church*, a summary of his thinking on hybridity is contained in: Christopher Baker, ‘Hybridity and Practical Theology: In Praise of Blurred Encounters’, *Contact* no. 149 (2006): 5–11. There is also further development in John Reader and Christopher R. Baker, eds., *Entering the New Theological Space: Blurred Encounters of Faith, Politics and Community* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), although the idea of hybrid church as a model of church is less strong here.

²⁵² Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 33.

²⁵³ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 27.

be challenged, with hybrids providing a way in which predominant cultures are confronted and challenged by their own translated practices. Baker links this to Christian ethics through the detailed working out of a position he describes as ‘radical Christian Realism.’

The hallmarks of this emerging position are a commitment to partnership and reconciliation that nevertheless is prepared to adopt non-mainstream perspectives in the service of understanding power and how it perpetuates both global and local forms of exclusion. ... It is also committed to working with plurality and diversity, but from the perspective of solidarity and relationship rather than abstract theory ... this approach also welcomes the opportunities and possibilities to work in new creative partnerships that postmodern society also brings, with the Church as part of a matrix of social, political, economic and spiritual transformation.²⁵⁴

Baker then turns to specific examples of ‘emerging patterns of Church-based engagement’, four from Manchester researched by the William Temple Foundation,²⁵⁵ and a further one from Texas and two from Chicago, all of which he says ‘emerge as a direct response to rapid urban and social change.’²⁵⁶ It is by these examples that Baker’s proposed ‘Third Space church’ is shaped. From the examples Baker suggests that ‘Third Space ecclesiology’ is about ‘ways of being a church that resist binary definitions both of itself and of the world, and instead place the church in that contested Third Space where new patterns, new forms and new thinking can emerge.’²⁵⁷ Three particular binary definitions occupy him: local and global; implicit and explicit; solid and liquid.

The first, between local and global, is particularly significant for neighbourhoods. As he writes of the need of churches to have a ‘local performative theology’ he argues strongly for the importance of the local.

First ... socially sustainable communities are those places that have a sense of place; some sense of common identity and experience mediated through dense, rather than diffuse, networks of relationships and encounters, and which are built up over a long

²⁵⁴ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 111.

²⁵⁵ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 111.

²⁵⁶ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 125.

²⁵⁷ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 125.

enough period for an individual to sense that there is a wider framework of memory, identity and belonging to which they can contribute. ... Second, in relation to the increased power of the global to what happens locally ... the local needs to be a commune or matrix of resistance.²⁵⁸

But the church must not let itself be defined by this aspect alone. Baker goes on to note the churches' continuing work to relate to government at regional and national level. However he argues that 'it is perhaps at the global level that faith groups still provide a meaningful and potentially beneficial framework of influence.' He continues:

The holding in tension of local and global identities is therefore an important form of hybridity to develop in a global society in which the global-local axis continues to dominate the national-regional one.²⁵⁹

This might be seen, for example, in the growth of congregations allowing people with a common ethnicity and language to worship together. Baker also goes on to note that this engagement at local and global level can be detrimental, with the local level showing 'inward-looking insularity' and the global 'mistrust and tension between cultures and religions.'²⁶⁰

Returning to the significance of the local, which seems to be the most potent part of this binary definition for Baker, he also writes of it as being

a locus of experimentation and learning, a space where new and collaborative partnerships are often formed to deal with locally expressed problems, such as the breakdown of trust between different religious and ethnic groups, racially motivated attacks, gun crime, and planning issues.²⁶¹

The local can therefore become a place which feeds into the global, or provides resources for overcoming issues of global significance.

The second binary definition is about being implicit or explicit about faith values.

Here Baker is writing particularly of partnerships which faith groups might enter into, with

²⁵⁸ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 126–127.

²⁵⁹ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 128.

²⁶⁰ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 128.

²⁶¹ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 127.

other religious or cultural groups, or with governmental or non-governmental agencies. Baker argues on the one hand for ‘a measure of explicit identification of the values and motivations that churches and other faith groups bring (that is, their faith).’ On the other hand this comes with ‘the responsibility of listening to and respecting the values and identities other partners bring to the table.’²⁶²

The third binary definition picks up on Ward’s liquid church, although in Baker’s view ‘Ward is not advocating that the liquid model replaces the solid model,’²⁶³ and he goes on to argue for holding both the solid and liquid together. Baker does this particularly through reference to participative justice movements, which work best by interactions ‘between national and local organization networks, without resorting to more formal and hierarchical norms. Solid institutions then might be national funding bodies, whether churches or trade unions or some other body, while at the local level more liquid networks connect people in action.

Where churches are able to engage in this kind of way it is frequently marked by an openness to other groups, a willingness to enter into partnership, and a readiness to question power structures. Baker considers a ‘spectrum of hybridities’ (from Jan Pieterse), from ‘assimilationist hybridity’ which work to fit in with the norms of the powerful majority culture, to ‘destabilizing hybridity’ which challenges that majority culture and brings about change. Churches in his case studies, he suggests, are ‘more towards the destabilizing end of Pieterse’s spectrum’, and refers to their ‘pro-poor, liberation theology or neo-colonial critiques.’²⁶⁴ He also notes their role in cultural negotiation and translation; forms of

²⁶² Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 129.

²⁶³ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 130.

²⁶⁴ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 133.

advocacy in which the binary assumptions of majority groups are challenged and alternatives offered.

Whether this form of church is something which has application to all local churches is open for debate. It might be suggested that the political engagement which Baker takes as an axiomatic part of church life is broadly absent from many local churches. He also mentions, but tends to downplay, objections to the part hybridity can play in politics, particularly its tendency to move towards the assimilationist form. The continuing role of the local is also presented, at least in the chapter on ecclesiology, without ambivalence. The continuing significance of neighbourhoods explored in the last chapter might lead us to question whether we can be as optimistic as Baker suggests. However, his thinking provides a framework for understanding social change which affects all churches, in a way which also takes the other texts above into account to some extent.

Conclusion

It is difficult to be sure of any of these alternative moves towards new paradigms. The church has to exist within a rapidly changing environment which is not only liquid, but unpredictable and volatile as well. Globalisation continues to open local places to influences they have not known before; the pace and extent of social change continues; technological developments carry unforeseen consequences; while the impact of environmental issues looks certain to lead to a capricious future. Some environmentalists use language of relocalisation, suggesting that there will have to be a social shift back towards more localised ways of living, which, if it were to prove so, might lead to a renaissance of neighbourhoods.²⁶⁵ However, the concept is contested with others challenging whether the environmental costs of global trade really

²⁶⁵ Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*.

outweigh its benefits, and arguing that there are also huge social and economic benefits in global living for both producers and consumers. These kinds of debates will continue, but the social consequences will only become clear at a later stage. Meanwhile the expressions of church being tried and tested during this time of change cannot (and perhaps can never) become embedded in such a rapidly changing social and cultural scene. It is the last possibility, that of the hybrid church, which seems best placed to work within such changing circumstances, especially as it has a capacity to acknowledge the insights of the other three.

For the time being people will go on living and relating, at least to some degree, on a local level. Neighbourhoods can no longer be the basis for understanding individual lives, but neither are they written off. Furthermore, it seems probable that neighbourhood churches will continue in existence for some time to come. How they will relate to their changing contexts is less certain, although the various possible paradigms pointed to above will have their impact in different places on different people. What is clear is that the neighbourhood paradigm cannot continue to structure the thinking and life of churches.

What needs to happen is a shift of the neighbourhood church out of the neighbourhood paradigm. Other potential paradigms are in evidence, and those which work will need to be paradigms which take seriously the social changes of our world, and central among those changes will be that of individualization, an interpretation of social change which will be explored in chapter 5. They will also be paradigms, as maybe the idea of liquid church particularly suggests, which have a place for ambivalence, and which work on the assumption that final resolutions may not be possible at this stage. It is my assertion that they will leave a place for the neighbourhood church, even as it is worked out amidst ambivalence and hybridity. It is to the question of individualization that I now turn.

CHAPTER 5

INDIVIDUALIZATION

Liberty hath a sharp and doubled edge, fit only to be handled by just and virtuous men.

John Milton.²⁶⁶

Individualization is about choice, freedom, and identity as ever-present facets of late modern living; it is endemic. In responding to issues about ministry in a neighbourhood setting, we do so from lives which are individualized, with individualized faith, within individualized neighbourhoods, and as part of an individualized society. Individualization provides an analysis of our current social structure. This does not mean it cannot be challenged, nor does its analysis spell the end of neighbourhood, despite what some of its advocates say, but it does mean that neighbourhood-focused relationships are challenged constantly. This happens through forces which lead out of neighbourhood, which can be observed for example, in a

²⁶⁶ John Milton, *The History of Britain, That Part Especially Now Call'd England*, Book 3, http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1210&chapter=78237&layout=html&Itemid=27#lf0233-02_footnote_nt_160 (accessed 26th July 2011).

proclivity to the short-term and shallow, or by changing structures of trust. The way that community is lived and experienced is a part of this story. It is a narrative about the way the ground beneath communities is shifting and changing, so that they are changing too. This chapter will consider what individualism is, what happens to individuals in the processes of individualization, and what an individualized neighbourhood is like. As we have seen this is important if an understanding of ministry in and for neighbourhoods is to move into a new paradigm.

5.1 Individual and Society

Human groups and societies have always been made up of various individuals. In different situations and settings one individual or another has sometimes played an individually significant role. That recognition can be borne out by the ancient narratives which have been used to give shape to human questions, explanations, or statements of value. These stories—Greek myths, Zen parables, fables, stories and legends, and Biblical accounts of the patriarchs—all demonstrate the possible role which an individual can play in shaping the human world. When Orestes kills his mother and her lover in revenge for the death of his father, his action and his possible punishment stand as a type, an example of what an individual might achieve, for what one might take responsibility, and how one might be held to account.²⁶⁷ When Abraham responds to God's call by leaving Ur, and setting out into nomadic life, he does so not only as a type of Israel, journeying with God, but also as an example of a faithful individual who responds to God's call for himself as well as for all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1–9). At the same time such stories tell of social beings—of individuals related to other individuals—whose stories affect not only themselves but many

²⁶⁷ Aeschylus, *Libation-Bearers* and *Eumenides*.

others. The story of Orestes is also about the beginnings of Athens, and the establishment of a society founded on justice. In the same way Abraham's story is a narrative of the promise of the founding of a nation.

Yet these are also exceptional and mythic people. In pre-modern societies individuals, aside from exceptional circumstances, were not able to shape the world in such ways. People were tied to the groups into which they were born. For many this meant an ethic and a social code which gave social life a clear priority over the individual. If an individual took actions which placed his or her own interests before the group, they would be punished severely. An example would be of the kind of actions taken as the result of suicide in some cultures. The action of taking one's own life could be seen as a gross betrayal of the broader needs of the group. The body of the person who had taken their own life would be deprived of burial rites, left to be consumed by wild animals or to rot where it lay, and sometimes mutilated as well.²⁶⁸

With the coming of modernity something different happened. The individual gradually came to be given a very different place and position. This change might be summarised in the use of the word 'individualism', a network of beliefs which in some way places the individual in a position of priority over broader social concerns. Lukes analyses the development of the concept of individualism. Not surprisingly he is able to illustrate both positive and negative responses to the idea—a particular example being the way *individualisme* was viewed in French thought (a view still apparent in its use in French today) compared with the very different attitude to individualism in the U.S.A. He writes, 'the mainstream of French thought ... has expressed by '*individualisme*' what Durkheim identified

²⁶⁸ Methodist Church in Ireland, *From Despair to Hope: A Christian Perspective on the Tragedy of Suicide* (Dublin: Veritas, 2002), 17.

by the twin concepts of ‘anomie’ and ‘egoism’—the social, moral and political isolation of individuals, their dissociation from social purposes and social regulation, the breakdown of social solidarity.’²⁶⁹ On the other hand in America individualism referred ‘to the actual or immanent realization of the final stage of human progress in a spontaneously cohesive society of equal individual rights, limited government, *laissez-faire*, natural justice and equal opportunity, and individual freedom, moral development and dignity.’²⁷⁰ A key change in the part the individual plays in modern thought is that increasingly there is a shift away from particular individuals (whether heroic, exemplary or elitist) to the importance of each and every thinking person. Lukes describes ‘the ultimate moral principle of the supreme and intrinsic value, or dignity, of the individual human being’²⁷¹ tracing it from its roots which he finds in the Gospels, and then, after a period of eclipse in mediaeval times, coming ‘to pervade modern ethical and social thought in the West.’²⁷² It comes to be

enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, which begins by declaring its “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family”.²⁷³

The universality of this individualist principle marks a change which affects not only moral principles and thinking, but also broader understandings of the place of the individual within social life. In modern sociological thought it became possible for some thinkers to suggest that individuals were real in a way that society was not. So the negative and positive attitudes to individualism are mirrored by a movement towards two poles. There have been those who have argued for the individual as of ultimate value, and those who have

²⁶⁹ Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1973), 15.

²⁷⁰ Lukes, *Individualism*, 26.

²⁷¹ Lukes, *Individualism*, 46.

²⁷² Lukes, *Individualism*, 48.

²⁷³ Lukes, *Individualism*, 49.

said that the individual can only be understood within a social context. As Norbert Elias suggested: ‘one finds oneself confronted ... by two large opposing camps.’ On the one hand are those who ‘approach socio-historical formations as if they had been designed, planned and created ... by a number of individuals or bodies,’ while on the other hand there are those for whom ‘the individual plays no part at all’ but for whom ‘the influence of anonymous, supra-individual forces’ are what explain the processes of ‘socio-historical formations.’²⁷⁴ Lukes analysis provides some degree of refinement to this picture, revealing a breadth of ideas and concepts about individualism which include the kind of absolute positions described by Elias, but also ways in which thinkers from a variety of different political positions worked to articulate an understanding of how individuality and society related to each other. This all shows how a tension between the importance of the individual agent and the importance of social structures is an essentially modern issue.

Later sociologists have worked in a variety of ways to theorize about the resolution of this tension. Elias offers the idea of a ‘society of individuals’, where both the collective society and the individuals within it, play a part in shaping the whole. An understanding of both the individuals and the society as a whole are needed to understand how the whole works. He writes of how the ‘we-I’ balance has shifted, and this is a useful way of thinking about how the relationship between society and individual has changed: there may be shifts in the balance, with either social or individual aspects coming to carry more weight, but there is an ongoing relationship between the two, and neither ever vanishes from the picture.

²⁷⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, ed. Michael Schröter, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), 3–5.

Peter Berger writes of a dialectic between social and individual, in which each feeds back in a reflexive loop on the other.

Society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product, and nothing but a human product, that yet continuously acts back upon its producer. Society is a product of man. It has no other being except that which is bestowed upon it by human activity and consciousness. There can be no social reality apart from man. Yet it may also be stated that man is a product of society. Every individual biography is an episode within the history of society, which both precedes and survives it. Society was there before the individual was born and it will be there after he has died. What is more, it is within society, and as a result of social processes, that the individual becomes a person, that he attains and holds onto identity, and that he carries out the various projects that constitute his life.²⁷⁵

In a similar way Giddens' structuration theory relates individual agency to social structures and vice versa. 'Social structures are both constituted *by* human agency, and yet at the same time are the very *medium* of this constitution.'²⁷⁶

So we can affirm three things about the rise of individualism in modernity. First, that the individual is significant in terms of agency and value. Second, that the individual is inseparable from society. Third, that the balance between individual and society can shift and change. One significant shift has already been noted: a shift which brought into the awareness of the modern mind the question of how this balance is held. Now, with the establishment of modernity, and as we begin to see its consequences played out in full in late modernity, another shift is happening. A shift towards an individualized society; but what does this mean?

²⁷⁵ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1969), 3.

²⁷⁶ Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 121.

5.2 Individualization

Individualization is portrayed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim as one of a set of changes going on in the late-modern world. Among these many changes and new social structures might be included globalisation, and the development of risk society, networks and liquid flows of information. While all of these affect individual life, individualization is a particular part of the interconnected changes going on which impacts specifically at the level of the human unit. As noted in the Introduction, it is also a structural change. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim contrast individualization as a structural change, with a neoliberal and ideological view of the individual, which might be seen as the successor to some of the views of individual autonomy mentioned above. This ideology makes an assertion about the centrality of the autonomous (or ‘autarkic’) individual. ‘It assumes that individuals alone can master the whole of their lives, that they derive and renew their capacity for action from within themselves,’ while ‘the ideological notion of the self-sufficient individual ultimately implies the disappearance of any sense of mutual obligation.’ They argue that individualization is not ideological but structural, and that the way it structures society ‘makes [integration] possible.’²⁷⁷ This dichotomy is not the same as that noted by Elias, between those who see the individual as fundamental, and those who see society as fundamental. Instead these writers suggest a swing towards individuals as more significant players in shaping social structures in themselves, rather than as people belonging to a social class, a gender, or other social grouping. Along with this goes growing freedom from traditional patterns of living and social constraint. At the same time there are contradictory aspects to this shift, which make it far from unproblematic for individuals, as will be explored below.

²⁷⁷ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, xxi. While this is a key text in understanding Beck’s theory of individualization, equally important is Beck, *Risk Society*.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim portray this shift as so radical that it leaves us struggling to make sense of society, and poses sociology with stark questions about whether it still has a role. Although they do not make the link with Kuhnian paradigm shifts this is how they view the theory of individualization. This shift is the tipping of the balance so far towards the individual that the whole relationship flips to a new state, one in which the individual plays a new dominant but uncomfortable role. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim would say that sociology is still so embedded in its old categories, its view of individuals as essentially social, rather than a society which is essentially individual, that it cannot address this developing new state of affairs. They write of the major ideas of sociology being 'on a war footing with the basic ideas of individualization theory.'²⁷⁸

A word of caution is necessary about Beck's approach. At times his argument seems to be retreading old pathways. The old arguments about individualism recorded by Lukes see focussing on the individual as a source of anomie; pure egoism is seen as a threat. In a roundabout way Beck argues the same. He sees individual choice increasing frustration, and many desiring a return to old certainties. As a result they resort to violence, an example being the increasing challenge of neo-Nazi groups. Integrating an individualized society is found to be a hugely problematic task, and one for which he cannot offer a convincing method. He has already mentioned the part that anomie plays; now we see it worked out in the desire to reassert old certainties in such a way that violence and lawlessness become a regular part of life for some. The difference is that Beck comes to these arguments after the event of individualization, recognising the positive focus of autonomy, but simultaneously remarking on its down side, the positive and negative having to be held together.

²⁷⁸ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 15.

For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim this process is something which happens over time: ‘the catch-word “individualization” should be seen as designating a trend.’²⁷⁹ Its effect gradually deepens. Beck also writes of elements of social class being ‘pushed into the background,’²⁸⁰ of traditional forms ‘beginning to disappear,’²⁸¹ and uses the language of erosion.²⁸² Its gradual nature is also found in differences from one context to another. In some contexts it is felt as a distant pressure exerted through mass media, and accounts of friends and contacts living in different settings; in others its effect is sustained and profound. Writing in the context of post-unification Germany, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest that examples of these changes ‘to some ... sound familiar. To others ... seem alien—tales from a distant world.’ Continuing they specifically cite the difference between urban and rural for ‘Individualization means, implies, urbanization.’ So it will not be surprising if these changes strike a chord with some, but produce quite different reactions in others. The process of individualization can lead particularly to a counter-current, back eddies in the flow of social change: ‘where seemingly unaltered life-styles and traditional certainties are chosen and put on show, they quite often represent decisions against new longings and aroused desires.’²⁸³

For some within faith communities such counter-cultural movements are an expression of faith, where what are felt as the imperatives of their faith values call them into life-styles or ways of being which contradict the social trends of the world around. For now it is enough to note this, and ask where such expressions of religious faith stand in contemporary culture: are they simply a back-eddy which will lose significance in the onward sweep of social change, or do they remain as a more constant minority theme which can act as

²⁷⁹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 5.

²⁸⁰ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 31.

²⁸¹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 35.

²⁸² Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 31.

²⁸³ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 5.

salt or yeast, reminding society of values which continue to hold the potential for richer and deeper relationships and social connections?

The gradual nature of this social change means it is as yet unfinished. The way in which it will work out in the longer term is as yet unknown. For this reason among others, those writing of individualization openly admit that the end point of these changes, which are still working their way through society, cannot be foreseen. Sometimes they resort to almost apocalyptic language of endings, radical change, and threats to existing ways of thinking or living. Ulrich Beck again:

Will the last bastions of social and political action be swept away as a result of that very process? Would the individualized society then not fall, torn apart by conflicts and displaying symptoms of sickness, into the kind of political apathy that precludes virtually nothing, not even new and insidious forms of a modernized barbarism?²⁸⁴

Further, because this process is unfinished and the end point cannot be clearly seen these theorists focus much more on interpretations of the current state of affairs, pointing to the problems and issues raised by individualization. Bauman sometimes does this by asking questions to which he offers no answers; so one chapter of *The Individualized Society* on the way in which freedom and security are affected by individualization ends with a plea that ‘something must be done’, followed by two brief paragraphs which ask the questions of what is to be done and who is to do it, before concluding, ‘On our ability to untie or cut this Gordian knot the fate of the republic, the citizenship, democracy and human autonomy will depend in the foreseeable future.’²⁸⁵ Similarly Beck concludes a piece about the future of status and class with a list of questions including those quoted above.²⁸⁶ Giddens also leaves an impression of individuals facing major problems of ‘Ontological Security and Existential

²⁸⁴ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 40–41.

²⁸⁵ Bauman, Zygmunt, *The Individualized Society* (Polity: Cambridge, 2001), 56.

²⁸⁶ See footnote 287 above.

Anxiety,'²⁸⁷ and concludes his book with major ethical questions which remain to be answered, of which he comments: 'No one should underestimate how difficult it will be to deal with these, or even how hard it is to formulate them in ways likely to command consensus.'²⁸⁸ So we are left with a picture of a gradual upheaval of social structures, set in motion and not to be stopped, which is yet to be concluded. Unanswered questions abound; and many of them centre around the notion of what it means to be an individual, and how individuals can continue to find ways of co-operation, support and mutual regard in the face of the changes happening.

This trend to individualization also involves democratisation (although not unequivocally). Because some of its roots lie in individualism, it can carry values of personal worth, autonomy, and freedom, and these are strong motors for it, providing personal and political motives. A clear expression of this comes from Beck as he relates how political thinking has to come to terms with individualization:

All old class conceptions and politics presupposed that the individual and individualization were a basic illusion which had to be overcome in order to rebuild collective identities, to organize political life and to represent the individual in political democracy. I think this is a basic mistake. Just the opposite is necessary. Political parties nowadays have to recognize and acknowledge individualization, not as something to overcome, but as a new form of cultural democratization and self-consciousness of society.²⁸⁹

Giddens writes of a shift from emancipatory politics to life politics. Life politics is possible because of the achievements of emancipatory politics.

Life politics presumes (a certain level of) emancipation. ... emancipation from the fixities of tradition and from conditions of hierarchical domination. ... While emancipatory

²⁸⁷ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, the title of chapter 2.

²⁸⁸ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 214–215.

²⁸⁹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 208.

politics is a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of lifestyle [and] a politics of life decisions.²⁹⁰

Giddens suggests that feminism is a key example of such 'life-politics', carrying democratisation on from structural issues of representation, to personal issues about what this might mean for individuals and their decisions and choices. I am unsure whether Giddens can maintain such a split, for there are aspects of life politics which seem to be profoundly emancipatory, and aspects of the tasks of emancipatory politics which are unfinished. Life politics picks up on some of these issues, but there remain questions about whether the continuing tasks of emancipatory politics can ever be achieved through life politics alone. Yet, chiming with his example of feminism, when Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim writes of 'the female biography' undergoing an 'individualization boost' she is indicating the particular ways that women have benefitted from this democratising shift.²⁹¹ So individualization assumes and assists a more democratised world.

5.3 The Ambivalence of the Individualized Subject

Individualization is experienced with ambivalence. Contrary currents and feelings work against one another, particularly with reference to individual choices. In ambivalence people feel tugged in two different directions at the same time. In the case of the neighbourhood this is a tug between being rooted in a place and having a sense of belonging, and being free to explore a wider world without feelings of obligation to a place or community. This kind of ambivalence underlies much late modern experience. As we trace the shape of the ambivalence which comes with individualization we will find it is made up of many pieces, a jig-saw in which different pieces interlock in different directions, but making a whole picture.

²⁹⁰ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 231.

²⁹¹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 55.

The picture is linked by experiences of individualization and freedom, and yet the freedom of individualization is a constrained freedom. We will explore this mainly through the same three key texts we have been using above.

As ambivalence involves contrary feelings, we need first to identify some of those contraries. There are three which I will use to give shape to the overall picture, which will act as the corners of the jig-saw puzzle. Each one contrasts an aspect of freedom with a corresponding sense of loss. I take my understanding of freedom from Lukes, quoted earlier in the chapter, who distinguishes three values: autonomy, privacy, and self-development, which he describes as “the three faces of freedom” ... all three [being] basic to the idea of freedom and that freedom [being] incomplete when any one of them is absent or diminished.²⁹² First, a sense of personal freedom, independence and autonomy, contrasted with feelings of a loss of certainty and clarity; second, the freedom of personal development and being able to shape our own life course, contrasted with the loss of shared structures of meaning; third, privacy and the freedom which comes with being able to retreat into our own space or into a larger world, contrasted with a sense of precariousness and a loss of security. Beginning with these corner pieces, the overall picture of ambivalence will take shape. Because it is so bound up with the idea of personal freedom, the picture will include details of how that freedom is exercised and limited in the late modern world. The three cannot be treated as three completely separate issues; they are closely inter-related, so even while dealing with them individually the connections between them will become clear.

It should not be surprising that increasing individual freedom goes hand in hand with losses. Freedom is, in itself, an ambiguous thing. Freedom can never be absolute; it has

²⁹² Lukes, *Individualism*, 127. His account of these three aspects of liberty is contained in chapters 8–10, with the relationship between the three contained in chapter 18.

to be restricted, and is perhaps self-restricting. To be able to drive as I choose, on whatever side of the road and at whatever speed, would not be a freedom that could last for long. Debates about freedom generally take shape through arguments about the point at which it should be limited, and whether greater or lesser infringement should be permitted. In a similar way Beck and Beck-Gernsheim suggest that ‘the limits of individualization should be sought in the individualization process itself—that, to put it mechanically, the more people are individualized, the more they produce de-individualizing consequences for others.’²⁹³ Certain limits of freedom are also drawn by the individualization process. The picture which takes shape here, of liberty in individualized society, will suggest that the tension between individual freedom and social constraint has undergone a radical shift: from an emphasis on constraints which hold individuals in set relationships, to constraints which demand they act on their own.

A. Greater autonomy and less clarity

The first aspect of freedom is that of autonomy: the possibility of individuals choosing for themselves, without undue constraint or influence. The natural constraint which comes with such freedom is that of responsibility, and a responsibility which, in the case of individualization, is not solely for others. The increase in autonomy under individualization brings with it an increased awareness of the responsibility we carry for ourselves and our own choices, decisions and actions. Before late-modernity responsibility was often a shared and social responsibility. For some people freedom of choice and responsibility were taken out of their hands, but in late-modernity individuals frequently have to make choices and carry responsibility for themselves. For example, a young person who found choices of working

²⁹³ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, xxiv.

life made for them by their circumstances, class, background—whether going down the pit, or going to university to train for a profession—had a limited range of choices to make. For some, and especially women and those from lower social groups, there could often be virtually no choice to make at all. Now young people are faced at all sorts of levels with a bewildering array of decisions to make, choices which affect their personal identity. In some ways this is a relatively straight forward shift, but what happens to it in individualized society?

Under individualization individuals have to constantly take responsibility for their own lives and their own decisions. There is one thing about which we have no choice: whether to choose or not. With the shifting of responsibility away from the corporate and collective, and towards the individual, for each person everything becomes a matter of choice then at least for decision, and that creates pressures. When Beck and Beck-Gernsheim begin by considering what were once givens in life, they conclude: ‘God, nature, truth, science, technology, morality, love, marriage—modern life is turning them all into “precarious freedoms”.’²⁹⁴ So what was accepted, becomes a responsibility, and when choices go wrong, often guilt replaces givens. For Bauman this is a powerfully disruptive experience for us; he comments:

Turning the blame away from the institutions and onto the inadequacy of the self helps either to defuse the resulting potentially disruptive anger, or to recast it into the passions of self-censure and self-disparagement or even rechannel it into violence and torture aimed against one’s own body.²⁹⁵

He goes on to suggest that social experience is pushed ‘down to a “second bottom”’: the denial of collective public vehicles of transcendence and the abandonment of the individual to the lonely struggle with a task which most individuals lack the resources to perform alone.’ The

²⁹⁴ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 2.

²⁹⁵ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 5.

ambivalence of this lies partly in the fact that individualization turns what might be seen as freedoms into compelled freedoms, and also in the way that the exercise of freedom becomes, at some points, a burden.

Individualization is thus connected with Beck's 'risk society', in which the distribution of wealth is replaced as the primary factor in ordering priorities by the distribution of risk. This distribution of risk is experienced at various levels, including the personal level. Risk is part of the background of the individual life and is also being incorporated into individual stories and lives. As we seek to plan for the future (the future is 'colonised'²⁹⁶) we calculate (or at least take account of) risks, and live constantly with the possibility of risks turning into dangers. Risk society is experienced in part as people seek to plot their life trajectory, and, being unable to see the future clearly, that process is risky. Risk is experienced as a part of life biographies; as people make choices they have to weigh up risks. Beck comments that 'Not only genetically modified food but also love and marriage, including the traditional housewife marriage, become a risk.'²⁹⁷ We might add that the choice to connect and engage within a neighbourhood could also therefore be construed as a risk. The point is that such life planning becomes a necessity. 'The tendency is towards the emergence of individualized forms and conditions of existence, which compel people—for the sake of their own material survival—to make themselves the center of their own planning and conduct of life.'²⁹⁸ More than that, what this amounts to is a loss of clarity. Looking into the future may once have been, at least at the individual level, relatively straight forward. There may have been all kinds of unpredictable events which might have intervened, but, if

²⁹⁶ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 111, 125, 129, among others.

²⁹⁷ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 27.

²⁹⁸ Beck, *Risk Society*, 88, my emphasis.

life was left to its own course then people's life stories had a certain predictability to them. Now looking into the future there is much poorer visibility; risks must be taken.

Bauman sees this same quandary as the core of the experience of ambivalence generally. He points to 'an intimate connection between the perception of the world as shaky and questionable and the range of human freedom.' This experience of the world as 'shaky and questionable' might be seen as another expression of what it is like to live in risk society. Bauman continues, in a way that makes a link with the example with which this section began of young people beginning their working life,

The less I can do and the less I may want ... the more straightforward are 'the facts of life'. The wider the realm of my choices grows—the imaginary world of future possibilities—the less obvious and compelling appear the signals coming from the real world here and now.²⁹⁹

He develops this further, suggesting that this ambivalence arises from a split in our experience of freedom, which 'is torn apart between the premonition of "what I may do" and the sense of "what I wish to be done"'.³⁰⁰

He describes the Enlightenment as a quest for clarity of purpose and desire, seeking to bring these two into lasting harmony. At that point the need for clarity arose out of the confusion of the natural world. The Enlightenment sought to impose order on that confusion, but by putting priority on what can be done rather than on desire. This priority led to a strong controlling aspect of many modern social systems, and even to 'modernity's hidden, yet notorious totalitarian tendency.'³⁰¹ Yet in late-modernity it becomes clear that this strategy has been first abandoned, and then seen to be a failure. However much nature was brought under control, new confusions break out. Within modernity other factors played

²⁹⁹ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 58.

³⁰⁰ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 58.

³⁰¹ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 67.

against clarity of purpose, particularly the way needs have constantly increased ahead of potential action to meet those needs. ‘The state of full satisfaction ... proved to be a constantly receding horizon.’³⁰² Although, he says, such a strategy is still applied to the ‘underclass’, for ‘the majority, the main body, the pattern-setting part of society—it is the wants that have been assigned an unqualified priority and given the role of the initiating and driving force as far as the potentialities of society are concerned.’³⁰³ So for Bauman ambivalence takes root in the clash between ever increasing desires and the inability to impose order and clarity on the confusion. It is as these ‘wants’—our desires for the future—drive the construction of personal narratives (sometimes resulting in success and sometimes in failure) that ambivalence is experienced. This is another facet of the ambivalence which Beck and Beck-Gernsheim see as the compulsion to be autonomous.

Of course, within late-modernity this push for clarity remains. People still want to be able to look ahead, to understand the world, and to be able to plan even though they have no clear understanding of how their actions will change the world. Giddens traces such patterns in the way in which we trust. Our trust shifts from being put in other people, to being placed on systems, but this change leads to a psychologically different kind of trust.

On a psychological level, there are close connections between the sequestration of experience, trust and the search for intimacy. Abstract systems help foster day-to-day security, but trust vested in such systems ... carries little psychological reward for the individual; trust brackets out ignorance, but does not provide the moral satisfactions that trust in persons can offer.³⁰⁴

Notice that ‘trust brackets out ignorance’; the same push to get beyond ignorance is evident, but instead of this coming through control and understanding, it comes through trust in systems beyond control. Clarity only comes by ‘bracketing out’ ignorance.

³⁰² Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 67.

³⁰³ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 67–68.

³⁰⁴ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 185.

B. More self-development and fewer shared meanings

The second area of freedom is that of self-development, which arises as we choose what to do with our autonomy. This particularly takes shape through ‘biographies’ or ‘life stories’, which are the means by which individualization takes shape in the lives of individuals. Through the construction of identity, through fashion and the consumption of goods which carry particular values and meanings, through self-help and life-long learning, individuals give shape to their lives. That shape provides meaning and structure for the individual; but at the same time it signals a retreat from the kind of shared meanings which have in the past provided social structures which might have been associated with class, gender, religion, nationality, regional or local identities, family, occupation, and so on.

Bauman introduces his book with a chapter entitled ‘Lives told and stories lived,’³⁰⁵ and writes of the narratives of individual lives undergoing ‘a process of relentless *individualization*.’³⁰⁶ It is these stories and narratives which give shape to late modern lives, as people work to give shape and point to what they are doing, and to bring fragmented pieces together. Bauman’s value system becomes evident in this introduction when he writes of ‘meaningful life’ and the ‘chances which life entails’; such meaningful life, in which chances occur, need to be held together in the kind of stories of which he writes.³⁰⁷

For Giddens these stories take shape through reflexive self-awareness; through the individual looking at their life, and making choices and decisions which then change its course. He takes the example of self-help, which he sees as a way of constructing personal narrative.³⁰⁸ Later, when introducing the idea of life politics, he writes of ‘the ethos of self-

³⁰⁵ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 1–14.

³⁰⁶ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 6, his emphasis.

³⁰⁷ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 5.

³⁰⁸ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 70ff.

growth.’³⁰⁹ He also writes of the ‘colonisation of the future’ as a ‘phenomenon concerned with the control of time.’³¹⁰ The subject of this phenomenon (who or what colonises) is sometimes seen in social or collective terms, but it also becomes a strategy for personal growth: ‘Individuals seek to colonise the future for themselves as an intrinsic part of their life-planning.’³¹¹ Yet this also makes it clear that such ‘life stories’ also involve risk. Insurance is an example of colonisation of the future; while ‘life-planning takes account of a “package” of risks.’³¹²

It is with this sense of risk that ambivalence in this aspect of freedom will be most keenly experienced. This is brought out clearly by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, for whom this individual riskiness is equally inherent in the whole process of individualization. For them:

The normal biography thus becomes the ‘elective biography’, the ‘reflexive biography’, the ‘do-it-yourself biography’. This does not happen by choice, neither does it necessarily succeed. The do-it-yourself biography is always a ‘risk biography’, indeed a ‘tightrope biography’, a state of permanent (partly overt, partly concealed) endangerment. The façade of prosperity, consumption, glitter can often mask the nearby precipice.

And they go on to comment that ‘the do-it-yourself biography can swiftly become the breakdown biography.’³¹³ This comes about because individuals have to construct their own meanings, rather than being able to fall back on shared meanings. This ambivalence is also expressed by Giddens:

In the reflexive project of the self, the narrative of self-identity is inherently fragile. The task of forging a distinct identity may be able to deliver psychological gains, but it is clearly also a burden. A self identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 209.

³¹⁰ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 111.

³¹¹ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 125.

³¹² Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 125.

³¹³ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 3.

³¹⁴ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 185.

An example of the way this works out in life stories would be in what Giddens describes as the ‘pure relationship’.³¹⁵ Marriage is being replaced by what he calls the ‘pure relationship’, by which he means a relationship which is entered into for its own sake and for what it brings to those who enter into it. Rather than being controlled by traditional social mores and expectations—the kind of shared understandings which govern such relationships in traditional contexts—people make their individual choices, building the significant relationships of their lives into their personal life story; but the choices they make in doing this are internal to themselves. What maintains the relationship is not an externally grounded sense of right and wrong (whether rooted in God, or society, or common humanity) but a sense of ‘what is right for me.’ Therefore, should the life story change course, and the relationship cease to bring the advantages for which it was entered into, there is no other motivation left to hold it together. The riskiness of such relationships is evident. Similar things can be said about the significance of living in and partaking in neighbourhoods. If there are ‘pure relationships’—in other words, individualized relationships—what of individualized neighbourhoods? They will be subject to similar stresses, and within them the same kinds of risks will be found.

C. Greater privacy and less solidarity and security

The third aspect of freedom is privacy, and as the scope of private lives increases under individualization so there is a shift away from communal and corporate patterns of life, together with the solidarity and security which they provide. The private life is partly about having a space of one’s own, where outsiders cannot intrude or observe: the possibility of retreat from view. Privacy can also be reinforced by having a larger world to retreat into.

³¹⁵ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 88–98.

Greater mobility means people are less tied to a particular place with the obligations and requirements which come with that place and its social relationships. So an increase in privacy also means a retreat from commitments, which have in the past provided forms of social support. The loss of supports therefore leads to a lessening of security, and a growing sense of precariousness.

For Bauman individualization is a process which closes down the possibility of joint, co-operative action. He analyses human life in terms of its conditions and actions: conditions cannot be changed, but are givens that must be simply accepted; actions are what we can do which will change things. The boundary between these two has been, Bauman suggests, ‘notoriously mobile’,³¹⁶ but now individualization seems to seal the boundary between these two in such a way that what is personal and individual is seen as ‘action’ while what is shared and corporate is seen as ‘condition’. Our whole way of speaking of life stories, the articulation of meaning in our lives, tends to see anything corporate as beyond reach.

The distinctive feature of the stories told in our times is that they articulate individual lives in a way that excludes or suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which society as a whole operates; more to the point, it precludes the questioning of such ways and means by relegating them to the unexamined background of individual life pursuits and casting them as ‘brute facts’ which the story-tellers can neither challenge nor negotiate, whether singly, severally or collectively.

Furthermore, this ‘game of life we all play ... is conducted in such a way that the rules of the game ... seldom come under scrutiny.’³¹⁷

So Bauman sets out to offer the reason for this inadequate articulation going unchallenged, and rather than seeking the reason in the media and the market, or in

³¹⁶ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 8.

³¹⁷ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 9.

ideological hegemony, he suggests this occurs because of a new form of hegemony particular to the world of individualization, played out through ‘precariousness’ and ‘disengagement’.

The high and mighty of our times do not wish to be embroiled in the trials and tribulations of management, surveillance and policing; above all, in the responsibilities arising from long-term commitments and ‘till death us do part’ engagements. They have elevated to the rank of the highest merit the attributes of mobility and flexibility, travelling light, on-the-spot readjustment and continuous reincarnation. Having at their disposal a volume of resources on a par with the volume of choice, they find the new lightness nothing but a fertile and thoroughly enjoyable condition. When translated into no-choice, obligatory canons of universal behaviour, the self-same attributes generate a lot of human misery. But they also (and by the same token) make the game immune to challenge and so insure it against all competition. *Précarité* and TINA (‘there is no alternative’) enter life together. And only together can they leave.³¹⁸

Bauman perhaps comes across as the most pessimistic of these presenters of individualization, as he explores the links between individualized life stories, precarious and risky living, and this ‘light hegemony’.

With such precariousness we are back to the idea of risk. Here an aspect of risk which is not so much about an inability to look ahead into the future as about a weakening of structures of support which might otherwise help individuals; although we should also be aware that such structures could also sometimes be experienced as restrictive. Giddens’ ‘pure relationship’ provides a clear example of the way in which this works. Older styles of married relationship certainly provided a greater sense of security, which is lost in the kind of relationships, whether involving marriage or not, in which people now live. They were also more restrictive, particularly for women. The pure relationships of late-modernity provide both greater freedom and less security. In terms of privacy such relationships are founded far more on the internal world of the two participants and what happens between them in the privacy of their lives together. ‘In contrast to close personal ties in traditional contexts, the pure relationship is not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life—it is, as it

³¹⁸ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 12.

were, free-floating.³¹⁹ The characteristics of such relationships are also found beyond ‘two-person settings’, as Giddens later on comments:

A given individual is likely to be involved in several forms of social relation which tend towards the pure type; and pure relationships are typically interconnected, forming specific milieux of intimacy. These milieux ... express an institutionally affirmed division of private and public arenas.³²⁰

Another area related to this theme is how poverty and inequality are not removed by individualization, but become more private. In fact, it is Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s assertion ‘that social inequality is on the rise precisely because of the spread of individualization.’³²¹ Yet this happens in unexpected ways which make poverty a source of shame, something to be kept within the privacy of the home. They argue that social classes are coming apart, dying with the old traditions. Consequently ‘unemployment and poverty under conditions of individualization are distributed not so much by group as by phase in a person’s life.’ This is illustrated with statistics from the United States, which show, for example, that over a ten year period ‘only 0.7 per cent of those interviewed had been continually poor, while more than 24 per cent had been affected by poverty in at least one of the years.’ This is described as ‘dynamic poverty’, and Beck likens mass unemployment to a bus which ‘contains one group who have remained stuck to their seats, but that most faces keep changing as people get on and off for a few stops.’ This means that as people fall into poverty, it normally comes not as a permanent reality but as a temporary set-back (as soon as they get on the bus, they are looking to get off again) which is kept concealed if at all possible, and therefore privatized. Beck comments specifically on the way privacy is used to cover-up poverty: ‘The new poverty is usually hidden away behind the four walls of the

³¹⁹ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 89.

³²⁰ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 97.

³²¹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, xxiv.

home, so scandalous that it is actively concealed.’ This does not mean that there is less poverty and unemployment, but rather that ‘in the social optic of ‘a life of one’s own’, the systematically generated fate of mass unemployment breaks up into millions of pieces.’³²²

Bauman offers another view on contemporary poverty, suggesting that views of the welfare state have changed from one of its necessity, to one of criticism as it ‘is charged with not working itself out of a job.’³²³ Bauman argues that the welfare state came into being at a time when the unemployed could be viewed as a reserve of labour, and it was in the interest of capital to keep that reserve fit and healthy. With the changes of mechanization and globalization the reserve of labour is no longer needed. ‘People left out of the game are ... left without a function which ... could be seen as “useful” ... for the smooth and profitable running of the economy ... but in a society in which the consumers, not producers, are cast as the driving force of economic prosperity ... the poor are also worthless as consumers.’³²⁴ The contemporary poor therefore ‘turn from objects of pity and compassion into objects of resentment and anger.’³²⁵ Bauman continues by suggesting that, given the precariousness of many life stories (as indicated by the case Beck makes for ‘dynamic poverty’), seeing the fate of the poor as the only alternative gives many people a powerful motive for putting up with their precariousness (including such things as part-time work, and short-term contracts) and also as a powerful motive for rejecting any idea of solidarity with the poor. ‘The poor are today the collective “Other” of the frightened consumers.’³²⁶ Bauman here seems to posit a new set of ‘classes’: the poor, the consumer, and the super-wealthy wielders of global capital.

³²² Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 49–50.

³²³ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 71.

³²⁴ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 74–75.

³²⁵ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 76.

³²⁶ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 116.

Between the first two there is an uncomfortable ease of movement, which acts as a motivator for consumers to bear with the precarious uncertainties of their lives.

All this suggests that poverty and unemployment are themselves individualized in a way they never were in the past. What would once have been experienced as a shared and corporate fate, for which structural solutions through trade unions, socialist parties, and close knit working communities could be sought, is now the fate of individuals. Each one is seen as largely responsible for their own fate. Instead of solidarity and security found in community, poverty becomes a much more private and individual experience.

5.4 The Individualized Neighbourhood

Individualization has been explored as a phenomenon which involves freedom, but a freedom which carries a cost. With the gains come losses and the ambivalence experienced by all manner of people as they experience freedom and insecurity in a single package. Our experience of neighbourhood also changes, and becomes ambivalent. The ambivalence over neighbourhood noted in the last chapter can be more thoroughly analysed particularly through the three aspects of freedom—autonomy, self-development, and privacy—and through the notion of choice. The most basic point here is a change from neighbourhood constituted by social givens to that of neighbourhood constituted by individual choice. The consequence is neighbourhoods which are shallower, where connections are more tentative and fragile, and where neighbourhood-based community in some situations struggles to get off the ground, because in their ambivalence people are only half-heartedly committed to particular places.

An important part of this is the experience of choice. Barry Schwartz has wittily explored the ambivalence with which we experience choice in our modern world.³²⁷ From a psychological point of view he looks at our contemporary experience of choice as one of being overwhelmed by options. He begins by relating a visit to The Gap to buy a new pair of ordinary jeans, and being overwhelmed by the variety of choice which confronted him.

The jeans I chose turned out just fine, but it occurred to me that day that buying a pair of pants should not be a day-long project. By creating all these options, the store undoubtedly had done a favor for customers with varied tastes and body types. However, by vastly expanding the range of choices, they had also created a new problem that needed to be solved. Before these options were available a buyer like myself had to settle for an imperfect fit, but at least purchasing jeans was a five-minute affair. Now it was a complex decision in which I was forced to invest time, energy, and no small amount of self-doubt, anxiety, and dread.³²⁸

What Schwartz goes on to explore in his book is the way that such demanding choices infiltrate every part of our lives. This parallels the reality of what Beck means when he writes about ‘the compulsion to lead a life one’s own’, suggesting that modern systems compel decisions. ‘In the place of binding traditions, institutional guidelines appear on the scene to organize your own life,’ and these guidelines ‘actually compel the self-organization and self-thematization of people’s biographies.’³²⁹ Schwarz goes on to catalogue some of the areas in which such choices have to be made, including: education, health care, pensions, body image, patterns of work and home-life, religion, and identity.³³⁰ His most telling point though is that choice, however positive some of its effects, also produces a heavy burden, first indicated in the final words of the quotation above: ‘self-doubt, anxiety, and dread.’ While said tongue in cheek about the purchase of a pair of jeans Schwarz maintains that the burden of choice in wide swathes of our lives has an impact on mental health. A whole range of

³²⁷ Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* (HarperCollins: New York, 2004).

³²⁸ Schwartz, *Paradox*, 2.

³²⁹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 22–23.

³³⁰ Schwartz, *Paradox*, 24–42.

factors means that the amount and kind of choice with which we live creates dissatisfaction and anxiety. For example: the difficulties and resistance which people have to making trade-offs; the sense of missed opportunity when one thing is chosen over another as we ask ourselves how the other choice would have worked out; regrets which follow a choice which doesn't match the high expectations set on it; and the constant comparisons which choice making entails. With the anxiety and dissatisfaction comes the potential for higher levels of depression. We have already noted above that under individualization choice is the one thing which cannot be optional. It denies itself, for late modern individuals cannot choose not to choose. Despite its negative aspects we cannot opt out, and therefore it has within it the seeds of ambivalence. There seems little doubt that choice is both a liberation and a burden, so unsurprisingly choice is present both in the three facets of freedom and in the losses discussed above.

So how are ambivalence and choices present in individualized neighbourhoods? How do autonomy, self-development and privacy impact on our local spaces? How are the losses of clarity, shared meanings and security dealt with? Here are some pointers.

A. Autonomy but less clarity

The shift towards greater autonomy means that people living within neighbourhoods feel they are not so much bound by the expectations of those around them. If they are to be in touch with their neighbourhood, then it is a matter of choice, not of compulsion. The choice is real. There are many connections which may be made outside the neighbourhood, through relationships which centre around family, employment, entertainment, or other networks. These are seen as equally capable of providing for the kinds of needs which could be resolved within a neighbourhood. The idea that individuals choose for themselves who to associate

with, and under what circumstances, places relationships within a neighbourhood on a supermarket shelf alongside a whole range of other possibilities.

In early modern, *Gemeinschaft*-style communities, neighbourhood was part of a network of relationships in which the familial and economic were inextricably tied up with place. Now this has all been uncoupled. The individual growing up within a neighbourhood may feel some sense of connectedness to it. Familiarity and memory can exert some pull. However choices are made about career in the context of education, and any desire to stay in a place where memories and connections are strong has to be able to exert itself over a wider job-market, the possibility of advancement, and the opportunities which come with greater mobility. For many the neighbourhood they grew up in can become a sign of what they need to grow up from. To become a truly autonomous adult, creating their own life-story, they must leave the place in which they are seen as their parents' children. It should also be noted that, in the nature of individualization, all these choices have an element of compulsion about them, and it leaves individuals growing up outside of any set pattern given to them by family and community. Values and ways of living must be chosen; they are not a given, and cannot be taken for granted.

Another effect of this is to make anti-social behaviour easier. Constraints which were once in place are removed. On one hand values of personal autonomy can encourage some to do as they please; on the other significant possibilities for expressing autonomy in economic ways are restricted by poverty and social exclusion. This leaves people searching for other ways to make a life which they can call their own. Choices involving criminality, drugs, and active flouting of social expectations become practical options in the expression of autonomy. There is an immediate effect on the local environment (noise, litter, graffiti), and on the lives of others living around (anxiety, stress, frustration). Such effects will be found

mostly in those places where more conventional and consumer oriented means of building a life-biography are not available, in neighbourhoods of marked deprivation. In such places neighbourhood can become, not a focus for community, but a place from which to escape.

B. Self-development but fewer shared meanings

This takes us on to that aspect of freedom which gives priority to self-development over shared values. While the neighbourhood might provide various goods which are relevant to a particular trajectory of personal development, the individual has a range of choices about how to secure those goods. The neighbourhood may or may not seem the best place in which to obtain them. Even when it is the chosen route neighbourhood is only significant for so long as it continues to provide what is needed; and while what is needed from a neighbourhood may have something to do with shared values, it is just as possible that it will be neutral to them, or even hostile. So, what is needed may well be trivial (somewhere to buy a paper, and a pint of milk), or may be expressed in the kind of anti-social paths to an autonomous life referred to above.

This emphasis on self-development also means that neighbourhoods have become easier to pick up and easier to set down. People are more ready to disconnect themselves from a place in order to move on. They then plug into a new place to find the things they need for the next stage of their life journey.

People spread their lives out across separate worlds. Globalization of biography means place polygamy; people are wedded to several places at once. ... The transition from the first to the second modernity is also a transition from place monogamy to place polygamy.³³¹

³³¹ Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 25.

Another way of approaching this is in terms of networks. It is not so much a commitment to different places, as a commitment to groups of people who are geographically dispersed, but connected by some common purpose or interest. Taking things even further, there are networks which are divorced from space. Information technology makes connections possible which transcend all national and political boundaries. Within such a networked world, what place for the neighbourhood, when with a short car journey one can be in another place, or with a few mouse-clicks one can connect with people around the world? The need for some sense of rootedness can be overwhelmed by the wealth of possibilities represented by network society. No surprise then that people are 'place polygamous'.

The individualized neighbourhood will be more important in different stages of life. Childhood and old-age are more likely to be neighbourhood focussed. In between these two there is a hinterland which begins with markers of personal mobility: life events such as moving up to secondary school a greater distance away, or being considered old enough to go unaccompanied on a bus, or learning how to drive. The hinterland tapers away as increasing infirmity leads to the inability to drive, or to get onto a bus, or to walk very far. Even then, in these life phases where neighbourhood matters more, its significance can be pared to a minimum. Parents take younger children to activities outside the neighbourhood, just as they go to things beyond it themselves. Infirm older people may find themselves bussed to a day centre on the other side of town, rather than one in their own locality. Social relationships are as often shaped into more mobile patterns, where the language of networks or liquidity make more sense, than into the stable patterns of neighbourhood. There is also an issue about how far experience of a place is shaped by a dominant institution: for the young through the local primary school; for the old maybe by different forms of institutional life in sheltered housing and warden-controlled complexes. These can provide a sort of buffer between the people and

the neighbourhood in which they live, effectively insulating people from the neighbourhood to some extent.

C. Privacy but less solidarity and security

Under individualization privacy has greater significance. Neighbourhood has always been a setting where people police the boundaries of privacy. That doesn't change. Although it might be argued that the increased emphasis on privacy could lead to greater vigilance I don't think this is the case. Under individualization the same kinds of mixed patterns of openness and closedness to relationships will go on. Some will defend their own space and information about themselves more strongly than others. Within neighbourhoods it is possible that there may be a shift towards privacy, but what is more significant is the range of possibilities for making choices about to whom to relate. Privacy is in part formed by choices made about who will be allowed over the boundary of our lives, and who will be allowed to become part of our life-story. This is an important part of how intimacy, and relationships in general, are managed and controlled. Because many people have a wide range of relationships on which to build in other networks those within a neighbourhood are just one group to be chosen from among those many possibilities.

There is a parallel here between Giddens's idea of a 'pure relationship' mentioned above, and individualized neighbourhoods in which we must choose to participate. In the age of pure relationship 'marriage becomes more and more a relationship initiated for, and kept going for as long as, it delivers emotional satisfaction to be derived from close contact with one another.'³³² That idea of a relationship for its own sake Giddens extends, as we saw above, to other relationships and friendships, and suggests they might be 'interconnected,

³³² Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 89.

forming specific milieux of intimacy.’³³³ In this way living in a neighbourhood may become the location of such a milieu, but that will only continue so long as ‘it delivers emotional satisfaction.’ One might extend this beyond an individual’s relationship with a network of others within a neighbourhood, to a relationship with a place as a whole. It may be that some people might choose, for reasons generated by their own self-understanding and by their values, hopes and aspirations, to commit themselves to a place and the community shaped within it; but how rooted will that commitment be? Will this not be another form of ‘pure relationship’, continued so long as it continues to provide some form of satisfaction? As such this is a private decision, and one which is reflexive—in other words, subject to review.

5.5 Individualized Freedom and Liberty under Christ

In some ways the nature of freedom under individualization, in which people find both benefits and costs, applies to all freedom. However, the particular shape of this freedom, through ambivalence, is of a freedom which confronts people with choices that remain stubbornly their own responsibility. It distances individuals from each other. There is some degree of support for the responsibilities of individualized living: professional structures which, usually for a price, provide expert advice or means of colonising the future and lessening the risks of choices; chosen relationships, from the more intimate to those involving friendship and association, which provide support and meaning. Neither of these, however, can take away from the power of individualization to leave us with our own choices. We are ruled by forces which shape social and individual action, and from which there are mitigations, but no escape.

³³³ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 97.

Liberty under Christ, on the other hand, always involves others. It cannot be expressed except alongside and for others. Perhaps the most striking difference is that individualized freedom is exercised for the self, out of taking responsibility for the self, whereas Christian freedom is a holy liberty, exercised with a view to the other, out of responsibility for the other, out of a love of neighbour. In some ways such a picture of liberty could lead to an idealising of Christian life, echoing the possible counter-cultural paradigm of church offered by Gibbs and Bolger. If Christian liberty is so different in its vision from individualized freedom, maybe the only way it can be lived out is by a radical separation from the world.

However, this goes against two important principles of theology. Firstly, against God's presence in the world. This is expressed in the idea of God's immanence, and in the idea of prevenient grace. God is revealing God's-self to us in and through the world in which we live. This reaches a particular expression in the incarnation, as Christ embraces a particular life and culture, is born within it and expresses God's word through it. The revelation of God, present most strikingly and importantly through the death of Christ, points out that there is no part of human experience and culture from which God is excluded. The individualized world of late modernity is no exception. Secondly, the Christian eschatological view of human life sees us as already living within God's order, but at the same time not yet having arrived. Any idealising of Christian life and practice emphasises the first of these at the expense of the second. The question must be: how can the already of the kingdom be expressed, while at the same time acknowledging that we are immersed in a world which is other than God, and therefore necessarily imperfect? Somehow our thinking needs to hold together the twin realities of ourselves: both as those whose lives God has claimed, and as those who live within the world; as those whose lives are structured by

individualization, and as those who live as though they see beyond it and will one day be beyond it.

These two insights mean that we must be alert to any step which supposes we can place ourselves outside our contemporary world. This is where we are, and this is where we experience the beginnings of our liberation and redemption. At the same time, we do not accept the individualized world to be as God intended. Our lives are shaped by individualization, but not fully. In an individualized world the Christian motivated by such a vision consciously, reflexively, steps back into the relationships from which individualization tries to remove her or him. Individualization seems to demand that such decisions are taken time and again. The individualization theorist will say that you cannot choose to place yourself outside of the individualized world; the choice must always be returned to; but that is precisely the place in which eschatological faith places us. Those who are already part of God's Kingdom, yet also not yet within it, are also those who must keep returning to the point of decision.

Like yet unlike individualized freedom, liberty under Christ can be defined through the freedom of the other. Found first in God, and in women and men as they reflect the image of God; found then in the experience of those who are least free. In the following theological reflection, the main writers explored will be those from the tradition of liberation theology, or those influenced by it, who have engaged particularly with these issues of freedom and liberty.

A. The liberty of God and the liberty of women and men

Liberty is part of our fundamental nature as creatures of God; not in that we are necessarily free, but in that we are necessarily made to be free: to be those who respond to God in

worship. As those who are made in God's image this essential freedom should be reflected in our understanding of God, and cannot be separated from the liberty of God. Moltmann introduces the theme of liberty through the writing of Berdyaev who sees 'freedom willed by God' as 'the origin of the world.'³³⁴ What God wills is the freedom of human beings, but 'because man continually misuses and suppresses his freedom, human history is a tragedy. It is a tragedy of freedom, not a tragedy of doom.'³³⁵ This sets up a question in our understanding of God which is at the centre of Moltmann's theology, as to how suffering, change, and history can be accounted for in our understanding of God. Moltmann wants to join Berdyaev in expressing something of God's longing for humanity, and the presence of suffering and tragedy within God, and seeks a way of doing this within orthodox Christian belief. This involves negotiating a way around the traditional affirmation of God's impassibility. This is familiar ground from Moltmann's earlier work³³⁶ but here he confronts the issue specifically in terms of a doctrine of God.

Moltmann continues by asking two questions of the theology of the divine passion. The first is about human suffering; the question of theodicy. The second, he writes, 'is the question of God's freedom.'³³⁷ Moltmann first asserts that God is free, and then goes on to ask the form of God's freedom. Two models of freedom are set aside as inadequate. One, a model derived from Roman property law, he dismisses immediately because it focuses on property rather than relationships, 'hardly appropriate for the God who is love.'³³⁸ The other model of freedom is that of choice in which God can be seen to choose to love; but Moltmann disposes of this model also. Because God's nature is essentially truth and goodness 'God by

³³⁴ Berdyaev quoted by Moltmann, *Trinity*, 42.

³³⁵ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 42.

³³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974).

³³⁷ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 52.

³³⁸ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 54.

no means has the choice between mutually exclusive possibilities. For he cannot deny himself. So he does not have the choice between being love and not being love.’³³⁹ Instead Moltmann asserts a different model:

The other concept of freedom belongs to the language of community and fellowship. Here ‘free’ has the same etymological root as ‘friendly’; its cognates in meaning are ‘kind’, ‘to be well disposed’ ‘to give pleasure’. The German word for hospitable, *gastfrei* (literally ‘guest-free’) still shows this meaning even today. If we take this line of approach, freedom does not mean lordship; it means friendship. This freedom consists of the mutual and common participation in life, and a communication in which there is neither lordship nor servitude. In their reciprocal participation in life people become free beyond the limitation of their own individuality.³⁴⁰

The closing words of this quotation are particularly apt in the context of this thesis, as it is precisely the freedom ‘beyond the limitation of ... individuality’ that is being sought.

Moltmann goes on from this point to develop his understanding of the God of freedom and friendship. As such the triune God is always set against the monotheistic and monarchist understanding of God, whose freedom is akin to the models rejected by Moltmann. The monotheistic vision of God is of a God whose freedom is the freedom of disposal over the creation which is owned and ruled as an absolute monarch rules a kingdom. In his final chapter Moltmann sets out the practical consequences of this view of God for human liberty:

The notion of a divine monarchy in heaven and on earth ... generally provides the justification for earthly domination—religious, moral, patriarchal or political domination—and makes it a hierarchy, a ‘holy rule’. The idea of the almighty ruler of the universe everywhere requires abject servitude, because it points to complete dependency in all spheres of life.³⁴¹

This view of God feeds directly into the secularised freedom from socio-religious constraint, because many social constraints were legitimized through patterns of religious life and belief.

³³⁹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 54–55.

³⁴⁰ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 56.

³⁴¹ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 191–192.

Such liberty can be articulated as freedom from God.³⁴² That secularised freedom is antipathetic to contemporary Christians even as they struggle to engage with it conceptually. It contrasts with a theology of freedom like Moltmann's, a freedom issuing from God, which is in turn rooted in Biblical views of freedom where God can be seen as the agent of freedom, and the one who liberates.³⁴³

Moltmann's contrasting scheme proposes instead a pattern of political engagement for the church which is based on the Trinity.

We have said that it is not the monarchy of a ruler that corresponds to the triune God; it is the commonality of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation. The three divine Persons have everything in common, except for their personal characteristics. So the Trinity corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.³⁴⁴

Looking back to what he said earlier about freedom, these patterns will be based on God's liberty, a liberty of being in communication and communion with humanity, and on a corresponding liberation of men and women into communication and communion with one another. Moltmann sees this playing out in a tension between what it means to be an individual and what it means to be part of a community. 'The Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides the intellectual means whereby to harmonize personality and sociality in the community of men and women, without sacrificing the one to the other.'³⁴⁵ So, just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit each retain their personhood as worked out in the setting of their unity in perichoresis, so individual human beings each retain their individuality and personality in the setting of an interwoven community. This is precisely the context in which true freedom and liberation are worked out.

³⁴² Cf. Moltmann, *Trinity*, 218.

³⁴³ Cf. particularly the way the story of Exodus 1–15 has been interpreted.

³⁴⁴ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 198.

³⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Trinity*, 199.

The case for a liberty based on friendship extends the idea of freedom. Instead of ‘freedom from...’ something, it is about ‘freedom for...’ something. The language of ‘freedom from..’ suggests that there must be a foil against which freedom is offered: in the context of theology freedom from sin; in social contexts freedom from socio-religious constraint. Moltmann’s understanding of freedom opens up the possibility of exploring ‘freedom for...’ or ‘freedom with...’.³⁴⁶ Freedom, because it is part of what is intended for human beings, part of the *imago dei*, comes to be seen as part of our vocation. It is freedom for a purpose, and freedom for those in whom we are in relationship. So Moltmann argues for an understanding of human freedom while emphasising that freedom has to occur within a communal framework. Such liberty with a purpose involves different aspects of liberty, such as autonomy and self-development, being turned back from solipsistic or selfish ends. This is what the values of faith in the triune God, and in Christ as the truly free human being, offer.

B. The liberation of the oppressed

Through the course of modernity thinking about freedom has been shaped by a developing emphasis on outward, political and social, forms of freedom. Worked out in various ways through liberal and radical politics, through revolution, through emancipation and democratisation, the development of modernity brought with it a new understanding of the ways in which individuals could be free from the constraints of class and station in particular, but also increasingly from those of gender. With the continuing development of these ideas more recent years have seen the same principles extending to issues around disability, sexual orientation, and age.

³⁴⁶ Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1992), 120.

Various theologies of liberation, while evidence in themselves of this trend, are also a response to the continuing role religion has played in restricting freedom. So for the feminist theologian Ruether the central theological way of comprehending liberty means that

whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.³⁴⁷

Yet the church is implicated in such diminution and denial. Ruether also recalls Marxist teaching, that

all religion is an instrument the ruling class uses to justify its own power and to pacify the oppressed. This makes religion not the means of redemption but the means of enslavement.³⁴⁸

On this view religious structures are themselves involved as part of the structure of enslavement, rather than as part of the structure of liberation.

On the other hand the language of Christian theology is itself imbued with freedom. As Ruether writes of the opposition between ‘redemption’ and ‘enslavement’ the connection between traditional theological language and freedom is recognised. The analogy of the life of a slave and the life of a free citizen lies behind much of the New Testament’s language about what God intends for human beings. ‘Redemption’ as the means by which a slave could be freed, becomes a model for understanding what God does for people. But through Christian history this became more narrowly defined both in terms of freedom from the slavery of personal sin, and through an emphasis on personal, as opposed to social or political, redemption. So Gutiérrez:

In the past concern for social praxis in theological thought did not take sufficiently into account the political dimension. In Christian circles there was—and continues to be—

³⁴⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1983), 19.

³⁴⁸ Ruether, *Sexism*, 17.

difficulty in perceiving the originality and specificity of the political sphere. Stress was placed on private life and on the cultivation of private values.³⁴⁹

While Ruether notes the way the teaching of Jesus was spiritualised so that ‘it has no relevance to questions of social justice.’³⁵⁰

For liberation theologians God’s redemption has to be about liberation in the political sense: liberation from oppressive human power structures. Yet liberation also moves beyond the political. Gutiérrez summarizes his theological understanding of liberation initially in three approaches. After the first, which is ‘economic, social, and political’³⁵¹ he goes on to liberation as

an understanding of history. Man is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for his own destiny. ... In this perspective the unfolding of all of man’s dimensions is demanded—a man who makes himself throughout his life and throughout history. The gradual conquest of freedom leads to the creation of a new man and a qualitatively different society.³⁵²

Here liberation is seen as a process in which human beings engage, and which is about the extent to which our race as a whole attains its purpose. Gutiérrez writes in terms which seem to harmonise with appeals to autonomy and self-development, but here those two ideas belong more to the whole species than they do to individuals.

Furthermore, liberation is explicitly connected to the Biblical witness. It leads directly to Christ as one who

brings liberation. Christ the Savior liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man truly

³⁴⁹ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 48–49.

³⁵⁰ Ruether, *Sexism* 30.

³⁵¹ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 36.

³⁵² Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 36–37. Gutiérrez consistently uses exclusive gender language which I have not commented on in individual quotations.

free, that is to say, he enables man to live in communion with him; and this is the basis for all human brotherhood.³⁵³

This figure of Christ ‘inspire[s] the presence and action of man in history.’³⁵⁴ When he comes to set out his problem in greater detail he asks: ‘what relation is there between salvation and the historical process of the liberation of man?’ and states that ‘we must attempt to discern the interrelationship between the different meanings of the term *liberation*.’³⁵⁵

This last point brings us back to those two sides of the coin: on the one side sin, the human propensity for injustice and wrong; and on the other side redemption, the place of freedom in human life. Both are essential parts of our understanding of human life, and liberation theologies look to place both firmly in the social, communal, corporate sphere as much as in the personal. Ruether specifically connects the two, sin and freedom, when she suggests that in Christian theology freedom has been seen as the root of sin.

Sin implies a perversion or corruption of human nature, that is, of one’s good or authentic potential self. This capacity to sin is seen as based on the distinctively human characteristic of freedom.³⁵⁶

The relationship between liberty and sin can be read in both social and personal ways, but individualization engages with a personal reading. Liberation theologies on the other hand point explicitly towards the systemic and social. Here we return to the language of ‘freedom from...’. Freedom can be pursued as an individual end, in which ‘freedom from...’ takes precedence over ‘freedom for...’ However, because in any social setting power relationships intervene, this pursuit occurs at the expense of others. This play of power means that individual freedom is treated as a higher priority for some than others; it is treated as more of a priority for those who hold power than for those who do not. Under modernity,

³⁵³ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 37.

³⁵⁴ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 37.

³⁵⁵ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 45.

³⁵⁶ Ruether, *Sexism* 160.

therefore, liberative processes have in many places been applied in inverse proportion to the need for liberation. In order to move fully into a situation where ‘freedom for...’ comes into its own, where people are released into God’s intended freedom, the power structures must first be addressed. This is the point to which theologies of liberation bring their critique of the theological tradition. Exploring it we will find that sin and liberation are related in their social and structural nature. This is not to deny their personal nature, but the understanding of sin and freedom is not complete unless social and political analyses are central to our understanding.

So Gutiérrez writes of sin as ‘personal and social ... reality.’ This comes in a discussion which deals primarily with salvation, which is also seen to have both personal and social dimensions. He charts a shift towards a view of salvation as ‘not something other worldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test’ but as ‘the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves ... something which embraces all human reality.’³⁵⁷ He then turns to sin:

Therefore, sin is not only an impediment to salvation in the afterlife. Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of men with each other, it is a turning in of man on himself which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others. And because sin is a personal and social intrahistorical reality, a part of the daily events of human life, it is also, and above all, an obstacle to life’s reaching the fullness we call salvation.³⁵⁸

Gutiérrez goes on to develop this as a connection between two views of history, which in fact are ‘not two’ but ‘rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history.’³⁵⁹ Salvation history cannot be seen as something which happens to a person’s eternal soul, separate and distinct from what happens within the order

³⁵⁷ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 151.

³⁵⁸ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 152.

³⁵⁹ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 153. This is central to Moltmann’s use of Gutiérrez’s work, see Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 110 ff.

of creation. What happens in the course of economic and political and national history is itself the same as salvation history. ‘The history of salvation is the very heart of human history.’³⁶⁰ Gutiérrez goes on to argue for this view through a connection between the themes of creation, salvation and liberation. ‘Creation’ he argues, ‘is presented in the Bible, not as a stage previous to salvation, but as a part of the salvific process.’ He holds out deutero-Isaiah as an ‘excellent witness’ in this regard, quoting among other passages Isaiah 54:5: ‘For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.’³⁶¹

This same unity of creation and salvation are also bound in with the exodus from Egypt, the key Biblical paradigm of liberation. Again he quotes from deutero-Isaiah:

“Awake, awake, put on your strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as you did long ago, in days gone by. Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great abyss, and made the ocean depths a path for the ransomed?” (51:9–10) The words and images refer simultaneously to two events: creation and liberation from Egypt.³⁶²

Immediately Gutiérrez goes on to emphasise the political nature of the exodus; this divine act is one which calls for human response in concrete actions. The section heading calls this ‘*Self-Creation of Man*’; this is understood in the light of God’s primary action, but goes well beyond the exodus into the historic calling of Israel to be liberators themselves.

A gradual pedagogy of successes and failures would be necessary for the Jewish people to become aware of the roots of their oppression, to struggle against it, and to perceive the profound sense of the liberation to which they were called. The Creator of the world is the Creator and Liberator of Israel, to whom he entrusts the mission of establishing justice: “Thus speaks the Lord who is God, he who created the skies, ... who fashioned the earth. ... I the Lord, have called you with righteous purpose and taken you by the hand; I have formed you, and appointed you ... to open eyes that are blind, to bring captives out of prison, out of the dungeons where they lie in darkness” (Isa. 42:5–7).³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 153.

³⁶¹ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 154–155.

³⁶² Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 155.

³⁶³ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 156.

It is the call, issuing from God's covenant with the people, which resolves the 'dislocation introduced by sin.'³⁶⁴ God's creating, liberating and saving actions are worked out in the concrete political world. In the face of human sin, which is also part of the concrete political world, these actions draw God's people into the history which is both the history of 'profane' creation and the history of salvation.

His comments on the New Testament are brief at this point, but fit in closely with the case he has made with the focus on deuterio-Isaiah. Gutiérrez sees

the redemptive action of Christ ... conceived as a re-creation and presented in a context of creation ... [and] ... as a liberation from sin and from all its consequences: despoliation, injustice, hatred. ... Creation and salvation therefore have ... a Christological sense: all things have been created in Christ, all things have been saved in him.³⁶⁵

Gutiérrez exclusive language points to the need to engage with other liberation theologies. Ruether, through feminist theology, has an approach which bears comparison. The connection between the way salvation and sin are handled, with both having an essential social component, is present in both writers. So Ruether writes of redemption and sin:

We cannot split a spiritual, antisocial redemption from the human self as a social being, embedded in socio-political and ecological systems. We must recognize sin precisely in this splitting and deformation of our true relationships to creation and to our neighbour and find liberation in an authentic harmony with all that is incarnate in our social, historical being. Socioeconomic humanization is indeed the outward manifestation of redemption.³⁶⁶

Ruether analyses sin differently, but the corporate element is very clear in her writing. Sin is seen as the capacity for human groups to project and name the Other; although she approaches the subject with care, noting that

³⁶⁴ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 157.

³⁶⁵ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 158.

³⁶⁶ Ruether, *Sexism*, 215–216.

Some feminists feel that the good-evil dichotomy [which sin presupposes] is not one that feminists should accept. It is the underlying “error” of patriarchal thinking that the dialectics of human existence ... are turned into good-evil dualisms.³⁶⁷

And yet feminism claims ‘that a most basic expression of human community, the I-Thou relation as the relationship of men and women, has been distorted throughout all known history.’ As quoted at the beginning of this section, Ruether analyses sin as arising out of human freedom. This she understands as being about the capacity of human nature ‘to stand out against its environment and to imagine alternative images of the authentic and good self;’ but ‘the human also stands out against its environment ... by separating the human from the nonhuman and “our kind” of humans from others.’³⁶⁸ From this a confusion arises between the duality of the self-other and the good-evil; ‘The males of tribal groups particularly became centres of their own definition of the collective self against the other as female, as other tribes, and as nonhuman nature.’³⁶⁹ The ‘other’ is named as ‘evil’; what is different from self is dangerous and must be controlled or destroyed.

So Ruether sees sin as that ‘process of false naming and exploitation [which] constitutes the fundamental distortion and corruption of human relationality.’³⁷⁰ She explicitly emphasises the corporate rather than personal aspects of sin, setting her analysis as she does ‘very early in the history of human consciousness’ in the context of pre-modern tribal cultures.³⁷¹ So she writes of the need for ‘conversion, or *metanoia*, from group egoism and passivity to the self grounded in community.’ Here Ruether is using a structural understanding of sin in which ‘distorted relationships, translated into power tools of

³⁶⁷ Ruether, *Sexism*, 160.

³⁶⁸ Ruether, *Sexism*, 161.

³⁶⁹ Ruether, *Sexism*, 161–2.

³⁷⁰ Ruether, *Sexism*, 163.

³⁷¹ Ruether, *Sexism*, 161.

exploitation, have built up a powerful counterreality', the counterreality of a patriarchal hegemony.

This structural understanding of sin is a marker of liberationist perspectives.

Gutiérrez draws on the writing of Ruiz who writes of 'the "hamartiosphere," the sphere of sin: "a kind of parameter or structure which objectively conditions the progress of human history itself."' ³⁷² Elsewhere Faus refers to this as 'one of the most characteristic contributions of Latin American theology to the theme of sin.' Faus explores structural sin through the way in which individuals are

inserted into a world of mediations and institutions: family, marriage, profession, city, economy, culture, state, and so on. ... This is why the community and the structures governing life together in it can create, more easily than the individual, a series of situations making necessary (and therefore apparently reasonable) ways of behaving which favour individual greed, even though these harm the life and dignity of many others. ³⁷³

Faus goes on to place this understanding of sin against that of 'certain great theologians (Urs von Balthasar and J. Ratzinger, among others). ... They accuse this language of denaturing what is most profound in sin—that it is the fruit of a personal and responsible freedom.' He suggests that structural sin is comparable to original sin in not being 'the fruit of a free and responsible decision by each person;' and also that because 'sin ... means that which God rejects, ... denying the notion of structural sin is equivalent to saying that the present situation of the world (and in particular the third-world countries) is not a situation that arouses God's rejection and anger.' ³⁷⁴ This draws an explicit contrast between freedom and sin in an

³⁷² Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 175, quoting José María González Ruiz, *Pobreza evangélica y promoción humana*, 29.

³⁷³ José Ignacio González Faus, 'Sin', in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, eds. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (Orbis: Maryknoll NY, 1996), 197.

³⁷⁴ Faus, in Sobrino and Ellacuría, *Systematic Theology*, 199.

individual mode, and the kind of liberty from sinful structures which take shape communally and corporately. As Ruether writes:

A false individualizing of responsibility for sin is also a major way of trying to evade the reality and responsibility for the history of distorted humanity. White male ethics reduces sin and evil to the individual and then claims liberation theologies are “guilt-tripping” males. ... Sin always has a personal as well as a systemic side. But it is never just “individual”; there is no evil that is not relational. Sin exists precisely in the distortion of relationality, including relation to oneself. Although there are sins that are committed primarily as personal self-violation or violation of another individual—abuse of one’s body by intoxicants, rape, assault, or murder of another—even these very personal acts take place in a systemic, historical, and social context.³⁷⁵

The relationship between this understanding of sin and freedom and that explored with regard to individualization above is important. The way individualization is described, including negative and harmful effects, and backed up by this liberationist case for an essentially non-individual aspect to sin, means that the account of individualization can itself be seen as, in part, an analysis of a structural sin.

The ‘in part’ is important in two ways if we are to take a truly and deliberately ambivalent view of individualization. First, while an account of individualization can be partly an analysis of a structural *sin*, it also includes a more positive assessment of human freedom; second, while that account is a *social* account which considers the way individuals relate, it also describes a system which places a primacy on what the individual chooses and decides. In engaging with that account theology must be able to account for personal choices and personal sin as well as social and structural sin, and the relationship between them. The exploration of liberation theologies has so far made the point that an account of sin must include an essentially structural element, but that is not at the expense of the personal element. The two belong alongside each other, and what is needed, if possible, is a more integrated understanding. Freedom from sin is something which is experienced by individuals in

³⁷⁵ Ruether, *Sexism*, 181.

community, and by communities of individuals. Such an integrated understanding is offered through Segundo's understanding of grace and human nature.

Segundo structures his book *Grace and the Human Condition* around a verse from Ephesians which he cites as follows: 'With deep roots and firm foundations, may you be strong to grasp, with all God's people, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.'³⁷⁶ It is these four dimensions which Segundo uses, exploring grace as the name given to Christian existence (to paraphrase the title of the introductory chapter); or 'to locate the grace of God, to give concrete content to this transformation, and to find it in our own lives.'³⁷⁷ It is the first chapter, considering the dimension of 'Length' which deals most appositely with the argument here.

In this chapter Segundo sets the task of 'go[ing] back far enough in our lives, through faith, to understand and appreciate the human condition which grace encounters and transforms.'³⁷⁸ Length is about trying to understand the 'before' of Christian existence. What were we like before grace came along? This 'before' is understood theologically rather than temporally; this is not a case of

trying to make a radical distinction between two different points in time. ... *Before* is simply a way of saying that to this basic element there is added that which comes from God's gift.³⁷⁹

Much of Segundo's case in this chapter is set on a careful reading of Romans 7:14–25. Here he sums up Paul's case; first we are free, but the world works as though we are not:

³⁷⁶ Juan Luis Segundo S.J., in collaboration with the staff of the Peter Faber Centre in Montevideo, Uruguay, *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity: Volume Two: Grace and the Human Condition*, translated by John Drury (Orbis: Maryknoll NY, 1973), v.

³⁷⁷ Segundo, *Grace*, 14.

³⁷⁸ Segundo, *Grace*, 15.

³⁷⁹ Segundo, *Grace*, 16.

While it is certain that there exists in every human being a personal principle of liberty, a desire and an exigency to determine for oneself what one aspires to be rather than to be handed this readymade, it is no less certain that the natural order of the universe seems to be unaware of this principle of liberty and treats man as just another cog in the mechanism.

What is even worse, however, is the fact that not only the things around him but man himself belongs to this mechanism. ...

Thus it is not strange to find that when man aspires to carry out the good he has planned, his instruments—subject to the law of nature rather than to his own law, betray him; and the end result does not correspond with his desire (at least not with his *innermost* desire).³⁸⁰

While this sounds as though it is being played out on a personal level, what becomes clear later is that these ‘instruments’ are not limited to the personal—the mind, heart and physical body—but include the social. First he states that ‘it would be an error to conceive these dehumanizing determinisms solely in psychological and individual terms,’ he then continues by affirming ‘the fact that the individual can be liberated only in terms of his total human condition: i.e. within his *social context*.’³⁸¹ Furthermore, ‘The social sphere ... confronts man with a new source of determinisms. And these determinisms are all the more dangerous in that they are normally lived inadvertently.’³⁸² These determinisms, also described as ‘norms, values, attitudes, and behavior patterns,’ are both ‘the *way* in which the society’s members conceive and experience their relationships with others’ and ‘a *justification* of these relationships which are imposed and perpetuated by existing structures. In other words: the established moral code takes on the characteristics of an ideology justifying the situation.’³⁸³

Segundo continues his main case: ‘All of us human beings possess an incipient liberty that seeks fulfillment.’ This is the freedom which is an essential part of our human

³⁸⁰ Segundo, *Grace*, 23.

³⁸¹ Segundo, *Grace*, 37.

³⁸² Segundo, *Grace*, 38.

³⁸³ Segundo, *Grace*, 38.

nature. ‘But in the power of nature that invades us and dwells within us ...’ (and we now see that this power of nature includes the social context; individualization is part of the power under which we live) ‘our incipient liberty encounters something which belongs to us and conditions all our executions even though it is indeed alien to the innermost core of our own ego.’³⁸⁴ Using Rahner’s language of what is ‘personal’ Segundo explores this as what is essentially personal, our ‘incipient liberty’, being overcome by what is impersonal, the power of nature, in instinct, emotion, and social context. But this is the path which is easier to follow. ‘The principle of minimum effort’ means it is far easier to be swept along by social forces, and by the straightforward insistence of what we are as physical beings, than to take a stand on our liberty and to reflectively decide for ourselves on how we will live and what we will do.

So the ‘before’ of the human condition is one which includes everything about ourselves and about our social context. It is precisely this human condition, including for late-modern Westerners the conditions of individualization, which constitute the arena within which freedom seeks to be lived out. This is what it means to live under individualization. Within this understanding Segundo suggests that ‘grace heals my liberty.’³⁸⁵ While living under a system which does not recognise it, grace is the gift which enables a free life, which calls out the personal within us against the impersonal within which we find ourselves. ‘Grace, the divine gift, heals our congenital tendency toward sin which, at its roots, is intertwined with impersonality, ... the impersonality ... which arises from the decision of our own egotism.’³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Segundo, *Grace*, 23.

³⁸⁵ Segundo, *Grace*, 21.

³⁸⁶ Segundo, *Grace*, 58.

The two essential facts concerning human liberty—that we are created to be free by the free action of God; and that we are not free and need liberation—stand at the heart of the Gospel. Imprisoned by sin, we need liberation. Imprisoned by the action of others, the poor and oppressed of the world stand in need of liberation. Liberty is therefore a fundamental part of our experience as creatures. As we are made in the image of God, a part of that image is one of liberty; but a liberty exercised within a given framework and against strong aspects of our human condition. It needs to be seen both as ‘liberty for...’ and ‘liberty from...’; a liberty for the vocation of humanness, and a liberty from sinful egoism. It also involves importantly a liberty for others, a liberty in relationship, and a communal liberty found together. It is therefore ‘liberty from...’, understood as: (a) a liberative process in which we are freed from that part of our human nature which is described as sinful, that part which is in some sense prior to God’s grace; (b) a political, social and communal process which seeks to work towards the liberty of the oppressed, both as a process of conscientisation and self-empowerment of the oppressed, and as a process of conversion and repentant action by the privileged. This view of liberty contrasts sharply with that of the individualized world. While it is an individual liberty, as such it can never be complete in itself. It belongs alongside the liberty of others, and can only be fully understood in that way. There is no liberation without a universal liberation, and particularly a liberation of those whose freedom is curtailed by the social and political structures of the world.

Conclusion

The increasing individual emphasis of modernity results in an individualization which brings with it both liberties and losses, which is received with ambivalence, and ambivalence becomes a hallmark of late modernity. Because individualization is structural, this reveals ambivalence as part of the structure of individualized society, as well as involving structural

sin. The flow of ambivalence has also been traced downstream towards the level of the neighbourhood. All this helps to give context to the ambivalence which was experienced by the site team. What the site team observed in our experience of neighbourhood has its roots in the way we live and in the development of individualization.

The challenge to the neighbourhood paradigm arises from this structural and ambivalence-inducing phenomenon. Understanding these dynamics of individualization and the part that ambivalence plays within them is important for understanding late modern neighbourhoods, and therefore the contexts of neighbourhood churches. All this raises questions about ambivalence itself. What can be made of such divided experience? If this is a consequence of individualization, and of the structure of society in late modernity, how does it play out? The next chapter will explore further the nature of ambivalence itself.

CHAPTER 6

AMBIVALENCE

*This is the Spirit of the One who created the world and guides its history
by bearing and enduring its contradictions.*

Jürgen Moltmann.³⁸⁷

The last three chapters have collected together information and reflection at three different levels. The most local level came from the auto-ethnography of chapter 3, which worked from the experience of a small group of people looking to work out their faith in the context of a post-industrial village in County Durham including my own personal experience. Chapters 3 and 4 looked at the concept of neighbourhood more generally, and different views about the significance of neighbourhood within contemporary British society. Chapter 5 took a step back to try to understand some of the broader sociological themes which might aid our understanding of what is happening in neighbourhoods; this was the least specific of the three chapters. To help the engagement with theology and ministerial practice these threads need to

³⁸⁷ Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 103.

be woven together more closely. One theme has emerged from these chapters which can give some overall shape to our understanding of neighbourhood engagement: the theme of ambivalence.

This theme emerged in the auto-ethnography through a lack of confidence. While local Christians spoke of wanting to engage with their neighbourhood, the task was problematic; chapter 3 offered an account of the difficulties which were experienced. The problems related to a lack of understanding of the changing nature of society at the local level, a desire to look back to old patterns and reproduce them, and a lack of acknowledgment of the dispersed nature of their own lives. Church members wanted to engage with their neighbourhood, but many kinds of other calls on their time and energy took them away from it. The view of church life as part of a local community was accepted in an unreflective way, and this was heightened by a residual connection between a small but significant number of local people who turned to the church for occasional offices.

The lack of confidence which was experienced by Christians in the local setting was caused by the mismatch between different experiences of their village: as a local community in which the church played a significant role; as a place where they lived, but from which their lives went out in many different directions. Between these experiences there were significant networks of relationships, but an accompanying awareness that many living in the village were outside those relationships, and that networks did not tend to interrelate well; fragmentation was a characteristic of local experience. At the same time attitudes to faith prevalent in our culture brought belief into question, encouraging a view of faith as a personal and private issue, rather than as something relating to public life. This network of experiences, which sit uncomfortably with each other, is an example of the ambivalent feelings with which people have to live.

Chapters 3 and 4 also demonstrated that such ambivalence is not confined to church goers. The exploration of neighbourhood revealed ambivalence as a part of the experience of neighbourhood. While some might feel firmly rooted in one place, many have a multitude of connections, what can be described as networked lives. This leads not to a complete devaluing of the neighbourhood where one lives or works but to a general lowering of the priority which any one place calls out from any one person. The variety of responses to the neighbourhood which were described at that point indicated that in any given place there is unlikely to be much commonality of view as to what the neighbourhood means to its inhabitants and stake-holders.

So why has this kind of pattern developed? Why is there evidence of such ambivalence? Chapter 5 sought to provide a picture from the writing of three contemporary sociologists of how social relationships work. Following the theme of individualization, a picture emerged of lives shaped by ambivalence in all kinds of ways. Central to this was the way in which the Enlightenment idea of personal freedom was itself affected by ambivalence: freedom was not experienced in a wholly positive frame, but in fact became in various ways something of a burden, and therefore was experienced with ambivalence.

This chapter focuses more specifically on ambivalence itself. There will be two parts of this exploration. First, the above analysis seems to suggest that ambivalence is a particular feature of late-modern society. A return to the work of Bauman and his book *Modernity and Ambivalence* will provide a way of putting this into the context of current sociology; ambivalence will emerge as an unavoidable part of life. Second, this idea of ambivalence will need to be widened, to describe how it touches our lives through feelings, culture, and theology.

6.1 Zygmunt Bauman on Ambivalence

Bauman locates ambivalence at the heart of a meta-narrative. Building on the work of Horkheimer and Adorno³⁸⁸ he works around a grand narrative of modernity and post-modernity.³⁸⁹ It begins with the desire to do away with ambivalence through the establishment of an hegemony of reason. The thinking of the Enlightenment demanded that reason alone be the basis of government and the management of society. Bauman points to the roots of what was seen as good government in philosophy:

Throughout the modern era, the legislative reason of philosophers chimed well with the all-too-material practices of the states. The modern state has been born of a crusading, missionary, proselytizing force, bent on subjugating the dominated populations to a thorough once-over in order to transform them into an orderly society.³⁹⁰

Bauman traces this connection primarily through the work of Immanuel Kant, particularly in *Critique of Pure Reason* (while at one point noting that Kant is following an ancient tradition which originates ‘at least with Plato’³⁹¹), and demonstrates the elitism of Kant’s ideas which predicated ‘the philosopher’s unchallenged prerogative to decide between true and false, good and evil, right and wrong; and thus his licence to judge and authority to enforce obedience to the judgement.’³⁹² The aim was to create order: ‘Modern rulers and modern philosophers were first and foremost *legislators*; they found chaos, and set out to tame it and replace it with order.’³⁹³

To see something of the nature of this hegemony, and the power with which it was wielded Bauman turns to the Holocaust. In doing so he provides a connection between the

³⁸⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 2000); Bauman refers to his work as ‘firmly rooted’ in their propositions about the Enlightenment; Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 17.

³⁸⁹ While most of this thesis uses ‘late modernity’ as the preferred term, in line with Bauman’s usage in his book this section will use ‘post-modernity’.

³⁹⁰ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 20.

³⁹¹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 21.

³⁹² Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 22.

³⁹³ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 24.

modern ways of thinking to which the Enlightenment led and political action which does great harm; he also demonstrates the hostility with which ambivalence came to be viewed in patterns of philosophical and scientific thought, and also connects philosophical and social thinking more firmly. While Horkheimer and Adorno had made some connections between the Enlightenment and the Holocaust, Bauman does so in a far more direct fashion. Following the legislative desire for order, he finds it given expression through the metaphor of gardening in which some things are designated ‘weeds’ which must be thrown out, while other ‘plants’ are placed in orderly rows. He demonstrates the presence of such eugenic thinking as a means of social engineering throughout both Western and communist worlds, found among scientists and technologists in particular.

Amongst those he quotes he includes Jewish scientists,³⁹⁴ in order to show that this was a pattern of thinking rooted in modernity as a whole, and not simply a facet of a particular historical nation-state which had in some way gone wrong. He reaches two conclusions.

First, that genocide is

not an uncontrolled outburst of passions, and hardly even a purposeless irrational act. It is, on the contrary, an exercise in rational social engineering, in bringing about, by artificial means, that ambivalence-free homogeneity that messy and opaque social reality failed to produce.³⁹⁵

Second, that

all visions of artificial order are by necessity ... inherently asymmetrical and thereby dichotomizing. They split the world into a group for whom the ideal order is to be erected, and another which enters the picture and the strategy only as a resistance to be overcome—the unfitting, the uncontrollable, the incongruous and the ambivalent. This Other, born of the ‘operation of order and harmony’, the left-over of classificatory endeavour, is cast on the other side of that *universe of obligation* which binds the insiders of the group and recognizes their right to be treated as carriers of moral rights.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ For example: Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 29.

³⁹⁵ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 38.

³⁹⁶ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 38.

This is more than a linguistic and philosophical issue. The process of separation is also a social construct, founded on aspects of a human desire to ensure that each object encountered can be assigned its proper place. It is the philosophical project which then turns that basic social construction into hegemony. Ambivalence is therefore rooted in social experience, and to articulate this more fully Bauman explores a sociological understanding of the stranger as a way of understanding what (and particularly who) is seen as ambivalent. He begins with the stranger as one of Derrida's 'undecidables': categories which cannot be fitted into recognisable classes, and which 'poison the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos.'³⁹⁷

Later he continues:

The stranger is ... the bane of modernity. He may well serve as the archetypal example of Sartre's *le visquex* or Mary Douglas's *the slimy*—an entity ineradicably *ambivalent*, sitting astride an embattled barricade (or, rather, a substance spilled over the top of it so that it makes it slippery both ways), blurring a boundary line vital to the construction of a particular social order or a particular life-world.³⁹⁸

Bauman notes that social groups have long had ways of regulating such 'boundary line' people. He traces this through 'pre-modern, small-scale communities' through to the nation state of modernity. In the former, groups were 'marked by *dense sociability*' of both friendship and enmity. 'The community effectively defended its dense sociability by promptly reclassifying the few strangers coming on occasion into its orbit as *either friends or enemies*.'³⁹⁹ Of the nation state Bauman claims that its rule over a territory means that they must 'enforce the friendship where it does not come about by itself', a process which requires 'indoctrination and force.' It does this by redefining '*friends as natives*; it commands to

³⁹⁷ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 56.

³⁹⁸ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 61.

³⁹⁹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 61–62.

extend the rights ascribed “to friends only” to all—the familiar as much as the unfamiliar—residents of the ruled territory.’⁴⁰⁰ In this Bauman identifies the source of nationalism:

National states promote ‘nativism’ and construe its subjects as ‘natives’. They laud and enforce the ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural *homogeneity*. They are engaged in incessant propaganda of *shared* attitudes. They construct *joint* historical memories and do their best to discredit or suppress such stubborn memories as cannot be squeezed into shared tradition—now redefined ... as ‘our common heritage’. They preach the sense of *common* mission, *common* fate, *common* destiny. They breed, or at least legitimize and give tacit support to, animosity towards everyone standing outside the holy union. In other words, national states promote *uniformity*.⁴⁰¹

Such a state then has little difficulty in dealing with the stranger in different ways, first through expulsion, then exoticisation, and finally and most effectively through stigmatisation. This then leads to the stranger’s desire to assimilate, to fit in with the state’s defined homogeneous community. Through the chapters which follow Bauman follows the story of European Jews, and particularly intellectual Jews of Western Europe, as a case study in attempted assimilation and its general failure.

This broad meta-narrative focuses up to this point on ambivalence as the target of modernity’s drive to impose reasonable order on the world, but if this reasonable order is so strong, and is imposed by all who govern, why is this not the whole story? Why are ambivalence, uncertainty and all that is different from modernity’s vision not simply cleared away? Why is it now found as such a strong feature of post-modern life? The reason for this lies in the nature of this modern project itself, which contains the seeds of its own failure.⁴⁰² ‘As a form of life,’ Bauman writes, ‘modernity makes itself possible through setting itself an impossible task.’⁴⁰³ This task, the task of order and knowledge, one which involves answering every question, is impossible because the more problems are solved, the more

⁴⁰⁰ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 63–64.

⁴⁰¹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 64.

⁴⁰² Bauman refers to the modern ‘project’ in several places, language which itself lends weight to the suggestion that this is an all embracing grand narrative; Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 15 and 271.

⁴⁰³ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 10.

questions are posed. 'The impossible task is set by the *foci imaginarii* of absolute truth, pure art, humanity as such, order, certainty, harmony, the end of history. Like all horizons,' he concludes, 'they can never be reached.'⁴⁰⁴

This story of the Enlightenment hegemony of reason also gives technology pride of place, but here too Bauman points to the seeds of its own failure. Later he will point to the part technology played in the Holocaust, and in the justification of social engineering; but in the introduction he comments on the atomisation and fragmentation of the world. This is something on which 'modernity prides itself. ... Fragmentation is the prime source of its strength. The world that falls apart into a plethora of problems is a manageable world.' Thus 'the fragmentation turns the problem-solving into Sisyphean labour and incapacitates it as a tool of order-making.'⁴⁰⁵ Fragmentation is a process in which 'localities and functions' are given autonomy which is

a fiction made plausible by decrees and statute books. This is an autonomy of a river or an eddy of a hurricane. ... It is the powers that are fragmented; the world, stubbornly, is not. People stay multifunctional, words polysemic. Or, rather, people turn multifunctional because of the fragmentation of functions; words turn polysemic because of the fragmentation of meanings.⁴⁰⁶

So he sets the stage for the second part of the grand-narrative, in which ambivalence takes centre stage. It is not that Bauman portrays ambivalence as something good, to be sought after; but rather it is inevitable, and therefore there is a need to 'consider what living at peace with ambivalence may look like.'⁴⁰⁷ The consequences for contemporary life are set out as he writes of the stranger. Because modernity cannot be maintained the problem of the stranger has to move into a new phase. The stranger, after all, will not go

⁴⁰⁴ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 10.

⁴⁰⁵ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 12–13.

⁴⁰⁶ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 13.

⁴⁰⁷ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 15.

away. Globalisation will see to that; but more significantly, completely new realities are stimulated in which the different must be dealt with. The end game for the struggle between modern state and ambivalent stranger comes as fragmentation leads to a point where everyone is a stranger in the various parts of their lives:

the mode of 'being a stranger' is experienced, to a varying degree, by all and every member of contemporary society with its extreme division of labour and separation of functionally separated spheres. ... Having become a *universal* human condition ... it does not any more generate universality as dynamite about to explode the smug quotidianity of parochial life. Strangerhood is no more an insight into the other side of existence, a challenge to the here and now, a vantage point of utopia. It is itself turned into quotidianity.⁴⁰⁸

Quoting Niklas Luhmann he comments that

the individual is a "displaced person" by definition: it is the very fact that he cannot be fully subsumed under any of the numerous functional subsystems which only in their combination constitute the fullness of his life process ... that makes him an individual. ... The result is that he is 'uprooted' from each and not 'at home' in any. One may say that he is the *universal stranger*. ... Indeed, as Luhmann would express it, for the contemporary individual the ego becomes the seat and the focal point of all inner experience, while environment, split into fragments with little lateral connection, loses most of its contours, and much of its meaning-defining authority.⁴⁰⁹

Bauman is clear that ambivalence is not going to go away.

What the inherently polysemic and controversial idea of postmodernity most often refers to (even if only tacitly) is first and foremost an acceptance of ineradicable plurality of the world; plurality which is not a temporary station on the road to the not-yet attained perfection ... a station sooner or later to be left behind—but the constitutive quality of existence.⁴¹⁰

So we are to learn to live with this strangerhood, with the constant presence of ambivalence, and with the plurality of our world; they are 'the constitutive quality of existence.' In the few pages which complete this chapter Bauman offers two very different takes on what this living with ambivalence might mean. One of the endings to his grand narrative is positive, the other

⁴⁰⁸ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 94–95.

⁴⁰⁹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 95.

⁴¹⁰ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 98.

utterly pessimistic. Yet the balance seems to weigh very much to the pessimistic side. First he writes: 'Liberty, equality, brotherhood was the war-cry of modernity. *Liberty, diversity, tolerance* is the armistice formula of postmodernity. And with tolerance reforged into *solidarity* ... armistice may even turn into peace.'⁴¹¹ Then, having commented on the 'hope' of this position he concludes the chapter by writing:

The formidable danger of postmodernity is that ... it may resuscitate defunct (or merely hibernating?) ambitions of the adolescent modernity and feed into its own contemporaries desire to re-live them. History, Marx said, always occurs twice. First as a tragedy, later as a farce. But then, as in so many of his predictions, Marx could have erred as to the order in which the genres succeed each other.⁴¹²

In presenting this account of Bauman's as part of a grand narrative I am suggesting that he writes, at least in part and at this point, from within the modernist tradition. This could be pressed further: what he writes could be seen as a continuation of the very hegemony for which he accounts. Bauman seems to be saying: *this* is the way it is. His account is one which seeks to describe the relationship between ambivalence and modernity in a fairly complete way. The grand narrative it sets out is one in which the project of modernity seeks to clarify all things, but is inevitably bound to fail; it offers an understanding of ambivalence as inevitable and an essential part of life. It views the outcome of post-modernity pessimistically, with a rather thin strand of hope. Can we be more positive?

6.2 Living Hopefully with Ambivalence

Ambivalence can be widened as a concept, and seen to relate to a series of other ideas which play a similar role in late modernity. Perhaps Bauman is thinking of this when he lists a number of terms which connect with ambivalence: 'The tropes of "the other of order" are: undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity,

⁴¹¹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 98.

⁴¹² Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 101.

confusion, undecidability, ambivalence.’⁴¹³ However, partly because of the context, this is a very negative list. This sense that the world is travelling towards potential tragedy seems to be at odds with Bauman’s suggestion that we should find ways of ‘living at peace with ambivalence.’ If we are to ‘live at peace with ambivalence’ we need to discover other more positive starting points for engaging with the ambivalent around us.

This widening of ambivalence also addresses another aspect of Bauman’s argument. The way he builds his case combines strong elements of modernity with aspects of late-modern understandings. The elements of modernity include an overarching view of how the world is, and a presentation of what is universally true (at least for western liberal democracies), which form a grand narrative which he relates, or at least relies upon. The late-modern aspects bring in a readiness to admit to uncertainty, an acceptance of contradiction, paradox and ambivalence. Even though his narrative is critical of modernity, taken as a whole the modernist approach seems to win out (and this lends a suggestion of ambivalence as a single phenomenon to his account). Yet in the detail of his argument Bauman clearly recognises the plural world to which ambivalence contributes; in fact, plurality is itself one of the many plural aspects of ambivalence. Thinking of ambivalence in the plural, referring to ‘ambivalences’, might be a helpful way of thinking.

So to live at peace with ambivalence means recognising Bauman’s claim that it is an inevitable part of life, and at the same time that it will exhibit itself in many ways and will be interpreted and contribute to interpretation differently in diverse contexts. Its very pervasiveness will mean that it is present in some form or another in every human context; and it will not exhibit the same features. A late-modern understanding of ambivalence will

⁴¹³ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 7.

recognise that it cannot be an over-arching concept which makes the same sense in every place, but that it provides part of a conceptual framework which helps in grasping what is going on in various late-modern social settings. It is an idea which describes certain shapes and forms which human experience can take.

One way in which our perception of ambivalence can be widened is particularly significant at this point. There are aspects of ambivalence which are negative in their impact. In such cases ambivalent views need to be challenged, and we cannot live at peace with them. While Bauman in his narrative sees ambivalence primarily as the enemy of unitary reason, with modernity seeking to obliterate it, contrast this with the views of post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha. For Bhabha ambivalence is not always something which modernism seeks to wipe out, but can also be a tool of colonialism: ‘the function of ambivalence [is] one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power.’⁴¹⁴ He goes on to write of the possibility of understanding ‘the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that “otherness” which is at once an object of desire and derision.’⁴¹⁵ It is not that Bhabha would necessarily dispute Bauman’s take on ambivalence. Indeed, a little later he comments on the way in which writers trying to understand other cultures or cultural texts, even when they do so while trying to ‘combat “ethnocentricism”’, are also wielding power. They, to some extent, objectify the difference and otherness of which they are writing. ‘There is in such readings,’ writes Bhabha, ‘a will to power and knowledge.’⁴¹⁶ So what emerges here is the possibility of delineating the role of ambivalence in two distinct ways, which might in some circumstances seem to work against each other. On the one hand ambivalence is found resurgent, as a unitary vision of knowledge and truth (used for

⁴¹⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 66.

⁴¹⁵ Bhabha, *Location*, 67.

⁴¹⁶ Bhabha, *Location*, 70.

oppression in modernity) breaks down, but at the same time ambivalence is used as a continuing tool on the borders between cultures, to control and define what is different and other.

Bhabha's writing also takes us into the area of hybridity, which is one of the key terms he uses, and which he sees as the main source of ambivalence.⁴¹⁷ Some critics of Bhabha in this regard think he does not go far enough in maintaining these different aspects of ambivalence or hybridity. Acheraïou, for example, argues that the ambivalence of hybridity has been extensively used as a tool of imperial power, using examples such as Alexander the Great and Napoleon, 'two of the greatest imperial conquerors in history.' Consequently he argues that 'there is good reason to suspect ... that the fervour surrounding the contemporary discourse of hybridity might equally be sustained by dubious pragmatic, cultural, political, and ideological goals that are just as hegemonic.'⁴¹⁸ He also suggests that the 'hybridity discourse' of such as Bhabha has been 'tamed and accommodated ... by global neo-colonial structures of power and domination.'⁴¹⁹ Peter Burke also writes of the unsettling side of hybridity, and notes the need to separate the social conflicts which arise when different cultures come together, from 'the mixture, interpenetration or hybridization of cultures. African music, for example, travels the world with less difficulty than Africans.'⁴²⁰

With this in mind, rather than refer to 'living at peace with ambivalence,' I would place the theological theme of hope in the place of peace. Placing hope into the argument at this point is a way of both responding to Bauman's pessimism, with hope being given priority

⁴¹⁷ Hybridity is widely written about as a literary, cultural, and political theme in texts such as: Amar Acheraïou, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Avtar Brah and Annie E. Coombs (eds), *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000); Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge, Polity, 2009); Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁴¹⁸ Acheraïou, *Questioning Hybridity*, 112.

⁴¹⁹ Acharaïou, *Questioning Hybridity*, 103.

⁴²⁰ Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 7.

over pessimism, and a recognition that there are ambivalent expressions with which we do not wish to live at peace, because they bring conflict, prejudice, or are the tools of oppressive power. Hope does not preclude the possibility of challenging these. Furthermore living hopefully with ambivalence does not mean placing any hope in ambivalence itself; hope is placed in God in the face of a world which often makes it very hard to live hopefully.

With this in mind, there are ways to think about how ambivalence might be widened and its plurality recognised, which will also enable a more hopeful stance to be taken in the ambivalent world. There are three areas to explore: affective ambivalences, cultural and political ambivalences, and theological responses to ambivalence. Besides broadening the scope of ambivalence, this will also help to categorise some of the many references to ambivalence in earlier chapters. It also provides a point of contact with one of the possible new paradigms introduced in the final section of chapter 4: that of hybrid church introduced by Christopher Baker. Because hybridity can itself be seen as an aspect of ambivalence, a hybrid church would also be a church which is equipped to engage with the ambivalence of the late modern world. This will emerge particularly in the section on cultural and political ambivalence below.

A. Affective ambivalences

The first widening involves greater recognition that beyond a philosophical and linguistic approach to ambivalence there is also a psychological and affective approach. Bauman notes this himself through his writing. In the opening definition which he offers he writes:

Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that

language is meant to perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort we feel.⁴²¹

Here it is clear that Bauman's principle approach to ambivalence is philosophical and linguistic. At the same time he notes that a symptom of 'disorder' is 'acute discomfort.' How his work spells out some of the forms of philosophical ambivalence has already been described above. The patterns of psychological and affective ambivalence are also touched on, particularly in chapter 6 of his book entitled 'The Privatization of Ambivalence.'⁴²² However, the pervasiveness of these affective ambivalences means that such patterns can be referred to more straight-forwardly. While Bauman seems to acknowledge ambivalent feelings, any suggestion that they should be seen as secondary to philosophical ambivalence needs to be challenged. What might be called people's everyday epistemology is more likely to begin with such experiences and be worked out from them, rather than to be rooted in any formal philosophy. Having said this, the reflexive relationship between popular attitudes and those of academic disciplines cannot be denied, so long as we recognise that these two forms of ambivalence sit alongside each other and influence each other.⁴²³

In considering how affective ambivalence is experienced we might start by noticing that our reaction to it may itself be ambivalent. At the affective level ambivalence is the experience of mixed feelings; a level of uncertainty about what our response should be. On the one hand it unsettles: how should we respond to something which both provokes and pleases, in which we find both bitter and sweet? This is not a recipe for emotional comfort. On the other hand it is an experience which accompanies a range of happenings in life. In the mobile lives of late-modernity making a new beginning in a different place is a common

⁴²¹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 1.

⁴²² Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 197–230.

⁴²³ Giddens, *Self-Identity*, 22.

experience. The bitter-sweet experience of both saying good-bye to old things while being excited and stimulated by the new is one which many would recognise. In fact such ambivalence has become part of our experience of growing up and maturing.

In experiences of loss too, such affective ambivalence can be clearly illustrated. While some people seem sure of what they think and feel about euthanasia, others are left unsure, or struggling. For every person who has made the journey to Switzerland to end their own life, there have been thousands of others working their way through terminal illness who—because of religious convictions or religious guilt, because of emotional relationships or ties, because of social expectations or constraints, or because of financial and other practical limitations—have not gone. Some will have struggled with a decision, for others it was a never a decision they would have considered; for others it may have simply been a possibility they were aware of but unable to entertain. Sometimes such choices to end life are placed in the hands of relatives, when medical intervention to prolong the life of someone no longer conscious is left to them. Medical advice can be offered, but in the end the sharp decisions which have to be made are filled with ambivalence. These are illustrative of choices which once were made for people. Individualization, along with technological advance, has created the possibility of making such choices.

It is not just in choices alone that ambivalence makes itself felt; it can simply be part of the accompanying experience of life. After a death grief itself can be marked by ambivalence, when a parent or partner has been both a burden as well as a companion; when the one who dies has suffered from prolonged mental illness, or where a relationship has been fractured by abuse. There is not necessarily any choice to make in such circumstances, but the mixed feelings are no less keenly felt.

While there are undesirable aspects to such situations (we really do not want to be caught not knowing how to feel and respond to things) that is not surprising, as these illustrations are of difficult places in which people find themselves. Yet at the same time, where choice is involved, the discourse in society is that on the whole people want to make their choices. People want to be informed. They do not want a medical profession which places itself above lay people on a 'doctor knows best' basis. The case of grief is more complex. Old patterns of acknowledged grieving behaviour, which gave people a pattern to follow and expectations which were clear, have been replaced by an expectation that grief will be kept private and hidden. The ambivalence is faced alone, or perhaps in a therapeutic environment where counselling is offered as a solution to dealing with difficult feelings. While it is less clear, in this case, it still seems that a privatised form of grief is the option towards which people move, a way of dealing with grief which acknowledges and perhaps deepens ambivalence.

Further examples of the presence of affective forms of ambivalence have been noted above in the chapter on neighbourhood, and in that on individualization: mixed feelings about the places where we live, about the way freedom is experienced, and about the making of choices. This is sufficient to establish the importance of this range of ambivalences which shape our affective lives. Ambivalence thus placed becomes a part of the context of pastoral encounter.

B. Cultural and political ambivalences

Finding ways of negotiating the ambivalences of late-modernity means dealing with binary oppositions used as a source of power under modernity, which have ambivalence at their heart. The work of Bhabha, already mentioned above, and that of Edward Said before him,

provides a foundation from which to build. These two writers also form a link with the work of Christopher Baker, who builds his understanding of hybrid church partly on the foundation of these two writers.

In his seminal work Said works on the idea of one particular binary opposition which has shaped global thought and politics. He catalogues the way West dominated East through ‘orientalism’.⁴²⁴ The two terms are an unequal pairing, which themselves delineate the power relationship between the two. The Orient is described by (or defined by) a western academic elite and through the West’s political power structures. Said’s work demonstrates how this description and definition developed through the course of history, forming a powerful cultural hegemony. For Said this hegemony is importantly a hegemony of reason, formed and used specifically by intellectuals and ‘specialists’ in the Orient. Said describes the powerful and hegemonic aspects of this socially and politically constructed discipline of Orientalism ‘as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient’⁴²⁵ through which ‘Orientalism overrode the Orient.’⁴²⁶

This was done through the construction of a language which describes an ‘imaginative geography.’ Of this language he writes:

We need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do, as Dante tried to do in the *Inferno*, is at one and the same time to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are *for* Europe and only for Europe. Hence the vacillation between the familiar and the alien.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Said, *Orientalism*.

⁴²⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 95

⁴²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 96.

⁴²⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 71–72.

This vacillation is an expression of that ambivalence which Bhabha also noted, which is a tool of colonial power.⁴²⁸

Said's work can be taken as an indication of broader patterns of thinking and expression. This emerges most clearly in his reflections written as an afterword sixteen years after initial publication. The binary opposition between West and East is something about which he is 'radically sceptical', but he generalises this point in saying that he is 'radically sceptical about *all* categorical designations such as Orient and Occident.'⁴²⁹ While

no one finds it easy to live uncomplainingly and fearlessly with the thesis that human reality is constantly being made and unmade, and that anything like a stable essence is constantly under threat ... My objection to what I have called Orientalism is not that it is just the antiquarian study of Oriental languages, societies, and peoples, but that as a system of thought it approaches a heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex human reality from an uncritically essentialist standpoint.⁴³⁰

So cultures, peoples, and places are to be explored in their particular complexity, as they stand in themselves, and not by recourse to such essentialist thinking. Said affirms the way in which academic discourse has developed since 1978, and the book thus emerges as a move towards multiculturalism.⁴³¹

This widening of ambivalence finds new spaces and uncertainties opening up in our experience of other peoples and cultures, and while globalisation provides us with ever increasing opportunities to encounter such, it is also true of all kinds of differences which affect our view of the contexts in which we live. It is true of those differences which people use to define identity in themselves and those around them: for example between working class and middle class; or between generations; or all kinds of cultural groups. It is also true

⁴²⁸ See footnote 417 above.

⁴²⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 331; my emphasis.

⁴³⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 331.

⁴³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 336.

of differences used to understand and categorise places (and along with them the people who live in them): between rural, suburban and (various categories of) urban living.

Remaining within such binary oppositions means accepting the power structures of modernity. They offer clarity, communities of shared meaning, and a certain security; yet at the same time, they deny freedom, impose identities and roles on people, and prevent them from having 'a life of their own'. Said challenges one such binary opposition, used as a way of imposing political, social and cultural power, and effectively invites his readers to challenge other oppositions. He points towards alternative ways of relating to the particularity of the Other, the different people we meet around us. It is worth noting at this point that Ruether is using the same kind of analysis in her critique of patriarchal language about God; the domination of women by men has come about by similar patterns of control and imposition. Ruether sees this as having a central role in shaping language about God. 'The dualism of nature and transcendence, matter and spirit as female and male is basic to male theology.'⁴³²

Bhabha presses this criticism of dualisms further, introducing the idea of another space: a space which is neither one nor the other. As a philosopher and a cultural theorist Bhabha is particularly concerned with moving thinking, writing and action into a post-colonial mode. What Said has described is an expression of colonialism. Bhabha wishes to describe strategies and theories which break free of those colonial patterns, also described as modern. This is not, however, a straightforward task, not least because of the discomfort which moving away from clarity entails. It is note-worthy that Bhabha's writing itself is notoriously unclear, using jargon in ways which makes his prose sometimes quite

⁴³² Ruether, *Sexism*, 70.

impenetrable. He is writing about cultural difference: about what happens when you try and say something about what is different from you—what happens politically, and culturally. Through a series of phrases he intimates, alludes, and suggests a way of relating to culture which finds creative possibilities in the face of hegemonic power; which says something about what is different without imposing a colonial will on it, or which empowers the colonised to call into question an imposed identity. This range of phrases all refer to what is ‘in between’ the two poles of a binary definition; of finding in that gap a space into which the particular, which the powerful binary definition denies, can emerge and be recognised. The most often used phrase to refer to this idea is that of a ‘third space’; but Bhabha himself as frequently uses other terms, referring to what is ‘interstitial’, to a ‘time lag’, to ‘elision’, or to ‘hybridity’, all of which are ways of referring to the same basic structure of thought, which is also the site of ambivalence.

An example comes from the opening essay of *The Location of Culture*. Here Bhabha is concerned with political dialogue and negotiation, and writes particularly of the way the British Labour Party has had to shift from the binary opposition of class, to build a broad consensus. He writes of the miner’s strike in the 1980s. ‘The choice,’ he says,

was clearly between the dawning world of the new Thatcherite city gent and a long history of the working man, or so it seemed to the traditional left and the new right. ... Then, to commemorate the first anniversary of the strike, Beatrix Campbell, in the *Guardian*, interviewed a group of women who had been involved in the strike. It was clear that their experience of the historical struggle, their understanding of the historic choice to be made, was startlingly different and more complex. Their testimonies would not be contained simply or singly within the priorities of the politics of class or the histories of industrial struggle. Many of the women began to question their roles within the family and the community—the two central institutions which articulated the meanings and mores of the *traditions* of the labouring classes around which ideological battles ensued. Some challenged the symbols and authorities of the culture they fought

to defend. Others disrupted the homes they had struggled to sustain. For most of them there would be no return, no going back to the ‘good old days’.⁴³³

Bhabha refers to this as a ‘hybrid moment of political change’, and goes on to comment on Stuart Hall’s arguments about how the Labour Party could construct a majority and in some way

(in)conceivably [sic] improve its image. The unemployed, semi-skilled and unskilled, part-time workers, male and female, the low-paid, black people, underclasses: these signs of the fragmentation of class and cultural consensus represent both the historical experience of contemporary social divisions, and a structure of heterogeneity upon which to construct a theoretical and political alternative.⁴³⁴

After thirteen years of Labour government, elected by the rather different consensus of ‘middle England’, the ‘(in)conceivability’ of this alternative can be appreciated; and while Bhabha has sometimes been criticised for writing from the perspective of an academic elite, lacking connection with the concerns of ordinary people, what he offers here is an insight into the importance of enabling and empowering precisely those sorts of ‘third space’.

Another example is mentioned by Bhabha himself in a conversation with his colleague W.J.T. Mitchell, but refers to his essay ‘Signs Taken for Wonders.’⁴³⁵ Here it concerns the way in which Indian Christian catechists engaged with local Hindu populations, as they sought converts, and for this Bhabha draws from the archives of the Church Missionary Society.

It would be easy to interpret the dialogue that ensued as an exchange between a muscular colonial Christianity that was keen to convert and an indigenous religious tradition that resisted conversion. That said, what was most fascinating in this process of dialogic contradiction was that the way the peasants dealt with this colonial antagonism was continually to produce supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation. They would say, for instance: We would be happy to convert so long as you convinced us that these words of the Christian god do not come from the mouths of meat eaters. These

⁴³³ Bhabha, *Location*, 27.

⁴³⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 28.

⁴³⁵ Bhabha, *Location*, 102–122.

words are very beautiful, but your priests are a nonvegetarian class. We cannot believe that anybody who eats meat can transmit the word of God.⁴³⁶

Bhabha's particular interpretation of this exchange is peculiarly tilted. He is interested in the part 'the English book' played in colonial authority, and conflates the Bible with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and by implication all other English literature. 'The discovery of the book,' he writes, 'installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative.'⁴³⁷ The account he offers for consideration, however, depicts a group of people already in possession of copies of the Bible translated into 'the Hindoostanee Tongue' and engaged with it, sufficiently so to have hand-copied further Gospels, and who respond when the catechist points to the name of Jesus asking 'Who is that?': 'That is God! He gave us this book.'⁴³⁸ Without calling into question the third space thinking Bhabha advocates, this illustrates the ambiguity of such third spaces, which are open to interpretation, and may work in various ways towards different ends. An alternative way of interpreting Bhabha's chosen text might be from within a Christian standpoint in terms of inculturation of the Gospel. Indeed it is interesting to see how Bhabha's take on the Bible here is reliant on seeing it as a univocal symbol of the West, whereas it is equally possible to see it as an Eastern book produced and interpreted initially within Middle-Eastern settings now being reclaimed by two-thirds world and post-colonial Biblical scholars.

Several further points might be made about this 'third space' structure or relationship. First, its outcome is a hybrid; a cross between two different cultures or sets of

⁴³⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Translator translated (interview with cultural theorist Homi Bhabha),' Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts, <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/interview.html> (accessed 18th October 2009), reproduced from *Artforum* vol. 33, no. 7 (March, 1995): 80–84.

⁴³⁷ Bhabha, *Location*, 105.

⁴³⁸ *The Missionary Register*, (Church Missionary Society: London, January 1818) 18–19; quoted in Bhabha, *Location*, 103.

expectations. Third space arises in the context of a colonial culture imposing its definition on those who are different. This imposition Bhabha sees as structured in various complex ways; but the important detail here is that third space arises out of colonial power and definition, but is also the response of the colonised. What colonial power wants and expects is for the colonised to mimic exactly its own 'superior' form, rejecting their own culture; instead the colonial culture is reflected back in a changed way which upsets and disrupts the expectation. In the first example above, the women, expected to reproduce particular forms of behaviour modelled on the solidarity of working class and traditional gender roles, respond in unexpected ways which are neither 'a spin-off from the class struggle' nor 'a repudiation of the politics of class from a socialist-feminist perspective.'⁴³⁹ This hybridity 'unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.'⁴⁴⁰

Second, what Bhabha is describing sometimes seems to be looking back to the colonial era, a product of modernity; yet third space also seems to be a tool for understanding what is post-colonial. What is the contemporary form of third space? For Bhabha post-colonialism is not a state beyond colonialism; the effects of colonialism are still felt and carried by many (the majority of the world's) people. Post-colonialism is what emerges as the colonised find ways of speaking their testimonies into their various hybrid situations:

Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political

⁴³⁹ Bhabha, *Location*, 27–28.

⁴⁴⁰ Bhabha, *Location*, 112.

discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity.⁴⁴¹

Within this post-colonial era third space comes into its own. It is a strategy which played its part in resisting the avowedly colonialist ambitions of the past, and now continues in an unavoidably hybrid world, and becomes part of the structure of human social relating. It is still the product of social expectations (sometimes hegemonic, sometimes not) being met with unanticipated responses.

Third, this space is a linguistic space. It is a place which involves articulation, translation, negotiation and dialogue. The place of language (and this is characterised by what he terms 'theory' in his opening essay) is to the forefront. The meeting of different cultures calls forth a need first for articulation: I must speak of what I experience and see in the other. Yet it also involves translation; on finding something for which there is no word in my own tongue I must find a way of saying what has not been said before; in doing so I produce not an imitative exact copy, but a new thing: a translation. Christopher Baker sees here the influence of Lévinas on Bhabha and describes it in this way:

Whenever we encounter the Other—another individual, another culture, even God—we attempt to define that encounter for ourselves, for our own consumption. For Lévinas, this attempted definition represents the Said. The Said strives for universality and solidity. But the nature of speech and language is that it is fluid and unstable, and the Other is an unknowable mystery. Therefore our striving for complete definition always falls short. This is the Saying. There is always a residue of the Other that resists the Said, but this relationship between definition and the attempt to define is itself a fluid one; a to-and-fro conversation that hopefully becomes a dialogue.⁴⁴²

As Baker notes, this process moves towards dialogue. So far as knowing the Other is possible, it happens in the process of coming to know. Back with Bhabha's discussion of the language of political theory, both the heterogeneous mix of groups and concerns which might

⁴⁴¹ Bhabha, *Location*, 171.

⁴⁴² Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 18.

make a potential Labour majority, and the conversation between politics and theory produce a need for negotiation.⁴⁴³

Finally, third space produces ambivalence. This is where this theme connects with Bauman's. A hybrid, being neither one thing nor another, will not be universal. It will fit in neither category. Because of this it produces mixed feelings, an uncertainty about whether it should be whole-heartedly embraced or not. This can be illustrated specifically with respect to people's attitudes to neighbourhood. Neighbourhood living is going to be ambivalent and hybrid living. Hybrids emerge between the psychological yearning for rootedness and consumerist desire; between a sense of belonging and a sense of freedom; between a past *Gemeinschaft* and a present network society. These hybrids produce ambivalences which are precisely those which affect, to different degrees, the way individuals respond to the places where they live and work.

6.3 The Ambivalences of Freedom in the Light of Christian Theology

Lives shaped by ambivalence come as no surprise to Christian theology. Human life, seen as both made in the image of God and sinful, is full of ambivalence. Viewed eschatologically the Kingdom of God is both 'already' and 'not yet', and the world itself is an ambivalent mixture of grace and sin. Even the radical separation of God from creation is broken open by the incarnation, and particularly by the entry of the critical cross. It is precisely such an ambivalent reality which theology confronts, and provides resources for facing.

A. *Autonomy and relationship*

⁴⁴³ Bhabha, *Location*, 30.

Autonomy, as an aspect of liberty, is also experienced with ambivalence. The theology of autonomy which will be explored here is a theology which recognises the God-giveness of autonomy, and also sees the unavoidable ambivalence. In its own way ambivalence over autonomy is a given—or one might say, a gift—and something which can be lived with hopefully. The ambivalence of autonomy under individualization has already been noted: an ambivalence which arises out of the fragmentation of sources of authority and knowledge, in which choices and life decisions must be made relatively unsupported. Christian theology offers a different form of ambivalence, yet one which is not unrelated.

John Cottingham writes of ‘The paradox of our humanity’ as ‘we oscillate between two poles: on the one side our contingency and dependency, and on the other our aspiration to independence and autonomy.’⁴⁴⁴ This polarity of life is expressed philosophically as a paradox; what is philosophical paradox engages with our affective lives as ambivalence. For Cottingham ‘autonomy properly understood’ is that in which

the autonomous person [is] construed as ... the being who makes decisions independently of the arbitrary will of another, acting in the full light of reason, free from internal or external interference with her rational processes.⁴⁴⁵

Our dependence, on the other hand, comes through both our human nature and context, and through our dependence on God. It is worked out, not in terms of ‘servile submission to an alien power’, but rather:

We need ... to complete the work of creation: our autonomy, our rationality, inescapably require us to do something more with our lives, to grow, to learn, not just physically but intellectually and aesthetically and morally, to orient ourselves progressively and ever more closely towards the true, the beautiful, and the good. None of this is a sacrifice of our autonomy properly understood: rather it is its culmination.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41.

⁴⁴⁵ Cottingham, *Spiritual Dimension*, 43.

⁴⁴⁶ Cottingham, *Spiritual Dimension*, 42–43.

There is here then a kind of hybrid space which emerges from an understanding of God as wholly free, offering dependent autonomy as a gift to women and men, and along with a revelation through Christ of how such a gift could shape human life. In the last chapter we saw how Moltmann argued for human freedom flowing from the freedom of God. Barth, with his characteristic emphasis on God's sovereignty in election writes of 'the command of God, which has as its goal the free man in his limitations.'⁴⁴⁷ It is out of God's freedom that God offers that hospitable space in which women and men can be free while remaining in relationship with God and each other. 'To the creature God determined, therefore, to give an individuality and autonomy, not that these gifts should be possessed outside Him, let alone against Him, but for Him, and within His kingdom; not in rivalry with His sovereignty but for its confirming and glorifying.'⁴⁴⁸ For Pannenberg 'the reality of God, on which man is dependent in the structure of his subjectivity, is encountered only where, in the context of his world, he receives himself as a gift in the experience of freedom.'⁴⁴⁹ So the human experience of dependent autonomy rests on the gift of God.

This gift is also resourced through Jesus Christ. Barth writes of Christ's wholehearted obedience:

The perfection of God's giving of Himself to man in the person of Jesus Christ consists in the fact that far from merely playing with man, far from merely moving or using him, far from merely dealing with him as an object, this self-giving sets man up as a subject, awakens him to genuine individuality and autonomy, frees him, makes him a king, so that in his rule the kingly rule of God Himself attains form and revelation. How can there be any possible rivalry here, let alone usurpation? How can there be any question of a conflict between theonomy and autonomy? How can God be jealous or man self-assertive?⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G.W. Bromily and T.F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 20:252 [III.4:586].

⁴⁴⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 10:187[II.2:178].

⁴⁴⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Idea of God and Human Freedom: Volume Three of Basic Questions in Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 96.

⁴⁵⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 10:188 [II.2:179].

It is Christ who ‘awakens’ us to ‘genuine individuality and autonomy.’ The incarnation is God’s way of revealing the possibilities for freedom within human living, even while remaining at one with God. Christ does not just demonstrate but reveals this through obedient freedom. Within this there is always the possibility of an insistence upon a more complete autonomy: a desire for the death of God.

However, this addresses only the first fact of liberation identified at the end of chapter 5, that we are created to be free; but what of the second fact, that we are not free and need liberation? How does language about autonomy work in relation to other human beings, and especially with regard to the poor? What of ‘freedom for...’? There are many people in the world who cannot exercise autonomy because they are prevented by social and political structures. They are prevented by others who are living fully autonomous lives with, by and large, no thought of living out a ‘freedom for...’ anyone else. Apart from the global implications, this has implications for neighbourhoods. How do people in neighbourhoods experience autonomy? For some it is strongly experienced, through mobility, choice, and opportunity. For others it is experienced only weakly, and may be no more than a desire. The Christian response is to desire mutual autonomy for others alongside ourselves, and to seek ways of working it out. To do so will involve living with the complexities of individualization, seeing the different ways it affects different people and different neighbourhoods, and responding in hybrid ways, creating third spaces. One of the ways these third spaces are organised will be around autonomy.

We can therefore expand the third space of dependency and autonomy into a space of mutuality and autonomy. Autonomy means choosing for oneself. Mutuality and autonomy means choosing for oneself and others; it means that in many situations we will willingly forgo our own pure autonomy in order to see others gain theirs. Joann Wolski Conn looks at

this from the perspective of a pastoral counsellor and spiritual director. Conn explores two psychologists who have developed alternative views of human maturity. Carol Gilligan's book 'boldly rejects the dominant model of human development which assumes that maturity is autonomy.'⁴⁵¹ Conn relates how Gilligan challenges the work of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson on moral and identity development because they 'contained a consistent conceptual and observational bias, reflected in their choice of all-male research samples.'⁴⁵² These views offer autonomy as the end point of maturity along with an ethic of justice, in which individuals seek to establish independently of others what is right. Gilligan offers a 'different voice', based on a small sample of women. Her view challenges these other theories which 'interpret the differences manifest in female experience as irrelevant or deficient.'⁴⁵³ Gilligan's alternative suggests a different pattern of moral and identity development is going on in women, based on maturity as involving relationship, and on an ethic of care:

the more appropriate norm of adult maturity is one which sees the truth of both attachment and separation in the lives of women and men and recognizes how these truths are carried by different modes of language and thought.⁴⁵⁴

The reference to 'attachment and separation' here is an alternative way of articulating mutuality and autonomy.

Although Conn goes on to find Gilligan's work incomplete she affirms the overall direction of her case. It is taken up by one of Gilligan's critics, Robert Kegan, who Conn suggests develops the theory in a more thoroughgoing and rigorous way. Kegan analyses the process of human development through five stages, each of which involves a balance between autonomy and relationship, separation and attachment. Each of these stages involves a

⁴⁵¹ Conn, *Spirituality*, 37.

⁴⁵² Conn, *Spirituality*, 38.

⁴⁵³ Conn, *Spirituality*, 39.

⁴⁵⁴ Conn, *Spirituality*, 44.

reorganisation of the balance one way or the other, at some points towards autonomy, at others towards attachment, but at each stage a movement away from the self being 'embedded' in the other, and towards a self which is differentiated from but in relationship to the other.

Self-other relations emerge out of a lifelong process of development: a succession of more adequate differentiations of the self from the world in which it is embedded, each differentiation creating a more complex object of relation. Maturity in each phase of the process is a relative triumph of "relationship to" rather than "embeddedness in."⁴⁵⁵

The use of the idea of balance is interesting here. Like the idea of ambivalence, balance is about two different ideas being held together in the same frame. The difference lies in ambivalence being a more negative condition, recognising the continuation of frictions and pinch-points as we work to hold opposite claims together. Balance, on the other hand, implies a positive condition, holding different claims in an inclusive poise. While the idea of balance may be appealing, it is perhaps unlikely that many people achieve a condition of maturity in which they find themselves perpetually comfortable in holding autonomy and the needs of others together. On the other hand, ambivalence seems overly negative; for many people there can be extended times of balance. Yet what remains an issue is the cost of setting aside autonomy, sometimes in very demanding ways, in the limiting cases where sacrificial giving is required.

What makes this of particular importance to Christian theology is that the self-giving of Christ is the paradigm of human maturity (Ephesians 4:11–16). In the terms of this argument we could say that in Christ a full autonomy and a full relatedness are held together. That self-giving is explored not only through atonement, but also through incarnation; it is through the whole life of Christ that we see this principle at work.

⁴⁵⁵ Conn, *Spirituality*, 51.

B. Self-development and vocation

This movement towards maturity, which involves both autonomy and relationship, brings us towards the idea of self-development. If the Christian understanding of liberty contrasts with individualized freedom through its strong focus on the communal, then this will also be evident in the theology of self-development. Very little systematic work has been done on the theology of human development. There is a large body of material about Christian education and formation but much of this is written from within education as a social science discipline, and, while there is some dialogue with theology evident within it, that is not its main purpose. There are however important theological themes which relate to individual and personal development. Through what follows an emphasis on communal freedom once again emerges. Like autonomy, self-development viewed through the lens of Christian theology needs to be questioned and its place must be found within understandings of human relatedness.

The Christian interrogation of the idea of self-development is not because self-development is of itself wrong, but because it cannot stand alone. The very ambivalence present in the individualized understanding of social relationships means that self-development is open to such questioning. From a Christian perspective this will be true of both its parts: ‘self’ and ‘development’.

It needs to be questioned in terms of the idea of *self*-development. Debates around individualization themselves raise questions about the capacity of the individual to direct her or his own life. The precariousness of life courses noted in chapter 5—the ‘tightrope biography’—is profoundly affected by the world in which it is formed. Individualization does not limit the source and drive of development to the ‘self’. It is also worth noting that other

issues are raised by philosophy, psychology and biology, about the identity of the human subject, about the relative significance of nature and nurture, and about ways in which genetic and evolutionary factors affect the individual. Without moving towards a behaviourist view, these considerations also question the possibility of seeing the 'self' in isolation. Christian theology addresses concerns about the relationship between God and human development. All this amounts to a questioning of the source of development, and what the limits of *self*-development are.

The idea of *self-development* also needs to be questioned in terms of ambivalence about what constitutes human development. Development is about change, and involves a value judgment that such change is for the better. However, coming to a view about what constitutes positive and good development is not straightforward. Christian theology needs to question and call into ambivalence views about what ultimate and final values are used to judge human life. This leads to a questioning of the idea of development itself. This relates more to the goal of human development rather than its source. So these two questions will recur in considering a theology of self-development. What is the source of human development, and what is its goal?

The primary answer of Christian theology to these two questions is God. This is true not just for the human being, but for the whole of creation. God is the creator and source of everything that is, and in God everything has its end. At the same time this beginning and ending is rooted in incarnation. God is the source and goal of everything in relationship to the world which is made, and that relationship is through Jesus Christ, God incarnate. So it is Jesus who is portrayed at the end of the Revelation to John saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.' (Revelation 22:13) This provides two struts of a framework for understanding self-development. First, that anything we are or

do as human beings is dependent on God, including any movement towards self-development or autonomy (see section 6.3A above). Second, that there is nowhere other than the created world in which significant action occurs; incarnation is one doctrinal and Biblical strand which emphasises the value of the created order to God. Our theology of self-development must include a valuing of humanity as physical—embodied beings—part of the created world, and that means as social and political beings.

A framework of human development within the divine pattern might also take us towards a consideration of certain changes which God, as the primary *source* of development, is seen to work in individual human beings. Traditional Protestant theology would insist that only by the gracious action of God can we be anything but sinners. God's liberative, redemptive action is the only way in which we will be moved beyond being sinful, and it will not be by development but by conversion, *metanoia*. One way of setting this issue to one side without devaluing it is used by Nipkow in a paper about Christian education theory. He suggests that this theology liberates us to act in areas of politics and education. The onus for our ultimate value and condition is not on ourselves, and so 'it frees [the human] mind from anxiously looking at worldly matters as if they were a condition of ... justification.'⁴⁵⁶ This means that significant matters of human development are not unimportant, and even as theology puts them into divine perspective, we are freed to act on them.

This pattern for understanding the relationship between human action and theology Nipkow describes as 'liberating differentiation.' He develops the pattern by seeing it as a way of freeing not only the human mind, but also secular disciplines. But the pattern is only the first of a dialectic pair, which then leads on to a third. One of the weaknesses of this first

⁴⁵⁶ Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis and Colin Crowder, eds., *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), 19.

pattern Nipkow identifies is that it ‘endorses conservative ... concepts.’⁴⁵⁷ Its dialectical partner involves a more radical political stance and sees theology as having a prophetic voice for the secular world, when ‘a church body, a group of Christians, or an individual Christian educator advocates a specific educational issue, though of a thoroughly secular nature, in the name of Jesus Christ.’⁴⁵⁸ Here theology speaks to the world. The third pattern tries to do justice to the strengths of both, integrating through a process of critical interpretation: acknowledging the theological framework within which the disciplines and actions of the world can be seen to operate, while expecting theological insights to be brought to bear on matters of value and ethics. Nipkow writes of this in terms which once again suggest ambivalence:

By this double-sided, dialectic approach, the theologian, when discussing with the educationist, will affirm here, contradict there. [The theologian] will not defend a closed religious or educational system ... [and] will instead co-operate in an attitude of certain uncertainties.⁴⁵⁹

This analysis is helpful in articulating the idea of a theological framework for self-development, in raising the question of how space is made for a more political approach, and in uncovering another aspect of the ambivalence which is unavoidably present. It is also an example of the kind of critical correlation method which this thesis seeks to follow.

So what expressions might be found in theology of the communal aspect of human development? There are two theological discourses which can be seen to articulate this. The first focuses on the church as the significant community for shaping identity; human growth is seen as most importantly about being formed as God’s people, religiously and socio-ethically; Stanley Hauerwas articulates this most clearly. The second discourse is among liberation

⁴⁵⁷ Astley et al., *Christian Formation*, 21.

⁴⁵⁸ Astley et al., *Christian Formation*, 22.

⁴⁵⁹ Astley et al., *Christian Formation*, 25.

theologians and thinkers, in which development as human beings is God's intention for all people and can only be accomplished within the political structures of the world; however, as those structures are not adequate for the task, people must act to change the world. Both discourses place a primacy on action and on sociality.

Thomson has noted that 'for Hauerwas, a church is a school of virtue rooted in an apprentice model of education.'⁴⁶⁰ Within a church Christians are shaped and formed by the community of which they are a part. Hauerwas himself has suggested

that we ought to think of making disciples the way a bricklayer is trained ... to emphasize that Christianity is not so much a set of beliefs that are meant to give our lives meaning, but rather, to be a Christian is to be initiated into a community with skills, not unlike learning to lay bricks, that are meant to transform our lives.⁴⁶¹

In an article on education in the church Hauerwas sees the church as 'a form of education that is religious.'⁴⁶² Hauerwas's view is 'that religious education has as its first task the initiation of a people into a story, ... the story of God and God's will for our lives.' This is what happens in and through the church, through a community of faith, 'as the story, and the corresponding community ... forms our life.' For Hauerwas Christian education is about becoming faithful, and 'we become faithful just to the extent that we learn to participate in the activities of the people of God we call the church.'⁴⁶³ This places a process of human development firmly within the church. The self can only engage with this in so far as it is part of the wider community of the church.

⁴⁶⁰ J. B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 20.

⁴⁶¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1998), 236.

⁴⁶² Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story,' in *Christian Formation*, Astley et al., 97.

⁴⁶³ Hauerwas, in *Christian Formation*, eds. Astley et al., 103.

In a related article Dykstra also focuses on Christian formation as participation. Working from Ephesians 2:19–22 as a starting point he draws out five theses which describe ‘very significant implications for Christian educators’:

- a. faith is participation in the redemptive activity of God;
- b. we participate in this activity by being active in the manifold relationships of the church, a community which knows that this redemptive activity is taking place and which is making itself open to it through its worship and discipleship;
- c. growing in faith involves the deepening and widening of our participation in this community and its form of life;
- d. we can learn to participate in this activity, and this learning requires that we be taught;
- e. Christian education is the dialogical process of teaching and learning ... through which the community comes to see, grasp and participate ever more deeply in the redemptive transformation of personal and social life that God is carrying out.⁴⁶⁴

Again, the process of development is defined as happening within the church. Dykstra reiterates this in several ways even in this brief statement. There is an initial participation of ‘being active in the manifold relationships of the church ... community.’ Then there is growth within that through ‘participation in this community and its form of life.’ Even the straightforward statement that ‘learning requires that we be taught’ implies a social relationship.

These considerations are both taken from the field of Christian education. It may be argued that this is a very particular and intentional form of self-development. Education has a formality and structure, which self-development of itself does not imply. The self-development of individualization might include consumer choices, decisions about life-style, and includes anti-social choices. Yet what emerges from Hauerwas and Dykstra is a view of education which widens it to the development or formation of a Christian person in community. Participation, in the sense they mean it, relates precisely to issues about finding ways of making life-style choices, choosing identity. What is strikingly different in

⁴⁶⁴ Craig R. Dykstra, ‘No Longer Strangers: The Church and its Educational Ministry,’ in *Christian Formation*, eds. Astley et. al., 108.

Hauerwas's wider writing is the way he challenges the kind of choices which would otherwise be made. The distinctiveness of the Christian community means that self-development shifts into development within a chosen community of meaning, which could even be said to call the self into question.⁴⁶⁵

The whole of Hauerwas's theology can be seen as setting out life in Christian community as an alternative which challenges the liberal world-view in which freedom is defined as choice shaped by consumerism and capitalism. By contrast what he has referred to as 'cultural Christianity' deemphasises choice.⁴⁶⁶ It underlines the things which are not chosen but which are, nonetheless, liberating. What they liberate from is the power of the system based on individual freedom, what he calls the 'order of necessity called freedom.'⁴⁶⁷ Therefore the process of development referred to here is one in which individuals are involved only as fully immersed in the network of relationships of which Christ is the centre. Although there may be an initial choice even the nature of that choice is called into question. As he considers the nature of the choice people make to become part of the church, he questions whether it is a choice at all; instead that choice 'becomes something that happens to us.'⁴⁶⁸ When commenting on conversion he says, 'Christians discover that what they thought they had done voluntarily has in fact been done to them.'⁴⁶⁹ At the same time the kind of thing which individualization theorists might see as self-development, 'life biography', or life courses, are seen as not open to choice. These are the social structures of life, the pre-determined givens, which extend beyond class, gender and race to include the hegemony of liberal capitalist democracy with its assumptions about individuality, choice and freedom.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 77–91.

⁴⁶⁶ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 157–173.

⁴⁶⁷ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 166.

⁴⁶⁸ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 164.

⁴⁶⁹ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 166.

Here Hauerwas would be in agreement with aspects of individualization theory, which recognise that late modern human existence, even while it is shaped by discourses of freedom, sometimes leaves people demonstrably less free. So he sees Christianity as ‘extended training meant to help us discover and name those practices and narratives that hold us captive’ even as ‘we fail to see how they do so exactly because we think we have chosen them.’⁴⁷⁰

The second theological discourse articulating a communal aspect is that among liberation theologians, including a close dialogue with educationalists. The contribution of Paulo Freire has been central to this. Freire writes from within the Latin American context of the 1960s and 70s, and argues that the education of the oppressed can aim either to maintain the status quo which oppresses them, or to liberate. He distinguishes between two concepts of education: the ‘banking’ concept in which the student is considered an object, an empty vessel to be filled,⁴⁷¹ and the liberative or problem-solving approach, in which the student is to be engaged creatively and transformatively.⁴⁷² The banking concept is described as part of an oppressive political structure, which treats people as

adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world.⁴⁷³

In doing so this system regards the oppressed ‘as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns.’⁴⁷⁴ It works on the presumption of a dichotomy between people and the world: ‘the individual is spectator, not re-creator.’⁴⁷⁵ The purpose is to control the way things from the world enter the

⁴⁷⁰ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 164.

⁴⁷¹ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 53.

⁴⁷² Freire, *Pedagogy*, 65.

⁴⁷³ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 54.

⁴⁷⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 55.

⁴⁷⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 56.

consciousness of the student, adapting and fitting them to the world. The state of the world, which is the oppressors' status quo, therefore takes precedence over the student. 'The educated individual is the adapted person.'⁴⁷⁶

Above all these concepts of education are about vocation, or calling:

Banking education ... den[ies] people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation.⁴⁷⁷

This brings us to Freire's alternative and liberating mode of education. A number of times he reiterates the belief in the vocation of women and men to become fully human.⁴⁷⁸ Problem posing education aims to humanise, to help people on the road towards achieving their vocation. In this form of education rather than being managed and objectified people are engaged in dialogue; student and teacher explore truth together.⁴⁷⁹ This must be done through a firm connection between people and their world: 'Education as the practice of freedom ... denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world. ... Authentic reflection considers ... people in their relations with the world.'⁴⁸⁰ Rather than how the world is taking precedence over people, people come to see that the world can be changed: '[people] come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation,' and because of this both people and world are 'unfinished'. 'The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing

⁴⁷⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 57.

⁴⁷⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 65.

⁴⁷⁸ For example, Freire, *Pedagogy*, 55, 56, 71, and 84.

⁴⁷⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 61.

⁴⁸⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 62.

activity.⁴⁸¹ This concept of education sees people and the world as a unity, in which the key is to ask what problems the world presents for living and how those problems can be resolved.

All of this relates to the source of human development. Hauerwas's emphasis is more on the community focused on God as the source of our development; Freire's on politically liberative action. Both Hauerwas and Freire are articulating a view of human development which calls into question the extent to which *self*-development can occur, and sees relational influences as central. The kind of social relationships to which they refer seem to be, however, very different. Hauerwas focuses on the church. The field of education and development is the church. This raises a question of whether church action in the neighbourhood becomes less significant because it is what happens within the Christian community which matters. For Freire on the other hand it is the political question of oppression which determines the basis for concern. He is sceptical of the role of the church.⁴⁸² He sees education as a tool for liberating the oppressed into their true vocation: the call to become fully human. Yet out of such different contexts and different concerns both point towards a theological idea which stands alongside self-development, just as relationship or connectedness stood alongside autonomy, creating an ambivalent third space: the idea of vocation.

Individualization theorists have written of self-development in terms of meaning making, with people shaping their lives according to various individual narratives. Such narratives are not, however, constructed from scratch. The individualized world presents various options and choices. Whether such options are freely chosen is open to debate. It can be argued that many people choose similar meanings, with particular off-the-peg life

⁴⁸¹ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 64–65.

⁴⁸² Paulo Freire, 'Education, Liberation and the Church,' in *Christian Formation*, eds. Astley et. al., 176–185.

biographies being presented to people; this is a model of ‘default individualization’.⁴⁸³

Alternative narratives are also possible. These are also shaped by cultural issues: by the ecological, religious, or anarchistic. These options seek to challenge hegemonic neo-liberal understandings of the world. They challenge the basis on which the individualized world is built. It is within such a varied world of meaning making that Christian theology finds space for the idea of being called by God.

Christian theology places such story-making into a framework structured by God and by community. Here, the way we choose and shape our personal narratives is seen through the lens of vocation. We still articulate the path taken as one of meaning-making, and can see it in terms of a life-biography. The religious option is chosen from among others. That is one way of looking at it. But into this life-biography a different element is brought. This different element introduces ambivalence; it brings uncertainty over what choices are made and how. It recognises that choices made under individualization are not free, but socially structured. That element might be characterised by vocation. It is about the extent to which we do not choose a meaning, but are ourselves chosen and called into a particular role and meaning. It is summarised by Jesus’s words to his disciples in John 15:16: ‘You did not choose me but I chose you.’

The Biblical sources of this theme can be seen in the way the vocabulary of ‘choice’ is used in the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures the verb used for ‘choose’ occurs 164 times; 105 occurrences are about God choosing, and most often this is about choosing Israel, or individuals. This pattern continues in the New Testament. There are fifty occurrences of *ἐκλεγομαι* and its cognates. Of these, twenty-four refer to ‘the chosen’ or ‘the elect’, picking

⁴⁸³ Melinda Mills, ‘Individualization and the Life Course: Toward a Theoretical Model and Empirical Evidence,’ in *Contested Individualization, Debates about Contemporary Personhood*, ed. Cosmo Howard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 70 ff.

up on the theme of the Hebrew Bible, so that this becomes almost a technical term for the human individuals and communities who are open to God, and which have been chosen by God. Of the other twenty-six, sixteen have God as subject, six have Jesus as subject, and three in Acts have the apostles or the company of disciples choosing from among their number for specific communal purposes. There are some parallels and repetitions among these instances, but the evidence for God and Christ as the primary subject of 'choose' is incontrovertible.⁴⁸⁴

Any Christian discourse about individual choice is therefore faced with this counterweight. If God has chosen me, then that invites me to explore meaning and purpose in my life in the context of vocation: for what has God chosen me? The idea of vocation, of a calling, is that human life in its generality or in its individuality has a purpose. This teleological view of human life sees it as moving towards an end determined by God. This end is part of human nature. It is one of the givens which cannot be challenged, and therefore can be seen as related to the dependency which sits alongside our potential autonomy. It is part of our relatedness to God and the created world.

In general terms this can be seen in two ways. First, it is about the calling of the church. Worship, mission, and discipleship all provide ways of reflecting on this general calling of Christian people. Second, the idea of general vocation can be broadened into the idea of a universal calling grounded in repentance: a turning to and a returning to God. In Genesis 3:9 God calls to Adam and Eve who have hidden themselves. This calling out of God to those who have turned away from the divine purpose of creation and human life

⁴⁸⁴ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. ἐκλεγομαι.

becomes the archetypal call, which is a call to all people. It is echoed in Augustine's 'our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.'⁴⁸⁵

In individual terms, calling comes as specific ways of shaping individual life to fit in with the general calling. It is about how our own personal story comes to be shaped by, and fit in with, God's story. Under individualization it becomes the way in which Christian life biographies are consciously shaped not only by a sense of personal choice, but also by the influences of a community of faith. It was such ideas of personal call which the Bowburn site team explored, and we did so because our call is shaped by our story, and thus by the places we inhabit, and the relationships in which we engage.

With God as the goal of all creation and human development, how then does this work out for human beings in the particularity of their lives and social relationships? One way of approaching this has already been touched on in the consideration of autonomy above. Conn, in her consideration of spiritual maturity, draws attention to two different aspects of human life which can both be seen as goals of human development: autonomy and relationship. This emerges in Conn's work out of gender differences, so the value placed on each of these goals will differ from individual to individual, although this will in part be structured by social factors such as gender. Conn, building on Regan's work, suggests that a succession of balances between attachment and separation, relationship and autonomy, has to be negotiated. What Conn is doing through this process is building an idea of maturity as an integrated goal of human development. It is by progressively negotiating new balances between autonomy and relationship that maturity happens. The thinking of Hauerwas and

⁴⁸⁵ Augustine *Confessions* 1.1.

Freire can point us towards a broadening of this view of human development beyond the therapeutic sphere in which it originates.

For Hauerwas the community in which development occurs is the church of Jesus Christ, and this can be placed alongside the suggestion that human development should lead towards maturity. The Christocentric church is therefore the place where Christians develop towards maturity. More than that, if we also accept Christ as the image of the invisible God in whose image all human beings are made, if Christ is therefore the one who displays for us what it means for a human life to display that image, the church becomes the place which seeks to model what human life is intended to be through the following of Christ. The Christian understanding of this model is universal. Conn's understanding of a balance between autonomy and relationship conceives of its effect on one-to-one spiritual direction or therapeutic counselling. That balance also needs to inform the way people relate to one another within groups, families and institutions. More than that, full maturity is something which will not be found in a single individual. Maturity can only be achieved in company and within the structures of a fully social relatedness. The church can then be understood as a place to practice human relatedness and to shape the kind of responses to each other which give us a shared maturity modelled on Christ.

Freire's concern focussed on those who are oppressed; he offers an understanding of oppression which sees it as refusing to recognise the full humanity of others, and as obstructing the fulfilment of their vocation to full humanity. Oppression is a process of objectification, which pathologises and demeans those against whom it is used. Rather than their autonomy being something which they claim in balance with their economic relatedness, it is something which they are denied, which means that the full human maturity of people acknowledging their mutual interdependence is also denied to them. Freire's understanding

of human development means that rather than starting with the balance within individual lives, the starting point is this social imbalance between people. The balance between autonomy and interrelatedness can only be aspired to when the oppressed are able to challenge the systems which prevent their being able to live in a space in which such balances make sense. The autonomy-interrelated balance only makes sense for those who initially have autonomy, while the path towards full maturity is blocked by oppression. The vocation, however, remains. The call to full humanity is a call to the maturity of both relatedness and autonomy, found within a changed network of human relationships, free of oppression.

There is another reason why only a fully social understanding of human development towards maturity will suffice. This is because for individuals the question of development itself can become ambivalent. The ambivalences of individualization become far sharper when particular individuals are considered who, for one reason or another, are excluded from individual maturity. Included among such people are: the mentally disabled; children; and those whose emotional development is impaired by their upbringing. For the mentally disabled individual human development is arrested by brain damage, or by genetic factors. Children experience their own particular form of oppression when seen only in terms of their potential. The impairment of emotional development can be caused by various developmental issues, often related to how a person was treated themselves as a child. If the goal of human life in God were to be understood in terms of individual maturity this would exclude such people. Hauerwas has particularly argued for the place of the mentally handicapped within the church, and his arguments apply equally to others who might otherwise be excluded. From his fundamentally communal understanding of faithful living,

Hauerwas argues that it is how the church relates together which demonstrates and is the social ethic.⁴⁸⁶

Conclusion

Late modernity demands many choices of individuals. Through its structures the light hegemony Bauman describes is imposed.⁴⁸⁷ Social constraint has been restructured in the late modern age, so rather than issuing from face to face relationships, where expectations might be expressed and used to control within neighbourhoods, constraint is felt through socially constructed forms of identity and individual choice which cannot be avoided. Heavier hegemonies of the past, which took their power, through class structures and economic control of the means of production, have been replaced by the light hegemony which gives individuals an illusion of fuller freedom, even while constraining them in and through the mechanisms of choice. For the church this represents a shift from being part of the older hegemonies, to a new location outside of the primary structures of social control.

In this situation all kinds of hybrids are arising. They arise because we live in a multi-cultural, inter-cultural, globalised nation. Hybridity can be a response to hegemony. In response to the light hegemony of individualization hybrids arise because people are ambivalent about the world they live in; sometimes enjoying autonomous freedoms and opportunities for self-development, while for many those same freedoms come at great cost. Desire for something more, something different, arises; desire for ways of finding the support and help needed to live this individualized life. Such support is found in various ways: through expert systems, through a return to community, and through a rediscovery of the spiritual in the re-enchantment of the world.

⁴⁸⁶ Hauerwas, 'Gesture of a truthful story', in *Christian Formation*, Astley et al., 97.

⁴⁸⁷ Bauman, *Individualized Society*, 11–12, 23 ff., 114 ff.

Living hopefully with ambivalence is not the most straightforward way of life. It is, however, one which has the potential to be liberative. Christian theology, as a discipline which begins from holding in tension, or in balance, paradoxes and ambivalences, offers resources for such liberation. It brings a critique of individualized freedom, but also recognition of its place and value. This is in itself an ambivalent view, but a view which can be seen to offer a possible way of living hopefully with ambivalence. It is a view founded on a basis of utter dependence on God, where freedom can only be constrained, and which connects that dependence on God to human interdependence. The place found for freedom is as a gift from God, and as a way of establishing a sense of human maturity. In a way this view of freedom chimes in part with (one side of) the ambivalence of individualization. Insofar as freedom becomes a weight which some sustain only with a struggle or not at all, the idea of freedom within a structure of (inter-)dependence can become a supportive resource for living with the problems of individualization.

CHAPTER 7

FAITH IN INDIVIDUALIZED NEIGHBOURHOODS

I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious Ambiguity.

Gilda Radner⁴⁸⁸

As we have seen, ambiguity is itself received with ambivalence. Those places in between one thing and another, one meaning and another, can even be found 'delicious', but Gilda Radner's experience is one among many. Such lives are revealed by individualization to be risk-laden and precarious. Sometimes, for many, that risk tips over into the certainty of financial hardship or social isolation. The last few years, with the collapse of banks and the credit

⁴⁸⁸ Quoted in many places on the internet including: Jeremy Abbett, 'Delicious Ambiguity', Hybrid Culture (the blog of Jeremy Abbett), entry posted August 12th 2009, <http://www.suture.com/page/4/> (accessed 27th July 2011).

crunch, have demonstrated just how precarious the freedoms of individualization leave both people and neighbourhoods. Local populations are left vulnerable to the effects of globalization.

As a discipline theology does not provide absolute answers; by its very nature it is tentative and provisional; it works always with a measure of ambiguity and uncertainty. However, while theology can never fully replace the lost clarity, shared meanings, and solidarity explored in chapter 5, it does offer a different understanding of freedom. That understanding can be a powerful resource, much better positioned to equip people for the *precarité* and risk of late modern living, and one way in which that freedom can be given concrete shape is through a stronger focus on neighbourhoods. That focus cannot be unambiguous, as the nature of the hybrid freedom explored above should indicate, and yet it offers a vision which mitigates the challenges of individualized freedom, and the possibility of weakening the centripetal vectors which throw people outwards from local places. Perhaps, further than that, there are ways in which it can equip local churches to create Third spaces founded through the practice of such shared freedoms, drawing on the positive side of ambivalent experiences. It is possible to live hopefully with ambivalence.

This is at least part of what Christopher Baker's proposals about hybrid church amount to. Within a neighbourhood church, whatever its context—urban, rural, or somewhere in between—such third space will both accept elements of individualization and also challenge its role within the new hegemony. Principally, the understanding of Christian liberty becomes a crucial tool in delineating such third spaces, offering a different kind of freedom, a resource which is far better placed to support people in the face of the slide from risk into poverty and need.

Each of the other three alternative directions for the church introduced in chapter 4 (counter-cultural, network, and liquid) also makes a contribution to the picture which emerges. They describe aspects of late modernity, and how the church might relate to those aspects. In the context of on-going social change this is all tentative. Are these suggested directions becoming part of a 'constellation of shared commitments' which make up a new paradigm? The sections below explore how this might be the case, and how they might relate to hybridity. These are not offered as definite 'expressions' of church, or even as models of church (although such models and expressions are being generated). Rather, they are used here as models of the congregation in its local context, tracing out possible ways that relationship can be influenced and shaped. The Christian understanding of freedom provides a theological resource for churches in such contexts, and how it might contribute to more resilient neighbourhoods is considered in each section.

7.1 The Hybrid Paradigm: Facing the Consequences of Social Change for the Church

A change from the neighbourhood paradigm to a way of thinking which looks not so much for stable models but changing liquid patterns and hybrid contexts will shape churches' relationship to neighbourhood within late modernity in many different ways. It is possible that the shared commitments of a new paradigm could form around hybridity, and be resourced by a Christian understanding of shared freedoms. In developing such a pattern, it would be important for the discourse of churches to allow for the variety of contexts. In addition, because of the rapid nature of social change, and the potential for other changes through the impact of globalization including the impact of environmental and climate change, the nature of any new paradigm will be tentative. Yet, a truly hybrid understanding, will also lead to a paradigm which has the potential to be flexible and resilient.

Bauman's rather negative language about a set of concepts which have been linked to hybridity in the last chapter indicate this. It can involve 'undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity, confusion, undecidability, ambivalence.'⁴⁸⁹ This negative side is why a counter-balance is needed to a purely individualized vision. Such a paradigm would need to draw on theological resources, such as those of Christian freedom. Similarly, what Bhabha variously describes as 'interstitial', a 'time lag', 'elision', or 'Third Space' can describe a process of giving way to power or of seeking assimilation. The same theological resources will contribute to it becoming instead a space of resistance to overweening power.

The different contribution of two of the models will each develop the positive and negative aspects of the ambivalent, hybrid situation. Drawing on the ideas of a network model can build on the more positive aspects; the counter-cultural model can demonstrate some of the potential limitations, and the need for those hybrid theological resources. Before moving on to these other models and their potential contribution to such a paradigm, consider the way this paradigm needs to develop with regard to local places. Initially the kind of response it offers falls, hybrid-like, between two others.

First, the church could respond through a reassertion of neighbourhood as a significant arena of human life. This response would ask that we do all we can to strengthen and hold on to it as a locus for community, especially in areas of deprivation. It would also look to the needs of particular groups of people for whom neighbourhood remains more significant. Church ministry would respond especially to the needs of those who are less mobile, including the elderly infirm, young children, and anyone without ready access to transport.

⁴⁸⁹ Bauman, *Ambivalence*, 7.

While recognising that this might be an appropriate response in some contexts, it cannot be maintained in an unalloyed form. The experience of ambivalence is strong, and in many neighbourhoods people make their choices to relate within a bigger and more complex world in which they feel liberated by the range of possibilities which their mobility offers them. That doesn't mean their local neighbourhood ceases to matter to them, but it does mean that other possibilities relegate neighbourhood to a subsidiary interest. Where this pattern of ministry is used it will occasionally work for a whole neighbourhood, but often will only appeal to a fragmentary part. As a pattern it will remain as a primary concern for particular kinds of places: particularly those where both deprivation and poor access beyond the neighbourhood are simultaneously present. In many places it also appeals mainly to the older part of the population, accentuating the demographic which already makes many church congregations proportionately older than the general population. At the same time churches in such settings will need to be very careful to take seriously the kinds of ambivalence found in all places and contexts.

Second, the church might respond through an abandonment of neighbourhood. By affirming the importance of networks, and recognising that community can be focussed as easily there, churches might feel that they have found a new set of contexts in which they can become embedded. Here the values of Christian freedom explored above find their expression alongside those of individualization. Network churches, centring on particular cultural, generational or interest groups, will build Christian community from that focus, sometimes across wide regional areas, and sometimes through virtual connections. This option more comfortably deals with ambivalence, as it responds to people's needs for rootedness through dispersed community. What once was found within neighbourhoods now is found in networks.

However, significant questions will be asked of churches making this response. First, if Christian maturity and liberty—the fullness of life in Christ—are truly to be found through open and inclusive groups, then networks which are more closed and homogeneous will risk failing to model such values. How will these networks open themselves beyond their immediate limiting culture or interest? Second, even if they turn from neighbourhoods to networks, such churches still need to acknowledge people’s many connections. An overly narrow focus on a particular network will have the same weaknesses as the old style neighbourhood paradigm, failing to acknowledge the multiple facets of human lives. How will they relate to these varied lives which stretch in all kinds of ways beyond the network to which they most immediately relate? A third question is similar: neighbourhood churches are challenged by the way commitments are held only so long as they fit into the complexity of people’s individualized lives. The same applies to network churches; how will they take account of commitments made for the time being only? A fourth question can be raised only as an issue of possible future significance: how do such network churches take seriously some of the social changes yet to come? There are possibilities of approaching changes resulting from climate change, and a shift from our oil-based economy. Looking ahead some have suggested that this may lead to a movement of relocalisation, and churches based on wider networks will need to maintain an openness to such changes.

These two options perhaps sketch out part of the ‘mixed economy’.⁴⁹⁰ Rather than being a straightforward mixture of ‘inherited’ models of church and ‘fresh expressions’, Baker’s development of hybridity offers a way of developing more fully what such a mixed economy would be. This will not be limited to categories of gathered and local, neighbour-

⁴⁹⁰ A phrase apparently first used by Rowan Williams; see Steve Croft, ‘What Counts as a Fresh Expression of Church?’ in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church*, eds., Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), 5.

hood and network. Every church, whatever model it uses, will exist and function within a hybrid situation, and will need to function as a hybrid church. For many churches, which still maintain some neighbourhood foundation, neither of the two options so far outlined will be possible. They will be left to work with ambivalence in neighbourhoods. For them boundaries will be blurred, and encounters with hybrid types frequent. All the messiness of the various ways people relate to the places where they live and the networks of their lives will be part of their context. Ministry in such situations demands flexibility, openness, and an awareness of our own hybridity. Such churches will themselves be hybrids: relating to neighbourhoods and to networks.

However these possibilities are followed through churches will need to work with the complex nature of the freedoms for which people strive. Such ambivalent freedoms lead to precarious lives and the experience of ontological insecurity. As people are constantly thrown back on their own resources, churches which respond to this by offering an alternative understanding of freedom hold out a resource which has the potential to be transformative. In the face of the challenges of global change impacting on local places, the hybrid freedom of Christian faith offers a life-line. Freedom for others experienced through connectedness, does not need to rule out personal autonomy, but raises the question of how that autonomy should be used. The freedom of entering into a sense of vocation does not need to rule out the possibilities of self-development, but places such self-development into a wider context. Both hybrid freedoms hold out the possibility of a new collectivity, and a foundation for finding support in a precarious global world.

7.2 Hybrids of Networks and Neighbourhoods

Building particularly on the work of Castells, *Mission-Shaped Church* underlined the significance of networks for the contemporary church. While MSC does not quite propose what

could be construed as a network paradigm (which might imply that network churches become the primary model of church) it does place considerable emphasis on the development of a network society in shaping ecclesial responses. However, while the development of network society is important it should be set alongside other processes of social change, including individualization and globalization. The hybrid paradigm can incorporate networks as components of social hybrids. This incorporation also involves neighbourhoods, as both neighbourhoods and networks find a place within the same social hybrids. The analysis of neighbourhood offered in chapter 3, and the experience of the site team in Bowburn, both provide evidence of this as the village shifted away from being a homogeneous mining community towards being a heterogeneous dormitory village. The variety of experiences and responses to neighbourhood mentioned in chapter 4 similarly sketch out the hybrid nature of the neighbourhood. Networks are affected by hybridity just as profoundly as neighbourhoods, just not in the same way.

Consider the manner in which people's lives are lived in hybrid ways. Three elements of this hybridity can be identified: the local or neighbourhood, dispersed networks, and virtual networks. For many individuals the first two of these are the most significant, with dispersed networks probably forming the largest part of their lives, but virtual connections are becoming increasingly significant. These different spaces of people's lives mean their identities are being shaped in hybrid ways both between local places and wider networks, and between real and virtual space.⁴⁹¹ While the social focus has shifted away from the local, for many groups their hybrid existence continues to involve a local element, sometimes a strong

⁴⁹¹ See Human Organization: the Journal of the Society for Applied Anthropology, v. 68, no. 2; article by Jordan p. 181. ff. and following papers

local element. In place of 'neighbourhood community' new categories are opened which increasingly means hybrid lives and communities with network and virtual elements.

Such hybrid lives and groupings retain elements of locality in varying degrees and the neighbourhood forms one part of a skein of connections which comprise people's hybrid lives. This gives a rather different picture of neighbourhood from Bauman's 'loose bunches of untied ends.'⁴⁹² Rather than viewing neighbourhood as having to be the prime site of social connection, and therefore failing, it can be viewed as one point of connection, one network, among a number for many individuals.

As noted in chapter 3 neighbourhood is more important to some than others. The extent to which it is significant in anyone's particular hybrid makeup depends in varying degrees on factors such as economic necessity, family circumstances, physical mobility and personal choice. The strength of different aspects of this hybridity can also be determined to some degree by faith commitments. Through a sense of vocation to a place, or to discipleship within a particular place, individuals sometimes make a commitment to neighbourhood structures and relationships. Yet, adding complexity, this sense of Christian vocation is itself hybrid, made up of different and equally significant callings. These various callings take shape through employment, family, voluntary work, and neighbourhood, as well as through the church. At times some of these will connect and support each other; at other times they will conflict. This needs to be understood as part of a hybrid life, which involves some aspects which mutually strengthen each other and others which work against each other. So family connections might both strengthen a neighbourhood vocation, maybe when a young child is

⁴⁹² Bauman, *Globalization*, 24.

attending a local playgroup or school, and weaken it, for example when visits to a dispersed family take people away.

The institutional life of churches is affected in similar ways (as is perhaps the life of other groups which connect to greater or lesser extent with neighbourhoods). This is demonstrated through the way that contemporary thinking about forms of church reveals ambivalence over the significance of neighbourhood. Examples of this can be drawn from some of the publications explored in chapters 3 and 4. For example, *Mission-Shaped Church* argues strongly for taking seriously the networks which give shape to people's lives, yet at the same time cannot leave the neighbourhood behind. This is perhaps most noticeable in the varieties of fresh expressions of church detailed in chapter 4 of MSC. While some of these are clearly moving away from neighbourhood (those specifically described as network churches for example) others are very dependent on being part of a neighbourhood. This is most clearly the case with 'base ecclesial communities', 'churches arising out of community initiatives', and 'school-based and school-linked congregations and churches'.⁴⁹³

The 'mixed economy' therefore becomes more complex. In MSC it was interpreted as a mixture of local (parish) churches and a variety of fresh expressions of church, many of them network churches. Taking a hybrid paradigm into account the mixed economy is also a complex hybrid economy, with many ways for churches to relate to the diverse connections of people's lives. Neighbourhood churches (many parish churches among them) retaining their focus on a small geographical area will also increasingly find themselves relating to networks which penetrate their neighbourhood. They will need to acknowledge that the neighbourhood includes not only residents, with a variety of rootedness in the place, but also

⁴⁹³ MSC, 47–49, 57–59, 67–69.

people who have family connections and have moved away, some who are just passing through, and others who come occasionally to make use of neighbourhood facilities. There will be many different possibilities for working out this kind of hybridity; different styles by which churches based in neighbourhoods could work out their hybrid mission and ministry, partly dependent on context. Several sketches can indicate kinds of relationships and pathways which churches in such settings might follow.

As one focus churches might consider the idea of neighbourhood as a point of return. Neighbourhoods are not necessarily places where people engage for long periods of each day, but they are a base and a stopping point in busy lives. Part of the modern relationship with neighbourhood is as a place from which lives spill out. They are a point of rest and recreation, or at the very least a place to sleep. One might say lives are stretched from this place.⁴⁹⁴ Neighbourhoods are therefore one perspective from which lives can be understood, but one which cannot stand alone because people's lives are not contained by the neighbourhood to which they regularly return. Neighbourhood ministry shaped by this understanding might consider its presence in terms both of convenience, a bit like a local corner shop, seeing as its aims the equipping of people for lives which extend continually beyond the neighbourhood and providing convenient local resources. The Methodist chapel in Bowburn was acting in just this kind of mode through its parent and toddler group. Its location near local schools provided a convenient resource to which parents brought their younger children for one morning a week. The connections created sometimes led on to baptisms, and other further relationships. The main point of this mode of ministry is that the church fits in to that part of people's hybrid lives which focuses on the neighbourhood.

⁴⁹⁴ Giddens, *Consequences*, 14 and 64 among other places.

Another focus is on neighbourhood as a passing place, or meeting place; a place where people connect but only in limited ways, where the depths of relationships and commitment are often shallow. In this case the stretched nature of lives is seen in the relatively little time people have to put into relationships within the neighbourhood. How can neighbourhood ministry offer the possibility of encounter with God, through other people or through a holy place, despite the transient or shallow connections which may be experienced? Neighbourhood can be explored as a passing place where people encounter God, but only transiently. Here the church needs to find ways of representing God to people who are in the world, but through brief and limited encounters. The chapel in Bowburn sometimes found itself host to baptismal families who lived some distance away, but where the parents had grown up in the village. Their family connections brought them briefly back to the place for one event. Another village church near Durham hosts a carol service for those who bring their children to a nursery across the road, although hardly any of those parents live in the village. Neither of these examples is likely to lead to long term commitment to a local church by the participants, but in responding to such opportunities a neighbourhood church can acknowledge the complexity of people's lives, at the same time as representing the wider universal church for those who briefly come into contact with it.

A third sketch might focus on that aspect of neighbourhood which is about symbolic and emotional ties. Here neighbourhood becomes a point of connection with people's personal histories, and a point of significance that roots them into aspects of their identity. While social relations are stretched by the range of different locations and situations in which people function, significant events can ground that life in particular places. Neighbourhood ministry can be well placed to engage with such experiences, at points where people's lives cross from one stage to another, or from one experience to another. Most obviously this can

happen through engagement with rites of passage through occasional offices. For example, a memorial service held in Bowburn for families who had been bereaved in the last year provoked much interest and a significant congregation. In addition it could be through working with children in cross-generational activities, or events focusing on remembrance and local history. A church in a neighbourhood can provide a place where memory, anticipation, and growth are appreciated.

7.3 Hybrids of Values and Freedoms

Against these relatively positive examples it must also be acknowledged that hybridity involves dissonance, where there is a mismatch between competing desires and needs. Because it is part of the pattern of ambivalence contested situations can be expected in all hybrids, and we can expect different parts of hybrid lives to rub up against each other. It can emerge in various ways as contested claims within neighbourhoods, churches, families, or even within individuals.

At the individual level mixed feelings and mixed loyalties can lead to internal conflict in which different aspects of life—commitments to networks or choices about connections—compete with each other. For individuals, managing the boundaries between the different locations in which they live may be problematic; friction can be experienced between differing demands from family, work, and various networks. Questions are raised about the boundaries between the meaningful and the mundane: where is meaning found in life and what is to be given priority? Personal and institutional perspectives can also conflict, where the culture and expectation of institutions make demands on people which leave them feeling that they have less time for other aspects of their life. Examples of this would include both employment, illustrated by contemporary concerns with ‘work-life balance’, and the church which sometimes places heavy demands on both paid and voluntary workers.

Paul Hoggett comments on how ‘each neighbourhood is a site for a multitude of networks, interests and identities which help determine how people see the place where they live. What comes across, even from the strongly working-class neighbourhoods, is the heterogeneity and complexity of communities.’ He goes on to comment on ‘the importance of sentiments and emotions in community life’; yet these sentiments and emotions are shaped in negative ways. After commenting on the evidence of fear in two case studies, he continues: ‘Anger, jealousy, pride and longing also fuel the process of boundary construction which distinguishes insiders from outsiders, those who can be trusted from those who can not.’⁴⁹⁵ Others find community contested along lines defined by criminal behaviour, gender, both youth and age, and by attitudes to government intervention. For example, as Brent writes about Southmead in Bristol he describes it as ‘split off as a disreputable community from outside, by those who construct themselves as safe and respectable’, and then he goes on: ‘But this splitting continues inside. There are streets thought of as reputable, and streets powerfully imagined as low, within Southmead. And what is most striking...is how widely young people have the weight of disreputableness loaded onto them.’⁴⁹⁶ Another example would be how McCulloch writes of the very different ways in which women and men relate to community activity within the neighbourhood of Cruddas Park, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Most community activists here are women, and ‘for these groups of women being a friend was also being a neighbour and a member of a community... ...for the activist men...friendship and community/neighbourhood relationships...seemed to be distinctly different sets of activities.’⁴⁹⁷ He goes on to reflect on how what had traditionally been a part of a ‘generalised altruistic’ approach by women in working class culture, had been contested by working class men’s expect-

⁴⁹⁵ Paul Hoggett, ed., *Contested Communities: Experiences, struggles, policies* (Bristol: Policy Press, 1997), 15.

⁴⁹⁶ Jeremy Brent, ‘Community without Unity’, in Hoggett, *Contested Communities*, 78.

⁴⁹⁷ Andrew McCulloch, “‘You’ve fucked up the estate and now you’re carrying a briefcase!’”, in Hoggett, *Contested Communities*, 61.

tations of employment and payment. ‘Payment for community activity excited jealousy in Cruddas Park because although it facilitated them in the short term, it corroded these non-market exchanges in the long term.’⁴⁹⁸

Within such a mix the church can play a variety of roles, and one which is sometimes positive but at others negative. Here the issue of a counter-cultural understanding of church becomes significant. It is open to question whether a self-understanding which sets ‘the church’ over against ‘the world’ can contribute helpfully within contested communities. The report *Faithful Cities* contends that ‘Religious faith is by no means always a reasonable and liberal set of values which engender good citizenship and social cohesion.’⁴⁹⁹ In its chapter on diversity and difference it goes on to refer to the rise of ‘furious religion’ as a ‘retreat into certainty [which] can be read as a particular expression of the wider cultural uncertainty and anxiety and the search for a “safe haven”’ and the failure of faith communities ‘to challenge the forces which attack diversity’.⁵⁰⁰ This kind of ecclesial response is one which pursues a view of the characteristic nature of Christian faith to strengthen a Christian community in distinction from all others around it; in the language of social capital, to develop bonding but not bridging social capital. *Faithful Cities* goes on to offer evidence of positive responses in which churches contributed to the growth of what the report calls ‘faithful capital’, social capital which derives from faith values.

This raises the question of the way in which the counter-cultural might interact with a hybrid paradigm. Baker sees hybrid church as essentially involving partnership. Its nature is to seek the bridges between religious faith communities and others who share similar concerns. In distinction from churches which ‘retreat into certainty’, cutting themselves off

⁴⁹⁸ McCulloch, in Hoggett, *Contested Communities*, 64.

⁴⁹⁹ *Faithful Cities*, 13.

⁵⁰⁰ *Faithful Cities*, 22–23.

from broader connections, hybrid churches will work to develop bridging social capital. This is not to say that hybrid churches are not grounded in distinctively Christian values. Baker argues for ‘a measure of explicit identification of the values and motivations that churches and other faith groups bring (that is, their faith)’. On the other hand this comes with ‘the responsibility of listening to and respecting the values and identities other partners bring to the table’.⁵⁰¹ As seen in the exploration of hybrid church in chapter 4 there is a balance to be maintained between values which are held and expressed implicitly and explicitly.

A judgment between these two directions which counter-culturalism might take will depend on the kind of theology which shapes a church’s self-understanding. This is one place where the theology of freedom set out in the last chapter comes into its own. Such theology can provide a resource for living hopefully within such ambivalent and hybrid places, while other theologies might encourage a privatised faith, or a church community which focuses on social capital which bonds within the group rather than bridging beyond it, or ‘furious religion’. Positive models and the example of other churches (through alternative expressions of church) are a beginning; but the contested nature of hybrid spaces means that more is needed. Theology can undergird a self-understanding which promotes an open but discerning approach to partners and neighbours.

First, the theology of freedom promotes connection and relationship. Where human maturity is understood as moving towards autonomy it promotes separation and atomisation. A theology of freedom which instead promotes connection, without rejecting autonomy, works in a hybrid space which blends or balances autonomy and connectedness. Where the light hegemony of individualization insists on individual autonomy such a theology provides

⁵⁰¹ Baker, *Hybrid Church*, 129.

an alternative response to that of furious religion, or patterns in which certainty is sought through a considerable surrender of autonomy. Such head-on approaches lead to conflict between the secular individualized aspects of neighbourhood and faith groups. On the other hand a theology which seeks to create a hybrid space provides a way of working within the structures of individualization without wholly succumbing to its insistence. It includes both a counter-cultural element, reacting against individualization, and an inculturised element, moving within the individualized world.

As part of this hybrid the place of autonomy remains significant and important. Where forms of individualization draw out clustered responses, shaping tribal groupings and sub-cultures, a hybrid theology of freedom questions such groupings. Are these default options, the response of people who are ill-equipped to deal with individualized choice, or are they genuine expressions of autonomy and individuality?⁵⁰² To what extent do they involve and encourage connection? This theology asks why autonomy under God should not provide a path towards autonomy from peer pressure, from socially constructed expectations, and from individualization, where those become a source of constraint or compulsion more than a route to freedom. It provides a resource for questioning the way individualization takes shape around groupings and to consider the extent to which the choices involved are genuine.

The promotion of both connectedness and autonomy as a model of maturity means that churches working with such theological presumptions within contested communities, whether localised or dispersed, will not turn away. It will be expected that communities are contested. Groups seeking to assert their own perspective and their own autonomy need to be listened to and heeded. At the same time the resolution of conflict and the reconciliation of

⁵⁰² Cosmo Howard, ed., *Contested Individualization*, 14.

different groups will be a primary aim, even where the context might be one which calls the neighbourhood into question. Hybrid churches will honour what is hybrid and seek to promote the different components of the meld. It will recognise and work with the factors which draw people away from neighbourhood as much as with those which draw people back to them.

The theology of freedom is also a theology of development, which leads to expectations of growth and change. Communities will not be expected to be finished and complete. The imperfect contested places of people's lives are precisely those in which growth and development can occur. If the values on which such growth are built are placed solely in individual development then self-development will be seen in terms of individualized life courses, structured largely without reference to others, and will further promote atomisation. Perhaps churches are more likely to adopt to and assimilate this aspect of individualization, and less likely to respond against it, as it can lead to very positive outcomes for individuals. Educational programmes such as Alpha offer ways of constructing Christian personal biographies; while one to one pastoral care can be directed to supporting individuals in the difficulties of living an individualized life. However, a theology of Christian development should surely demand that such programmes must press beyond what is focused purely on the 'self' into the third space which calls individuals to aspects of vocation which lead their personal biographies back to the communal. To do that such approaches to education and development need to be given communal expression from the start.

Again, the two aspects of a hybrid freedom need to be held together. Here the hybridity is found between the self-development of individualization and universal vocation. The development of individual lives offers a significant freedom. It is important to remember that, while including formal educational settings, that provides only part of the context of in-

dividualized self-development. Identity construction and consumption, choices made about politics, clothes, style, music, and so on, are all part of the constructed biography and the meaning making of the individual life. In the context of Christian theology such choices, construction and consumption take place within the framework of vocation.

As was noted above, part of the effect of individualization is to awaken awareness of conflicts between different parts of a person's perceived vocation. Within individualization what was a given becomes subject to choice. There is an apparent movement from constraint to choice. However, such choices are not necessarily genuine, and often prove more burdensome than truly liberative. Vocation, on the other hand, takes shape around a sense that there remain givens in life, and seeks to work within those givens. It begins with constraint, but moves towards a form of freedom shaped by connectedness, mutuality and relationship. Where it works well for people this hybrid can open up the possibilities of a true liberation, discovered through the living out of freedom for others, and leading towards a fuller maturity. Part of its hybrid nature is also that the vocation is not experienced as imposed, but as something which is more like a gift, and therefore which brings some of the characteristics of choice to it. This inner tension between what is a given and what is chosen cannot be disposed of, but is at the heart of this hybrid freedom.

These freedoms move out of the individual sphere into what is shared. They are themselves hybrid entities bringing together two different understandings of maturity: autonomous and related; and bringing together two different understandings of development: self-development and vocation. Each of these hybrid freedoms contributes to a patterning of the social world which points towards individuals connecting, and different parties and groups seeking co-operative ways forward. They belong both in the individualized world and in communal space, hybrids which are naturally inhabited at both an individual and a communal

level, and they offer the possibility of finding a balance between the two. They point the church outwards into relationship with others in the individualized world around them.

Baker's examples of hybrid church demonstrate this through the principle of partnership. Where Christian community is inclusive, the possibilities for partnership open up, making connections between self-development and community development. Hybrid churches will be those which seek to take their understanding of self-development and vocation across the boundaries of church into the neighbourhood (or into networks and virtual communities). Neither will such a process close down interests around neighbourhood boundaries. Those who occupy such hybrid spaces will look beyond boundaries, encouraging neighbourhoods to work with other neighbourhoods and with both virtual and extended networks where there is common cause for human development and growth.

Once again, these theological resources of Christian freedom are available in the face of global challenges and changes. They have the capacity to promote the kind of local resilience which can equip people and places in ways which are not offered by individualized freedom.

7.4 The Hybrid Paradigm and Liquidity

Liquid modernity is constantly changing, and any movement or institution which is to relate to such a world must find ways of adapting to those changing conditions. Again, the furious religion which builds emphatically solid walls might be one way in which religious groups deal with the situation. Ward also identifies aspects of solid church which cluster around heritage, refuge and nostalgia, setting up bulwarks against a changing world.⁵⁰³ As an alternative, a hybrid church itself has liquid qualities. Moving between neighbourhoods and net-

⁵⁰³ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 26–29.

works, founded on freedoms which are directed to both individuals and connected social groups, such churches will be better equipped for change.

Ward suggests that this can be done through adoption of patterns which are based on consumer culture, and yet, what appears first as an adoption of consumerist motifs and possibly as assimilation to consumerist culture, can be interpreted as the definition of a third space which allows liquid churches to challenge that part of the hegemony which is expressed through consumerism. In chapter 4 we noted that, while Bauman is a key writer for Ward, as he recapitulates the motif of liquidity Ward moves away strongly from the pessimism about consumerism which Bauman expresses. The move beyond 'needs' is interpreted as a shift towards a search for the meaning behind products. 'To shop is to seek for something beyond ourselves.'⁵⁰⁴ He quotes Twitchell who, he says, 'argues that the problem is not that we are materialist but that we are not materialist enough!', and consumption 'is based on the exchange and enjoyment of "meanings." The role of advertising is to add value to objects by investing them with meaning.'⁵⁰⁵ This is related to 'who we are in the world', and consumer objects 'locate me in relation to my friends and neighbors.' Ward quotes both Twitchell and Lyon as finding in this 'a kind of salvation' and sees this therefore as 'an alternative source of meaning to the traditional Christian gospel'.⁵⁰⁶

Ward argues in various ways for the shaping of liquid church based on the idea of added value taken from consumerism. This move can be approached in two ways. First, in another book he suggests the creation of a hybrid third space as something which is important to the shaping of liquid church. Second, to question whether he goes far enough in recognising the real ambivalence involved in tangling with consumerism. It may be that Bauman is

⁵⁰⁴ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 59.

⁵⁰⁵ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 59–60.

⁵⁰⁶ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 60.

overly pessimistic, but it could equally be argued that Ward and those with whom he engages are overly optimistic, and forget ways that consumerism excludes, divides and privileges.

In his book on practical theology Ward uses the image of waters being ‘muddied’. Here he develops in greater depth the idea of faith as ‘consumption’ and connects with the themes of hybridity and ambivalence. As he writes of religious faith and culture being mediated through ‘things’ (the objects of consumption) he says that ‘liquid church, in its fluid affirmation of meaning in relation to things, muddies the waters.’⁵⁰⁷ He goes on to explore what this muddying of waters means. The faith of the church, which is necessarily mediated through some culture or other, ‘is extended and becomes more fluid’ through its mediation by *consumer* culture. ‘Consumer culture is not necessarily corrosive, it is simply a muddied flow of the helpful and the unhelpful. It is a place where epiphany and attention coexist with a veiling and concealing of the divine light.’⁵⁰⁸

Ward goes on to develop from this an understanding of the relationship between contemporary faith in the western world and the ‘culture industry’, which culminates in a consideration of ‘The Practice of Everyday Life’. This section takes its title from the book by de Certeau⁵⁰⁹ and explores the role of consumers in the composition of culture, with de Certeau perceiving a far more active role for consumers, rather than as passive recipients of what the culture industry delivers. ‘It is not possible to understand representation simply by describing the intent of its makers, rather the cultural theorist must analyse the way that people use cultural artefacts.’⁵¹⁰ This use of artefacts is a positive ‘production’, ‘a kind of *poiesis* (poetic

⁵⁰⁷ Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 149.

⁵⁰⁸ Ward, *Participation*, 150–151.

⁵⁰⁹ M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendell, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁵¹⁰ Ward, *Participation*, 162.

making)’. Ward explores this through an example of a response to colonisation, in which Christian culture was imposed on indigenous people in Latin America, and sought to assimilate them. They ‘were not strong enough to challenge the power of the Spanish but they turned this power nevertheless and they escaped without leaving’.⁵¹¹ While the example is not as strongly expressed here as in Bhabha’s work, the connection with hybrid strategies is clear, and Ward goes on to quote de Certeau’s assertion that as a result of such activity by marginalised groups

popular culture emerges as a series of “arts of making” based around the use and combination of different modes of consumption. These are “poetic ways of making do”. This kind of subcultural activity is no longer experienced around the edges of society, all popular culture works in this way.⁵¹²

So ‘marginality is becoming universal.’⁵¹³ Ward backs this up with reference to the work of John Fiske⁵¹⁴ and comments that ‘For both writers agency is a kind of resistance but it is a resistance within a fragmented and de-centred field of power.’⁵¹⁵ This kind of hybridity seems to be what Ward is negotiating in *Liquid Church*, and it demonstrates the close connection between Ward’s understanding of liquid church and the model of hybrid church developed by Baker.

Ward refers back to Bauman’s description of the move from need to desire in a chapter about ‘Desire for God’.⁵¹⁶ It is noticeable that he does not mention in his account the further shift which Bauman describes from desire to wish, a step which completes the detachment from reality which Bauman sees in ‘addictive consumerism’.⁵¹⁷ Yet perhaps he is

⁵¹¹ Ward, *Participation*, 162.

⁵¹² Ward, *Participation*, 163.

⁵¹³ De Certeau, *Practice*, xvii, quoted in Ward, *Participation*, 163.

⁵¹⁴ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁵¹⁵ Ward, *Participation*, 165.

⁵¹⁶ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 73.

⁵¹⁷ Harvie Ferguson, ‘Watching the world go round: Atrium culture and the psychology of shopping’, in *Lifestyle Shopping: The Subject of Consumption*, ed. Rob Shields (London: Routledge, 1992), 31, quoted in Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 76.

right to alight on desire as the focus for liquid church. Perhaps this can be construed as a further facet of hybridity, found this time between need and wish; although even that step for the poorest of the world is a move away from what is most fundamentally needed and cannot be described as just. The difficulty lies in the different ways in which social classes are able to interact with consumerism. Bauman sees it as benefitting a wealthy elite, providing an acceptable if precarious existence for the majority within Western nations, but offering the poorest choices which are beyond their reach, tantalising but ungraspable. There is undoubtedly the possibility of poorer people constructing identity in ways which allow them to be active in shaping their interactions with consumer culture; Fiske and de Certeau particularly describe these strategies of popular culture. There are also those options which are taken as 'off the peg', cheaper alternatives for those who would prefer to be part of a crowd. But what remains behind this is that consumerism, and the power to buy and spend (in other words wealth), remains the driving force behind structures of privilege and inequality.

The challenge for churches in negotiating the space between the individualized, consumerist world and Gospel values is great. On the whole Baker's account of urban churches working within demanding urban areas seems more convincing than Ward's, which relies so much on a more positive take on consumerism. Ward's liquid church seems to offer possibilities for those who have enough money to engage more fully with consumer culture. However, the connection between them is strengthened by Ward's later work, as it draws on de Certeau and Fiske, who articulate those ways in which popular culture is produced. This is a Third space manoeuvre, in which the meanings generated by hegemonic power are both evaded and reworked. More work is needed to articulate the ways in which the church might learn from popular culture and incorporate as equals those who are excluded by poverty. Alongside this there is a need for a self-understanding of church which seeks a space between

the choices of self-development and vocation, recognising the problems of using consumer choice as a sole category.

At first sight the notion of neighbourhood finds no place within Ward's liquid church. The local is an aspect of solid church with its emphasis on congregation, 'the tendency to emphasize one central meeting'⁵¹⁸. Yet, while locality is not given a central or focal role, it does not disappear. For example, within the context of his analysis of networks Ward describes how liquid church is firmly connected to Castells understanding of networks, with networks and flows being interconnected concepts. 'A church that is liquid will be shaped by a series of flows. The flows represent a myriad of moving and changing connections, that is, a kind of network.'⁵¹⁹ However, 'The "processes" of communication rather than the structure of the network determine its character.'⁵²⁰ Yet, even though this is set out as the fundamental principle of liquid church, almost immediately Ward mentions the local as a place which connects with networks: 'In the local church...there are examples of networks. When we look closely at these networks we can see that they have come about because they enable certain kinds of communication and Christian activity.'⁵²¹ In a different example in *Participation and Mediation* Ward explores the role of Christian culture industries. These, he says, 'extend the local expression of the Church through mediation, but they do not replace the local Christian community. The mediated nature of the contemporary worship scene is produced within the context of local worshipping communities.'⁵²²

Neighbourhood church then needs to be seen as existing within the flows and networks of liquid church, and finding a place for itself through the hybridity we have already

⁵¹⁸ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 17.

⁵¹⁹ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 41.

⁵²⁰ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 43.

⁵²¹ Ward, *Liquid Church*, 43.

⁵²² Ward, *Participation*, 154.

explored. There are many nodes for the liquid church. Provided that neighbourhood churches do not try to claim too much for themselves, they continue to function as nodes within the liquid network. If they work from an understanding of neighbourhood as hybrid space, that will equip churches for precisely this kind of setting and role. Local communities aware of their hybridity and formed around hybrid values of freedom, which recognise both their own liquid nature and that of the lives around them, will be more robust and resilient to face social change.

CONCLUSION: ADVOCATING NEIGHBOURHOODS

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that neighbourhood continues to have a role to play in people's lives, but to demonstrate how that role has changed. Whereas once its power was almost monopolistic over many individuals that monopoly is well and truly broken. The mixed economy of people's lives means that neighbourhood is a chosen. It is part of the network of people's freedoms. This network of freedoms means that neighbourhood does not necessarily have a significant role. It can drift away into half-forgotten reminiscences and nostalgia, or can be almost wholly discarded. If it is to have a significant role, politically, spiritually, environmentally, then it must have its champions and communities. It needs those who will argue for it and articulate its place and role, who will tell its stories and articulate its discourses. These will be people and sectors for whom neighbourhood continues to matter for various reasons. They will almost certainly not relate to neighbourhood alone. Their lives will be shaped by hybridity, but their hybridity will itself be shaped by those stories and

discourses and values which elevate neighbourhood connections to higher levels of significance.

There are those who come to local neighbourhoods from the point of view of community development; people who see the possibility of local community as something which enriches human life. Writers such as Gilchrist and Freie, discussed in chapter 4, illustrate their contribution to the discourse of neighbourhoods. Politicians, from whatever motive, are also arguing for the importance of local places.⁵²³

Such concerns are strengthened by the practical factors affecting people's lives, particularly those of economics and mobility, where deprivation shapes neighbourhood concerns, and particularly where it is recognised that the full range of choices and freedoms offered under individualization is not open to all. As Paul Hoggett notes, 'in a society increasingly prone to polarisation between cosmopolitans and locals perhaps the delocalisation of community applies primarily to the former. As new kinds of non-place communities emerge for some, the dispossessed find themselves locked into place more and more.'⁵²⁴ This is a perennial concern for some parts of the church. Recent contributions include the urban reports already cited (*The Cities and Faithful Cities*). Graham and Lowe writing of *What Makes a Good City* repeatedly point towards the smaller scale of estates, 'communities', and neighbourhoods.⁵²⁵ In an introductory discussion of the place of the parish system, they refer to the work of Sigurd Bergman who writes of 'God taking place', the God who 'values the local and the spatial as an epiphany of the divine, as a sacred space in which, through creative activity and the works of dwelling, humanity can experience

⁵²³ The Conservative party's campaign in the 2010 U.K. general election, argued for the formation of local voluntary groups to run schools and other community facilities.

⁵²⁴ Hoggett, *Contested Communities*, 15.

⁵²⁵ Elaine Graham and Stephen Lowe, *What Makes a Good City? Public Theology and the Urban Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009).

something of the transcendent.’⁵²⁶ This is language reminiscent of Sheldrake’s comments on Duns Scotus referred to in chapter 3, and indeed they later cite Sheldrake’s work as they come to refer to a theology of place representing ‘a valuing of material culture and the built environment to speak of more than mere subsistence—and indeed to be more than empty “space”—but to be capable of evoking and embodying deeper meanings and associations.’⁵²⁷

This pointing towards the smaller scale is found elsewhere in their work. When writing of the divisions of social class it is illustrated with the example of South Oxhey, a large council estate with a population of about 12 000 ‘locked away in a more affluent corner of South Hertfordshire’.⁵²⁸ Later while discussing aspects of ‘faithful capital’ they write of ‘the strongly local nature of most faith-based organisations, which is often very longstanding, encourage[ing] a commitment to people and places that is tolerant of slow progress and assigns importance to building relationships.’⁵²⁹ What emerges is an understanding of a concern for the smaller scale being part of what makes a good city.

Other parts of the discourse which argues for the neighbourhood include concerns for other groups for whom it matters more. Young children and elderly people are both less mobile. A striking example of the situation for older people is given in a paper in Hoggett’s collection, portraying the lives of elderly people who have moved away from their homes in the neighbourhood of Benwell, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and into sheltered housing. The experiences of loss, fear and lack of control involved in this is palpable. The authors conclude:

Their reasons for moving into sheltered housing; their place in decision making about moving made even more complex by their own contradictory feelings; losing their

⁵²⁶ Graham and Lowe, *Good City*, 49.

⁵²⁷ Graham and Lowe, *Good City*, 54.

⁵²⁸ Graham and Lowe, *Good City*, 67.

⁵²⁹ Graham and Lowe, *Good City*, 111.

homes and belongings carefully gathered over many years to finally be given away by others; all these demonstrate a complex interaction of lack of resources and being old which requires an analysis combining a political economy of ageing with an understanding of the routine lives of older people in communities and ways in which these are shaped through policies and practices.⁵³⁰

Again, without using the language of neighbourhood what is revealed is a concern for quality of life which takes its strength from the importance of the smaller scales of place which people inhabit.

Other concerns which might be drawn on in this developing discourse which can support thinking about the neighbourhood include consideration of how different kinds of community can form. Although virtual communities and networks have come to play a significant part in people's lives, there are questions about the extent to which such connections can be primary. Networks normally involve face to face connection, and virtual communities do not have the potential to replace that form of engagement. Community requires face-to-face encounter. Alternative economic models might also provide a contribution to that same smaller scale of concern. The place of locally based co-operatives, for example, might be another way of articulating reasons to focus on neighbourhood patterns.⁵³¹ Maybe the most significant other strand of such discourses are developing around environmental concerns using language about re-localisation. Concerns are being expressed about the way in which our social and economic life needs to be reshaped by patterns of energy consumption which are much lower. Groups clustered around the Transition Initiative⁵³² argue for local neighbourhoods which are resilient in the face of the kind of rapid social change which might come about through climate change and a decline in the

⁵³⁰ Harrie Churchill, Angela Everitt and Judith Green, 'Taken away from community: older people and sheltered housing', in Hoggett, *Contested Communities*, 121.

⁵³¹ Karen Ann Faulk, 'If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism,' *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 579–614.

⁵³² Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*.

availability of cheap oil. This is also an economic argument, and one which speaks up for the neighbourhood as a locus of economic activity which will become increasingly important.

These discourses will sometimes be effective and sometimes not. One factor which may change their effectiveness will be whether they are founded on an understanding of the neighbourhood as hybrid, or whether they fail to engage with the complexity of the local. Hybridity is now part of the local scene because freedom has changed in such a way that neighbourhood commitments (social, economic, role-focussed and spiritual) have to be chosen. Neighbourhoods therefore need these discourses of persuasion, as ways of drawing people into seeing their choices as things which affect and alter the play of autonomy, self-development and privacy in their lives in positive ways. They also need discourses which help to form those third spaces, questioning those aspects of freedom which are taken for granted and offering alternatives in their place. The Christian values of connectedness and vocation both have a part to play in this.

Where such discourses are deployed, in churches and more widely, they will help to strengthen the role which neighbourhoods will continue to play in people's lives. Those who believe in that role will work to hold neighbourhood up alongside networks and virtual communities, so that it can become part of the blend of hybridity, and even have the possibility of becoming a major factor in our social relationships again. These discourses articulate the reasons it is important to do this: first because neighbourhoods are there and continue to function at least at the minimal level of convenience and as a living environment for our daily lives; but further because healthy neighbourhoods can offer better quality of life to many, provide a focus for continuing community, and move the local economy towards resilience rather than dependency.

Because this is founded on explicitly Christian theology and values, in dialogue with others, the local neighbourhood church has a continuing role to play. The hybrid neighbourhood church will seek out partnerships, and work in alliance with others. It will fulfil a discursive, expressive, symbolic role, strengthening the ways in which hybrid spaces hang together. It will support people in their development towards autonomy which remains related, and development which leads to awareness of vocation. It will be a different local neighbourhood church from those of the past; but it will be there as a highly significant part of the church's mixed economy.

Appendix

MPhil/PhD Track A

Project Proposal Document

Final Version

Exploring Christian Community in Bowburn, County Durham

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Date: 17th December 2004

Urban Theology Unit

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING⁵³³

Bowburn has always been an industrial village. It grew up around local coal mining. A first pit opened for about ten years in the mid-nineteenth century in the area now south of the A1(M), but the big development which led to Bowburn's growth came in 1906 when a new pit was sunk. In 1931 it merged with the nearby Tursdale colliery, among the biggest in the Durham coalfield. A new council estate was built during the 1950s—a very significant expansion of the village to the North—and employment at the pit reached a peak of 2 950 in 1958. But the decline of this industry was fairly rapid in the early 1960s and the pit was closed as uneconomic in 1967.

Both village and church life were shaped by the miners and their families. These were the people who made up the main population of Bowburn, and whose work gave it life. There are still a good number of older people living in Bowburn who remember the 1950s and before. Aural evidence suggests a close community, which would be expected with nearly every household in the village including someone who worked at the mine. People knew one another and were bound together around the coal industry.

Many of the people were Methodists with two Methodist chapels in the village. The Wesleyan chapel was built in 1910 and still stands as the existing Methodist Church. The Primitive Methodist chapel, known locally as 'the tin chapel', was near the south end of the old village in Lamb's Terrace and opened in 1908. It closed in about 1964 when the membership combined with the ex-Wesleyan chapel, although the tin chapel remained in use for the Sunday school. It is an indication of the conservatism of church life that thirty years after Methodist union a village the size of Bowburn still had two Methodist chapels. A conversation with one elderly woman in Bowburn revealed that, for her at least, the closure of this chapel—'my chapel'—was still an issue forty years later.

The Anglican church's involvement in Bowburn was shaped, at least in part, by the older parish boundaries. The parish was not historically centred on Bowburn, and the parish name, 'Cassop-cum-Quarrington', uses the names of older villages in the area. It covers the three villages of Bowburn, Cassop and Quarrington, although Bowburn is now the major population centre. The main parish church was historically in Quarrington, but this closed about ten years ago, and services continued in a small village hall until 2001. There was a small sister chapel in Bowburn which was built in 1926. It was the Church of England building for the village until a new parish church was built in the centre of the village council estate in 1978 when the old chapel was sold and converted into a private house. The new church became the main parish church. It still stands although in a very poor state of repair, and in September 2004 it has been closed for health and safety reasons. The congregation continues to worship, using the Methodist Church, and hope to rebuild in due course.

⁵³³

There were three sources for dates and facts in this section:

local aural research;

Cassop-cum-Quarrington Local History Society. Past times in Bowburn, Cassop, Quarrington Hill and Tursdale. Cassop-cum Quarrington L.H.S., 2003.

Durham County Environmental Education Curriculum Study Group. Coal Mining in County Durham. Durham: Durham County Council, 1993.

The closure of the pit in 1967 could have nothing but a major impact on the village which entered a period of economic decline. However, this was mitigated by several factors. Continued coalmining in nearby villages provided some employment until the late 1970s, while in the late 1960's the A1(M) motorway was built with a junction at one end of the village. This helped to place Bowburn well for industrial development. In 1966 an asbestos factory opened, and in 1969 Henderson's started manufacturing garage doors on the industrial estate (and they remain the largest employer in the village). The changing pattern of employment, with the community becoming less homogeneous, came just as the social changes of the 60s were also making themselves felt. This included changes in patterns of religious practice and observance. All this has changed Bowburn profoundly.

The community today has more middle-class people. Owner occupation has increased markedly, with the sale of local authority housing and with the building of new estates. People are now employed in a wide variety of places. Some still work in the village—and economically the village industrial estates are prospering—but Bowburn has developed as a commuter village too. Good road links, and regular public transport links into Durham make it a convenient place to live. Newcomers have included a number of students attracted by properties for rent which have been bought up by landlords. The landlords see property in the village as a good investment. Bowburn also has the attraction of being in the catchment area of a local comprehensive with a high reputation, while housing prices remain relatively low. These changing patterns of life have also had their effect on Bowburn's shops and services. While it has a local Co-op supermarket, the prices there are higher than at others within easy driving distance. There is also the neighbouring village of Coxhoe. While only slightly larger it has managed to retain a greater range of services, and has benefited from a new sports centre and large children's play area built recently.

All this means that, from being a village which was more self-contained until the 1960s, Bowburn's people now look outside the village for many services and amenities. For some this includes church attendance. The site team are aware of a significant group of people who worship regularly at churches in Durham, Coxhoe, Sedgfield and elsewhere.

Bowburn's Methodist Church today is not very representative of the village population as Table 1 indicates, with a preponderance of people aged 60 or over, and correspondingly few aged 30-59. There are also far more women attending than men.

*Table 1: Numbers attending worship at Bowburn Methodist Church in 2004*⁵³⁴

Age groups	Women		Men			Total		
	Regular Attendance	Occasional Attendance	Regular Attendance	Occasional Attendance	Housebound	Total Numbers	%	% in Bowburn from census
0-9	2	3	0	2	0	7	16	23
10-19	3	0	1	0	0	4		
20-29	1	0	1	0	0	2	6	12
30-39	2	0	0	1	0	3		
40-49	2	3	1	1	0	7	21	44
50-59	1	1	1	1	0	4		
60-69	6	6	3	1	0	16		
70-79	10	2	2	0	0	14	58	20
80 plus	4	1	1	0	5	11		
<i>Total</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>68</i>		

These people are drawn almost entirely from within the village of Bowburn (60 out of the 68) with another four coming from the neighbouring village of Shincliffe where another Methodist Chapel closed to amalgamate with Bowburn in 1997. The other four are elderly people from Bowburn who, because of infirmity, have moved into more appropriate accommodation within a few miles of Bowburn.

The Anglican Church also draws most of its membership from Bowburn, 61 out of the 75 recorded in table 2 below. There are three from Cassop and three from Quarrington Hill on the electoral roll, and 11 who live locally but outside the parish. The table shows that the church community is reasonably representative of the local community so far as age is concerned. However this is largely due to seventeen people in their fifties, so unless a number of younger people start attending they will appear similarly unrepresentative within ten years. There is also the expected gender imbalance, with 54 women and 21 men.

⁵³⁴

Final column of table based on figures for Cassop-cum-Quarrington ward taken from the 2001 census website: <http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk> accessed 9.10.03.

Table 2: Numbers attending worship or on electoral roll at Christ the King Church, Bowburn in 2004⁵³⁵

Age groups	Women		Men		Total		
	Electoral Roll or Regular Attenders	Occasional Attenders	Electoral Roll or Regular Attenders	Occasional Attenders	Total Numbers	%	% in Bowburn from census
0-9	1	0	8	0	9	17	23
10-19	4	0	0	0	4		
20-29	2	1	1	0	4	5	12
30-39	4	2	2	1	9	43	44
40-49	6	0	0	0	6		
50-59	13	0	3	1	17		
60-69	3	3	1	2	9	35	20
70 plus	14	1	2	0	17		
<i>Total</i>	47	7	17	4	75		

A. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

1. Summary Statement of Problem

The changing nature of society in Bowburn, a former mining village in County Durham, has adversely affected Christian confidence within this new mission context.

2. Criteria for Selecting the Problem

Christians have faced large changes over the last fifty years. The particular changes which have taken place in Bowburn have left churches in a weakened position within the community with fewer people relating to them. Relationships between Christians within the village have also failed to develop as the community has become more heterogeneous. If alternative ways of engaging Christians within Bowburn are not found then church structures are likely to decline further, or possibly close down. The two churches are both looking at their buildings and wondering how they can maintain such resources in the long term. Decisions might be taken in the next few years which could lead to the closure of church buildings in the village. As recently as September 2004 the Parish Church was closed because of its poor state of repair with a measure of uncertainty about whether funding can be raised to rebuild. Changes in twenty-first century British life also continue to challenge the relevance of the church and of Christian discipleship. In Bowburn's local context to ignore these issues now may lead to an almost complete absence of any organised Christian presence in the village.

⁵³⁵

See previous footnote.

However these changes have also created a new context for church life. Before, the idea of mission would have been largely perceived in terms of other places—overseas mission for example. While the village has always been a context for mission, this is now much clearer; where once Christians might have been unaware of it, now it can be brought into consciousness. So the problem statement also hints at possible solutions.

The initial response to the problem outlined in this document will not involve great expenditure of resources. The most important resource is the involvement of people and their readiness to engage with each other and with the issues, and also the personal gifts of the candidate and site team in being able to promote that engagement. The process will be one of trying to remodel people's experience and understanding of church life and mission. It therefore requires explanation, persuasion and encouragement and the building of relationships.

The site team represents a mixed group including four regular worshippers from the Methodist Church, one from the Parish Church, and two who worship outside the village. Several are already involved in an ecumenical Bible study group. The site team is supportive of working on this problem.

The site team believe that Christians would benefit from working together in developing positive ways of engaging in mission, and that this will help both their morale and confidence, and also the strength of their engagement with their community. This could empower people to live out their faith in the particular environment of Bowburn.

3. Social, Political, Economic and Psychological Factors

An initial response to the problem statement might well be that this is an inevitable result of the changes in British and global society over the last fifty years and not just in Bowburn. Fundamental sociological issues about the changing nature of communities and relationships, and about secularisation, are involved. These are issues which have effected every village, town and city in the U.K. There have also been huge changes in the relationship between the global and the local, which contribute to the changing context of mission in Bowburn. So awareness is needed of the general issues, the particular shape and form which they take in Bowburn, and the ways of working with them that this project will explore.

On one hand we are social creatures, needing one another and the communities we create. On the other the emphasis on individual choice and freedom makes such notions unfashionable or nostalgic, with nothing much to say to our contemporary situation. Margaret Thatcher was quoted as claiming that 'there is no such thing as society' and that claim seems to voice a fundamental principle of some people's contemporary experience of community. The greatest we owe others is to live and let live. On the other hand, while we face pressures to loosen our ties with one another, we cannot escape from our need as social beings. The human animal is gregarious and sociable.

But the idea of community has changed and mutated. With increased mobility and car use, and with the end of older styles of community, it's focus is now less geographical, and is expressed in other ways. This expression is through a variety of networks. One person who briefly joined the site team at the beginning of the process

lives in Bowburn, worships at a church in Durham four miles away, is actively engaged in working with Guide Dogs for the Blind which involves him in voluntary activity around the region, and frequently spends time away from Bowburn in a caravan.

Bowburn has also changed from a more homogeneous working class village, to one in which there is a more substantial proportion of middle class people. Sometimes class divisions within the village can seem fairly pronounced (with one street of 'luxury homes' built into the centre of the village but with entirely separate road access), but in other ways they are expressed through a much more heterogeneous community than there used to be.

That heterogeneity means that people are affected in different ways by the growth of networked communities. That way of life depends on mobility, and mobility is not available to everyone. Access to transport and the ease of relating to broader communities (beyond walking distance) make big differences to people's lives. There are those who are disadvantaged through this: people who are not able to travel. This includes elderly people with health and mobility problems, and households where there is no car (29.5% in Bowburn, 2.7% above the national average—although bus connections in Bowburn are good so the effect of this should not be exaggerated).

Part of the problem is about the tension between locality and ways of life which reach far beyond the local into the county, region and even beyond. Is there a boundary around Bowburn which means anything? Clearly it is far more porous than it once was, but what significance does it retain in people's lives? How effectively can a geographical place of Bowburn's size provide a focus for a meaningful expression of community, or do the pressures of car culture and the tendency to associate in dispersed networks mean that Bowburn's sense of community is only residual?

There are clearly two diametrically opposed ways in which we might respond to the problem statement in the light of these questions. One is to see it as a hopeless project. Bauman writes: 'Far from being hotbeds of communities, local populations are more like loose bunches of untied ends.'⁵³⁶ From this point of view church in locality has ceased to have any currency; or if any currency remains it is fast running out. There is no point in continuing to try to build up expressions of church which are based on the local. Locally this can be seen in all the ways mentioned above, with the change in work patterns and the increase in mobility taking people away from Bowburn for most amenities.

Another point of view would be that community is an essential part of human living. People need to relate to one another in communities, and the big changes haven't altered that fact. We must go on working at the local level, incarnating community where it is possible. There is evidence for this point of view also: evidence which suggests that there are ways in which Bowburn retains a sense of place which is significant for those who live and work within it. The local councils clearly perceive it as a significant unit, and organise and plan accordingly. Recent consultation by the County Council and the direction of SRB funding towards the village illustrate this perception. Local people are also ready to join together in a

⁵³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 24.

common cause—opposing a recent attempt to open a large open cast mine on the edge of the village; while there are community projects in evidence, including a quarterly local newspaper, and active local history group.

This problem statement seeks to recognise the seriousness of the issues raised by the first point of view. No amount of protest or nostalgia for community is going to make these changes go away. However, at the same time, it seeks to recognise the continuing significance of locality. So there is an interplay between locality and wider networks which needs to be acknowledged and explored. Community, whether expressed locally or through wider networks is an aspect of Christian living, and our critique of contemporary society must involve strenuous efforts to rebuild and restructure community in ways appropriate to our context.

The church, as with any other institution, works within this tension. The problem is stated on the assumption that the effect of these changes on the church may be more severe because the church has not paid sufficient attention to this opposition between locality and more extended networks. To some extent the churches have been successful in continuing to express something of the significance of the local scene. But maybe Christians could be more effective if they worked from a greater conscious awareness of the centripetal forces in people's lives.

One of the difficulties with this position is that it will seem like a rejection more of the first point of view than the second, and therefore like a struggle to hang on to community where no community is possible. In response to this it needs to be emphasised that what is intended is to seek solutions which respond to the acknowledged changes in society, with significance in both locality and extended networks. There are those who argue for such approaches, seeing locality as one aspect of community which may vary in its importance. Freie, for example, writes, 'Traditionally, communities have existed within definable geographical boundaries... Such a sense of place continues to be an important element of community: it provides a physical location and focus for human interaction.'⁵³⁷ Gilchrist provides a more nuanced approach when writing that 'social networks extend beyond geographical boundaries' and that 'communities can be constructed by their members, not merely arising from local circumstances'.⁵³⁸

As far as this problem statement is concerned this might lead towards: networking among Christians who live or work in Bowburn but who normally worship in a variety of different places; seeing how the church has responded or could respond to the needs of those who find it harder to access transport; engaging with other village focussed groups and institutions, including schools, the local youth project, and political groups; engaging in the ongoing process of consultation on the development of the village; identifying issues which retain local significance; fulfilling a role as those who pray for the life of all in the village. These are issues which can be raised through the goals and strategies outlined in this paper, and which could develop as a result of the action planned.

⁵³⁷ John F. Freie, Counterfeit Community: The Exploitation of Our Longings for Connectedness (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 31.

⁵³⁸ Alison Gilchrist, The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2004), p. 2.

4. Biblical and Missional Factors

The Bible tells a story of God relating to groups of people: extended families, an ethnic community, a nation. Where God relates to individuals it is within the context of a community. This begins with the creation of animals as companions for Adam, recognising a fundamental aspect of our humanity, and, when they are found to be insufficient, continues with the creation of Eve. From this point onwards it is extended families which form the focus of the stories. When Noah builds the Ark, and is brought safely through the flood to a covenant with God all this is shared with his family. When Abraham is called it is in the context of a promise that he will be father of many, and after the stories of the first generations of that family the focus shifts first to the Hebrew people as an ethnic group. This group is defined in Egypt by their difference to those who enslave them, and during their wanderings by the ambivalent relationship with God that they share. And at the end of the Pentateuch the focus is moving again to the emerging nation of Israel, whose holy scriptures these books are. The Jewish scriptures are the stories of how God deals with a people.

This communal focus of the Bible continues into the New Testament. The mission of Jesus is related as a continuing part of the Jewish story of God's people. The twelve disciples are seen as relating to the twelve tribes of Israel. This was part of the growing self-awareness of the early church, which is seen at an earlier stage in its development in the letters of Paul. In various passages Paul spells out the commitment Christians have to each other, and the importance they have to each other (examples from the Corinthian correspondence include: weaker and stronger—1 Cor. 8; church as body—1 Cor. 12; how his own sufferings relate to theirs—2 Cor. 4; the collection for Palestinian Christians—2 Cor. 8-9; and so on). The New Testament concludes with Revelation and John's vision of a city, a place where people live together, as the end point of God's creative and redemptive purpose.

However, we need to note that these various communities were all very different. Most of them were not based around a particular geographical locality. Even when, as in the early church, a city is seen as the place where a church lives and acts, the community focus is not primarily the place but the person of Christ. It is the common commitment to him—the shared belief—around which community forms. This raises questions about the church in Bowburn, and about whether a strong network could be developed around a common commitment to the person of Christ. The Christian community does not need to accept as inevitable the fragmentation of its work and witness.

The main focus of the site team's biblical work has been in the gospels, and particularly Mark's Gospel, looking at the relationship between Jesus, the disciples and the crowd. The feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6.30-46 is a story which was explored in detail. It shows something of these relationships through an interaction between Jesus, the disciples (who have recently been sent out on mission and returned after some success), and a demanding crowd.

The crowd plays a significant role in Mark's gospel. It gathers around Jesus as a result of his healing and teaching in chapter one, and continues to recur through to chapter eleven with the account of Palm Sunday. This crowd, sometimes referred to indirectly through a description of their effect (e.g. Mark 2.2), are those from whom the disciples are drawn, and yet in this passage the disciples are seen as a distinct group of their own.

The disciples are a group who are gathered around the person, teaching and action of Jesus. The crowd are also drawn by Jesus, but they are far more dispersed. It would be misleading to refer to them as anything like a community. In Mark they are seen as coming 'from every quarter' (Mark 1.45)—from all over the region—they are a loose knit group. The focus of this crowd is loose, but it is characterised by some kind of experience of need—a need for healing, teaching and food. All these needs are seen to be met primarily by Jesus and secondarily by the disciples. The crowd is seen as those to whom the mission of Jesus and the disciples is directed. But within the crowd there must also have been many other networks—people who knew one another through business, family, or perhaps a shared religious-political commitment. So the crowd may have had similarities with people in a village like Bowburn: together and yet separate; individuals whose proximity is significant, but whose relationships to each other are loose—more of a tangle than a woven piece of cloth.

Among other issues noted when we studied this story in the site team, one significant entry point is the orderly manner in which the crowd sat to eat, apparently following Jesus' instructions through his disciples. How had Jesus achieved this from such a rag-tag crowd? If this crowd was a tangle of networks, Jesus seems to begin to find within it something more coherent. But can that coherence also lead to something more?

The progress to something more is hindered by the disciples who relate to the crowd imperfectly. Their close relationship and personal teaching is interrupted; their suggestion of sending the crowd away may have been motivated as much by selfishness as compassion. They look only to the practicalities of physical food, and they find the demands overwhelming. They are unable to see how to make anything of the tangle. This seems to relate to the feelings expressed in the site team—feelings of frustration, lack of confidence, and puzzlement. We too struggle to make sense of the tangle of networks which surround us. We sense there would be value in finding within it something more coherent, but we find ourselves unable to make any sense of it.

One of the issues which was discussed in moving towards this problem statement was the lack of confidence felt in the church. Could this lack of confidence be addressed partly by giving Christians a new understanding of their local community, as one which is shaped by networks? It could gain in confidence by looking at the way community is now being shaped, and seeing whether it can find ways of relating to those less well defined communities and patterns of association. It could be led to search for the resources to be found within such patterns, and draw on them itself—not by fragmenting, each going off in their own direction, but by creatively working to establish networks which focus on Christ.

Jesus' attitude to the crowd contrasts with that of the disciples. It was one of compassion; but more than that he seeks to bring the crowd into relationship with each other. Not just in the orderly seating of the crowd, but in the act of feeding he encouraged sharing. He also wanted to include the disciples within the move towards a greater sense of connection by asking them to look at the resources they had. So, perhaps the point of the story lies partly in the way Jesus is able to create links, and coax some kind of communal coherence from the tangle of the crowd and disciples. Are they enabled to see one another with their various needs as belonging to each other and needing each other, and therefore led to share what they have? Could the same be true of what we are trying to be part of in Bowburn?

We discussed the differences we saw between the crowd and the disciples in their relationship with Jesus. On the one hand there were clear differences: the disciples enjoyed a greater intimacy with Jesus, and they shared Jesus' compassion for the crowd. There was an experience of specialness and separateness which could be explored. On the other hand, however, they were the same: ordinary people who did not yet understand Jesus' mission. After the apparent success of their own mission, here they are seen as overwhelmed and uncertain.

In comparing this with our own situation we noted the eagerness of the crowd to respond to Jesus and his disciples. There is a tenacious turning to Jesus, following him around the lake, in the hope of receiving something good. To start with it seems there is nothing comparable to this in our situation. People are not visibly seeking out Jesus—at least not through the institutional church. The site team found themselves very unsure of what people's beliefs amount to now, even while over 70% within the local ward registered as Christian in the census⁵³⁹. These reflections led to an awareness of the possible connections with and differences between the Gospel crowd and the loosely knit gathering of Bowburn. Part of that loosely knit gathering seems to be involved in wanting the church to still be around. Within Bowburn there is what Grace Davie calls a 'penumbra'⁵⁴⁰ around both the Anglican Church and Methodist Church. There was a concern that we do not overlook the existing experiences of faith found among the people of Bowburn. These experiences may not be expressed through church attendance, or forms of religious expression with which we are familiar. However, they are present and we should acknowledge them. Despite what has happened to the church and the lack of form given to many people's religious beliefs, there is a tenacious clinging to some kind of spiritual response. But this residual relationship still contrasts strongly with the eager clamour and expectation of the Gospel crowd.

In summary, these are issues which have come out of the study of Mark 6.30-46 which seem to say something about the problem to be addressed:

- + Community/crowd as the object of mission.
- + Disciples/church as those who relate to community imperfectly.
- + Looking for resources within community/crowd to deal with problems.
- + A community/crowd focussed around need.
- + Many networks in the crowd/community.
- + Lack of confidence arising from failure to see the possibilities in the crowd/community.
- + Creating links and networks as a miraculous happening.
- + Existing experiences of faith (the community's tenacious spirituality) are seen in the crowd's tenacious turning to Jesus,.

5. Research

Further research will focus first on the changes in society which have occurred—from the background and history of modernity through to the developing realities of

⁵³⁹ From census website as in note 2 above.

⁵⁴⁰ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), for example p. 56.

post-modernity. This will involve looking at secularisation, globalization, and the growth of individualism, . Important volumes in researching these issues would include: Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity; P. Berger, The Desecularization of the World; Steve Bruce, God Is Dead; Manuel Castells, The Rise of Network Society; Grace Davie, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (editors), Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures; and Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes.

Responses to these issues will also be investigated, including Christian responses such as: the work of Grace Davie; Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture; James Fowler, Faithful Change.

There will also be work to be done in looking at recent understandings of mission in the context of our changing society, and in a study of models of contemporary local mission. It will be important to include both more practical studies, with the Church of England's recent report Mission Shaped Church being a significant starting point, and more theoretical work such as Tom Stuckey's Into the Far Country. Other missional factors need to be addressed in considering the felt lack of confidence within the church, including the work of Pete Ward and John Drane.

Issues about the nature of community will be explored through works including John Freie's Counterfeit Community and Alison Gilchrist's The Well-Connected Community; also books by Zygmunt Bauman and Gerard Delanty both titled Community. The Biblical idea of community will also be explored through works including: Robert Atkins, Egalitarian Community; Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community; and Paul Hanson, The People Called.

B. Goal Setting

1. Statement of Change Goals

1. To sensitise Christians in Bowburn to the impact on church life of the changing nature of society
 - 1A. by exposing local Christians to information about the changing nature of society
 - 1B. by engaging in study together about these changes in the context of church life
2. To empower Christians in Bowburn to engage in mission together
 - 2A. by developing relationships with and between local Christians
 - 2B. by engaging in a communal process of vocational discernment about mission
 - 2C. by facilitating the emergence of a network of participants in mission focussed on Bowburn

2. Criteria for Selecting the Goals

a. First Change Goal

This a change in the consciousness of Christians in Bowburn. This is the logical first step—to ensure that Christians have reflected together on the way society is changing so that they can then look with fresh insight at the issue of mission. The changing nature of society indicates the broad shifts which have been happening over the last fifty years, which have included a shift towards secularism, and a contradictory shift towards greater spiritual openness. Both of these directly affect the way church is perceived and responded to. Other changes in the way people relate to one another have contributed towards an alteration in patterns of church going. These are the most straightforward examples of the way in which church life has been affected, but there are others.

The first administrative goal (1A) addresses directly the changes which have been going on. While these are part of the world we all live in, and we are all aware of them to some extent, turning attention directly to them will allow people to consciously recognise what has been going on. It will also be a step which will allow people to decide how important this is to them, and whether they wish to explore further. Along with this step there can then be exploration of how the church is affected, represented in the second administrative goal (1B). The two administrative goals are different in two ways. First, in that one addresses broader issues while the other looks specifically at the church. Second, in that one is about informing, while the other is more participative.

The interest in these issues has been indicated already, both in the site team meetings, and also in secular community meetings about the regeneration of Bowburn. The changes which have affected Bowburn are of considerable importance to people, especially when they impinge upon local resources and amenities. But it is hoped that Christians will be able in the context of their faith to reflect more and come to a deeper understanding of how the life and witness of the church have been changed and challenged.

b. Second Change Goal

This is a change in the setting or system. It seeks to address the need to bring Christians in the village together, focussing on the issue of God's mission. It recognises a lack of confidence which became evident through site team discussions, and seeks to address it through a process which is empowering. This implies encouragement, valuing of one another, recognition of gifts, and a strengthening of motivation. This aims towards engaging in mission 'together' because this is to be a communal exercise and one which is inclusive. It can and may include anyone in the village who feels they can contribute to the Christian community.

The first administrative goal (2A) recognises the need to work from the site team in building up networks. In this we recognise that it will also need to involve creating new relationships which can become the focus for broader Christian community, and also by developing and deepening existing relationships. The two village based congregations need to be involved; so do those who worship regularly outside Bowburn. We also need to recognise that existing relationships and networks are a significant starting point.

Recognition is needed of the presence and importance of Christians who commute to congregations outside Bowburn. We will work on the presumption that these people have a Christian concern for the locality of their homes and seek to foster and encourage that concern. This does not imply a devaluing of Christians within the two village based congregations. The site team is already adequately in touch with those. Rather the process should ensure that the Christian community we work with in Bowburn is more whole, and representative of all Christians, and not just those who worship in the village. In addition the site team has wanted to emphasise the importance of recognising the presence of God's grace and activity beyond the churches—there are people who may wish to be part of what is done who are not presently committed to institutional church. There are also people who work in the village but do not live in it, and there will be specific strategies to open the possibility of involvement in the project to them. This administrative goal will seek to nurture the network of Christians in Bowburn. We might describe this vision of church as 'dispersed church'.

But the development of relationships is part of a larger whole. The change goal is about engaging in mission. The first administrative goal is therefore a necessary step towards the second (2B). Hopefully people will feel that there is value in developing this Christian network for its own sake, thickening the sense of community, promoting a sense of mutual worth and an awareness of rich diversity. But this will be further enhanced by being motivated in a shared vision. That vision lies in the common call to be part of God's mission—God's reaching out in love to the world. In expressing that value the relationships and network to be nurtured will look outwards and be mission focussed; this will be a further expression of inclusivity. The community of the church is open to the wider community, and in its mission seeks to nurture its sense of Gospel values in the wider community. The aim is for Christians in Bowburn to become more aware of their corporate call as the body of Christ, across denominational boundaries. We will aim to awaken a sense of being called to join in God's mission in this particular locality. So the second administrative goal envisages a process of reflection together, which will involve prayer, Bible study, sharing of experience and perspectives, consideration of the kind of place our village is, and exploring what being part of God's mission might be in

this place. This discernment of vocation will be a process of growing in awareness of God's call to us to share his mission. It will be a process of discovery about the particular and local form which mission should take in Bowburn. Again, it is a process to be carried out together.

But to discern a call implies an answer to the call, a willingness to respond. The third administrative goal (2C) indicates how this response will be encouraged. Having determined the various kinds of ways in which people feel called to act in mission together, it will be necessary to put some kind of structures in place to support and maintain those intentions. This administrative goal is couched in terms of networks because it is not envisaged an institutional form (such as a formally constituted 'Christians Together in Bowburn' group) should be the end point. What is more appropriate to the place and situation—and to our era—is a looser association, bound together by a common purpose and vision, and a common commitment to Christ.

The resources in pursuing this change goal will be largely the members of the site team with their existing networks of relationships. These include strong links into the two village based congregations, as well as more fragile links with other Christians. Some members of the site team have already begun to explore how these relationships might be developed.

It is hoped that addressing this change goal will make a significant difference by changing the way church happens with regard to Bowburn. It is not expected that commuting Christians will change their allegiance to a particular Sunday congregation, but that new expressions of church might result from the changes in relationship which occur. Hopefully these changes will effect the village based congregations and Christians who worship or live elsewhere.

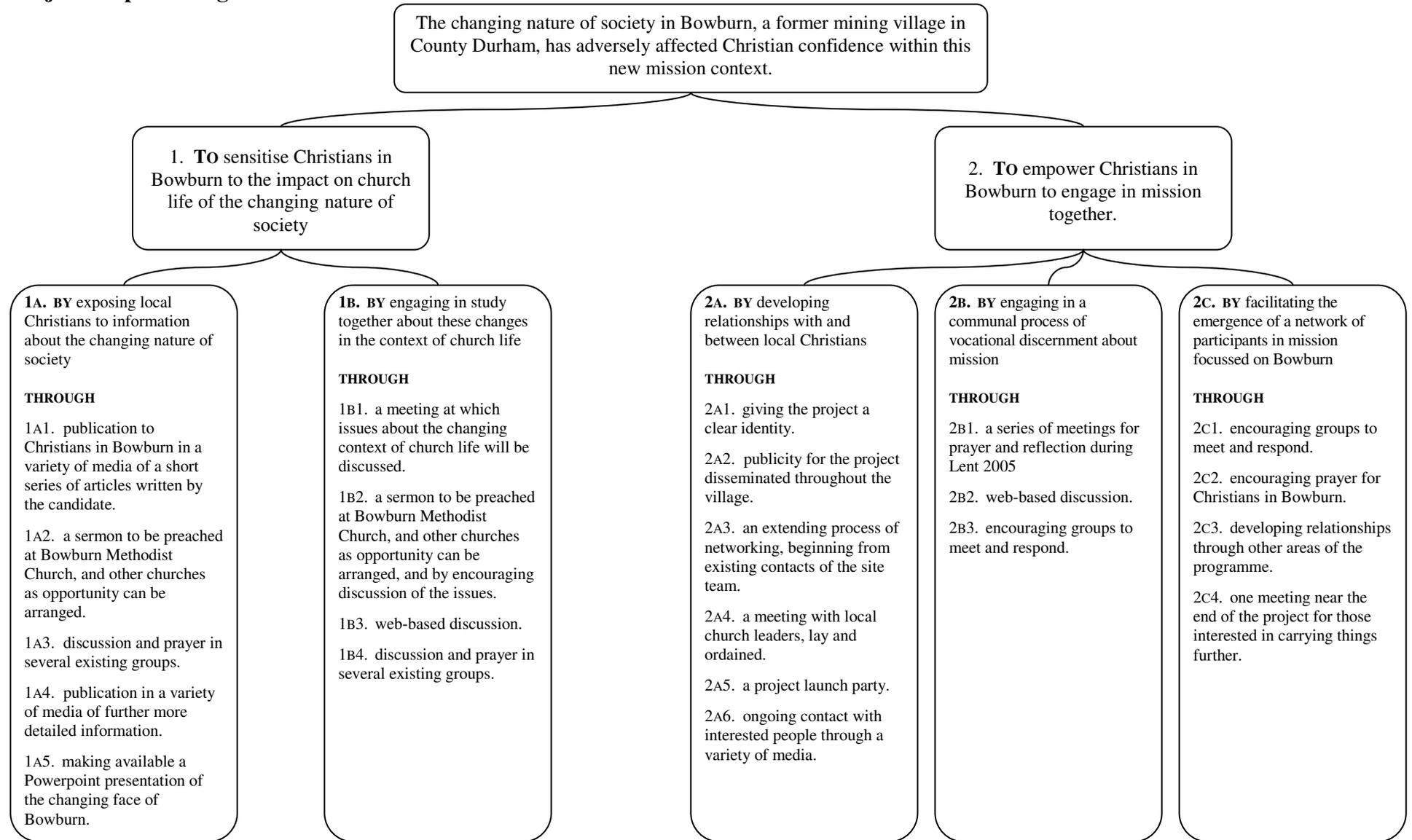
It is hoped that giving people the chance to consider why Bowburn matters to God will lead them into deeper local involvement, strengthening the links between the village and its dispersed church. That deeper local involvement might take a variety of different forms, but if the change goal is achieved then new expressions of commitment will be visible as a result of this project.

3. Research

One particularly significant area of research will be in the field of community development, where writers are seeking to remodel or reaffirm values expressed in terms of community in the context of our changing world. Starting points for this work have included John Freie's Counterfeit Community and Alison Gilchrist's The Well-Connected Community. Gilchrist's book in particular explores the method of networking, and analyses in detail the benefits for community development which it brings.

Further reading could also be undertaken about the nature of discernment. There are a number of different patterns of discernment including Quaker and Ignatian traditions. This will also include texts on theological reflection, which can also be interpreted as a form of discernment; e.g. Killen and de Beer, The Art of Theological Reflection.

4. Project Proposal Diagram



C. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

1. Statement of Strategies

CHANGE GOAL 1. To sensitise Christians in Bowburn to the impact on church life of the changing nature of society...

ADMINISTRATIVE GOAL 1A. BY exposing local Christians to information about the changing nature of society.

1A1 THROUGH publication to Christians in Bowburn in a variety of media of a short series of articles written by the candidate.

Those to receive the articles will be identified through strategy 2A1 below. Media to be used and timings will be: e-mail, the articles to be split into five short sections to be sent separately over a period of two weeks: 18th, 21st, 25th, 28th January and 1st February 2005; printed newsletter to be available at both village churches on Sundays 23rd and 30th January 2005, and by post to those without e-mail to be sent the same weekends; in the Bowburn Interchange (local bimonthly paper delivered to all houses in the village), a brief introductory article about the project in January 2004.

1A2 THROUGH a sermon to be preached at Bowburn Methodist Church, and other churches as opportunity can be arranged.

This will be done on 23rd January 2005, 10.45 a.m. service, at Bowburn Methodist Church. The candidate will also pursue possibilities of preaching: at the parish church's service the same week, or arranging for the parish priest, Father James Thompson, to preach on a similar theme; at the Roman Catholic Church in Coxhoe for a Saturday evening mass in January.

1A3 THROUGH discussion and prayer in several existing groups.

Three groups have been identified: ecumenical Bible study group; Methodist prayer group; Methodist Women's Fellowship; and an ecumenical prayer group. Action will be taken by the candidate and members of site team who are in the groups at meetings during January.

1A4 THROUGH publication in a variety of media of further more detailed information.

Media to be used and timing will be: a dedicated web page, giving overview of the project and additional articles from 17th January 2005; and paper copies of articles to be available at both village churches and at Bowburn library from 17th January 2005.

1A5 THROUGH making available a Powerpoint presentation of the changing face of Bowburn.

This presentation will be displayed at the launch party (see 2A5 below) and will also be available for down-load through the web-site and at the local library on a CD. It will include pictures of Bowburn past and present, with some written commentary. To be prepared by the candidate together with members of the site team.

CHANGE GOAL 1. TO sensitise Christians in Bowburn to the impact on church life of the changing nature of society...

ADMINISTRATIVE GOAL 1B. BY engaging in study together about these changes in the context of church life.

1B1 THROUGH a meeting at which issues about the changing context of church life will be discussed.

This will be the first meeting of a Lent series and will happen on the evening of Tuesday 15th February 2005, with a repeat day time meeting on Thursday 17th February 2005.

1B2 THROUGH a sermon to be preached at Bowburn Methodist Church, and other churches as opportunity can be arranged, and by encouraging discussion of the issues.

This will be done on 23rd January 2005, 10.45 a.m. service, at Bowburn Methodist Church. The candidate will also pursue possibilities of preaching: at the parish church's service the same week, or arranging for the parish priest, Father James Thompson, to preach on a similar theme; at the Roman Catholic Church in Coxhoe for a Saturday evening mass in January. A meeting will be held after the Methodist service on 23rd January, and members of both village based congregations will be invited to come to discuss issues raised in the sermon.

1B3 THROUGH web-based discussion.

This will either be done through the dedicated web-site, or through the existing Bowburn website. Discussion starters can be posted, and people encouraged to start their own strands. This will need to be moderated.

1B4 THROUGH discussion and prayer in several existing groups.

Three groups have been identified: ecumenical Bible study group; Methodist prayer group; Methodist Women's Fellowship; and an ecumenical prayer group. Action will be taken by the candidate and members of site team who are in the groups at meetings during January.

CHANGE GOAL 2. TO empower Christians in Bowburn to engage in mission together...
ADMINISTRATIVE GOAL 2A. BY developing relationships with and between local Christians

2A1 THROUGH giving the project a clear identity.

The project will be called 'Bowburn Christian Network'. It will have a simple logo to be used on paper and electronic publications. The basic terms of the project will be part of the initial publicity including the contact detail cards, the web site, the initial newsletters, and the article in the December Bowburn Interchange. These will be:

1. A five month project, January to May 2005.
2. Open to all Christians with an interest in Bowburn, wherever we live, work, or worship.
3. Opening up possibilities and opportunities to reflect together on the changing role of Christians in society and within Bowburn.
4. Offering one another mutual support and encouragement in responding to God's call, through prayer, pastoral care and mutual accountability.
5. Exploring the ways in which God is calling people to continue in and develop mission in Bowburn.
6. Using a variety of approaches and media including larger meetings, small groups, publications and internet.
7. The project is to be enabled by Andrew Lunn, who lives in Bowburn and is minister in pastoral charge of the Methodist congregation in the village.

2A2 THROUGH publicity for the project disseminated throughout the village.

There will be four main ways of publicising the project. Firstly, posters from 4th January 2005 onwards, displaying the basic details and inviting interested people to contact the project in person or by post, phone or website. These will be displayed in Bowburn Library, on work place notice boards, at schools, and in shop windows. Secondly, a website giving basic details of the project and initial articles from 4th January 2005 onwards, a link to be arranged from the Bowburn village website, and with contact details including an e-mail contact button. Thirdly, an initial article in the Bowburn Interchange January edition giving the details of the project and inviting interested people to contact the project. Fourthly, an initial newsletter and project information to be sent to churches and Christian groups who may have members living or working in Bowburn including churches in Coxhoe, Shincliffe, Durham and University Christian student societies. Various members of the site team will be responsible for circulation.

2A3 THROUGH an extending process of networking, beginning from existing contacts of the site team.

A card will be prepared to hand out to people. This will have two sections: one with project details, and the other to return with contact details. This will be distributed in three ways: by the site team to people known to them personally; by the candidate as he receives details from people responding to the publicity; through the church congregations. The candidate will compile a list of people who will receive further information.

The site team and church members will be encouraged to talk with one another and other Christians they know in Bowburn, to elicit interest in the project and to engage with its

various aspects, and to encourage people to attend the launch party and subsequent events. It is hoped that through the various strategies of the project the network will gradually broaden.

2A4 THROUGH a meeting with local church leaders, lay and ordained.

Church leaders from a number of congregations with links to Bowburn will be invited to a meeting on Tuesday 11th January 2005. Food will be provided, and the candidate will give a presentation on the project. In discussion the support of these leaders will be sought for the project; they will be asked for permission to publicise the project to their congregation, and will be asked to pray for its work. There will also be discussion of a proposed statement of mutual recognition and support (see 2A7 below). Those to be invited will include: Father James Thompson, Anglican parish priest of Christ the King, Bowburn; Father Anthony Hastie, Roman Catholic priest in Coxhoe; a representative of the leadership of Emmanuel church in Durham; a Salvation Army officer from West Cornforth; Revd John Allison, Methodist minister who shares responsibility with the candidate for the section of the circuit including Bowburn; Revd Peter Kashouris, vicar of a nearby Anglican parish in Durham and ecumenical officer for the deanery; the vicar of Shincliffe Anglican parish; lay leaders to include members of the site team, church wardens from Christ the King, and those active in leading local prayer and Bible study groups.

2A5 THROUGH a project launch party.

As a way of providing a positive launch for the project an event will be held on the evening of Saturday 29th January 2005. Everyone linked to the two churches and who has been identified as possible participants in the network will be invited. Music, brief input and worship, and a chance to talk will be the main content of the event, which will aim to give a positive sense of who we are as the body of Christ in Bowburn after all the change of the last fifty years.

2A6 THROUGH ongoing contact with interested people through a variety of media.

Ongoing contact will aim to build confidence and provide support and encouragement. They will come from a variety of sources including brief stories about the ways individual Christians are engaged in mission, suggestions for action, perceived needs within the local community, and further reflections on discovering the strength of the network of Christians. These will be published in four ways: regular e-mails will be sent to participants—these will be short (no more than a hundred and fifty words) and sent at two to three weekly intervals on 8th February, 1st and 15th March, 6th and 19th April, 3rd and 17th May; a brief newsletter produced each month of the project on 13th February, 20th March, 24th April and 22nd May; changing material on the website (altered at the same dates as the publication of the newsletter; articles in further editions of the Bowburn Interchange.

CHANGE GOAL 2. To empower Christians in Bowburn to engage in mission together...
ADMINISTRATIVE GOAL 2B. BY engaging in a communal process of vocational discernment about mission

2B1 THROUGH a series of meetings for prayer and reflection during Lent 2005

These will follow a pattern which has been followed for Lent groups in the past. The group will meet on Tuesday evenings 15th and 22nd February, 1st, 8th and 15th March, 7.30-

8.30 , with information circulated as widely as possible. A second opportunity to meet will also be offered on the following Thursday mornings 11-12 at the Methodist Church. The Tuesday evening group will be run by Richard Walsh, and the Thursday morning group by the candidate.

2B2 THROUGH web-based discussion.

This will be done through the existing Bowburn website. Discussion starters can be posted, and people encouraged to start their own strands. This will be moderated by the existing site administrator.

2B3 THROUGH encouraging groups to meet and respond.

Using responses to the questionnaire, groups will be encouraged to meet. These can be on an ad hoc basis or regular; they can focus mainly on prayer, or on Bible study, or on mutual support, or on planning action; they can be based on locality, or on a shared interest or concern; numbers can vary from two (e.g. prayer partners) upwards. This will all depend on the participants. The candidate will act to bring together those who express an interest, but with the responsibility for carrying through the group meetings being on the participants.

*CHANGE GOAL 2. To empower Christians in Bowburn to engage in mission together...
ADMINISTRATIVE GOAL 2C. BY facilitating the emergence of a network of
participants in mission focussed on Bowburn.*

2C1 THROUGH encouraging groups to meet and respond.

Using responses to the questionnaire, groups will be encouraged to meet. These can be on an ad hoc basis or regular; they can focus mainly on prayer, or on Bible study, or on mutual support, or on planning action; they can be based on locality, or on a shared interest or concern; numbers can vary from two (e.g. prayer partners) upwards. This will all depend on the participants. The candidate will act to bring together those who express an interest, but with the responsibility for carrying through the group meetings being on the participants.

2C2 THROUGH encouraging prayer for Christians in Bowburn.

At all meetings connected with the project prayer will be encouraged for the project and for one another. There will also be a prayer diary as part of the website and in the newsletter. It will include prayers for Bowburn, its people and places, for local churches represented in the project, and for any action local Christians are involved with. There will be the possibility of prayer requests being sent in. Those published on the web-site will only refer to individuals by a single initial unless consent has been received directly from the individual concerned.

2C3 THROUGH developing relationships through other areas of the programme.

Each aspect of the programme has the capacity to develop relationships and links between people. This will happen through group meetings, web-based discussion, and discussion in local churches.

2C4 THROUGH one meeting near the end of the project for those interested in carrying things further.

This meeting will be in mid-May. It will meet at a location to be agreed as the project proceeds. Possible agenda items would be: reviewing things which have grown from the project; agreeing future activities and goals; providing opportunity for ideas to emerge; stating a formal commitment to working together.

D. EVALUATION PROCEDURE

1. Goal Achievement

a. Change Goal evaluation

CHANGE GOAL 1. TO sensitise Christians in Bowburn to the impact on church life of the changing nature of society...

This is a consciousness change goal which looks to change the understanding and attitudes of Christians living in the village. It will be evaluated by looking at the way in which people perceive both their individual participation and the church's participation in God's mission in the context of the village.

Structured interviews with several individuals will allow the issues to be explored. There will only be time to carry out such interviews with a small group of participants. Six people will be chosen: two from each village based congregation and two who are not part of these congregations. The structured interviews will be carried out in January, with participants chosen from among those who express an initial interest in following the project through. The structured interviews will then be repeated after the end of the project in June. The questions to be used in the interviews are listed in section D4 below. There is a possibility that the act of measurement may change the awareness of those who participate, by bringing issues into consciousness with responses being made only after some initial reflection. Using a questionnaire would not allow any judgment to be made about whether this is happening. A structured interview, on the other hand, enables the interviewer to engage with the attitudes first expressed by the participants.

The choice of people will inevitably skew the results, and some way of addressing this will be needed. By expressing an interest in the project, participants have already indicated an openness to community development and shown that they see the project as addressing issues which concern them. But there is not going to be change (or very little) in another group of people who express no interest and do not become involved. In order to assess the size of the group of those resistant to the project the results of the structured interviews will need to be viewed alongside the measurement of the second change goal—the overall growth and development in a network of Christians in the village. If there is only a minimal change in the size of the network of Christians in the village then it would seem that this change goal has not been addressed, and there is a relatively large group who are resistant. If there is considerable growth in the network, then this indicates a smaller group of people resistant to the project. The results of the structured interview may either contradict or correspond with these results. Between the two ways of measuring a reasonable assessment can be made of the change in attitudes to which the project has contributed.

In addition to this a summary of the results of the questionnaire used for strategies 1B1 and 2B3 above will provide some helpful information, especially when compared with the extent of involvement of those who fill in the questionnaire. There may be a few questionnaires which are returned by people who do not engage so fully with the project, and these might provide a useful comparison with other responses.

CHANGE GOAL 2. TO empower Christians in Bowburn to engage in mission together...

This is a system change goal which looks to change the way in which Christians relate to one another in the context of Bowburn. It will be evaluated by looking at how far a network

of relationships has been developed. If the change goal has been achieved there will have been an increase in the number of people connected with the project over its life-time. There may also be an increase in the complexity of the network, with a variety of different connections between different groups evident. The network should also have been developed well enough to maintain people's commitment and engagement with the project both during its course and after its completion.

This will therefore be measured in the following ways.

- a. By counting the number of participants registered with the project on 20th January, 20th March, and 20th May.
- b. By counting the number of participants who have contributed to the project through attending a group, contributing to on-line discussion, or corresponding with the candidate on the same three dates.
- c. By counting the number of identifiable nodes of the network (e.g. prayer partnerships; active discussion strands on the website; interest focussed groups) which have become evident on the same three dates.
- d. By observing the outcomes of the final meeting, and any other observable phenomena at the end of the project, and listing these. In all cases it should be asked whether what is observed is new, or whether it was already happening before the project began.

While it would be inappropriate to indicate a precise form for a future network to take, or to prejudge how people would wish to see relationships within the network developing, it is possible to speculate about possible outcomes. Under the final heading above a variety of things might be observed, such as:

- a. continuing ecumenical small group work;
- b. a formalised structure for nurturing the continued life of the network;
- c. a commitment to continued contact between particular individuals with shared interests.

b. Administrative Goal evaluation

The site team in its meetings after the conclusion of the project will take time to assess together how well the project plans were implemented. This will be done for each administrative goal together with its strategies. As witnesses of the project the site team will be able to make a judgment about the relative success of different parts of the project. Comments will also be invited from participants who have been active in the project. This will be done with a brief concluding questionnaire (see section D4 below) available at the end of the project (at the final meeting, through e-mail circulation, the web-site and a final newsletter).

2. Personal Growth of Project Participants

Members of the site team will be invited to keep a journal of their involvement with the project. This possibility will also be presented to individuals who become involved in some way in the project. This group will be representative of the project by including people who involve themselves in different ways, at least one from each of the following groups:

- a. those attending the Lent meetings;
- b. those deciding to meet with others on some other basis;
- c. those co-operating with others on some other basis;
- d. those engaging with the project by electronic means.

An open invitation will be given (at the final meeting, through e-mail circulation, the website and a final newsletter) to anyone who has been part of the project to contribute to this assessment through a short written summary.

The site team in its meetings after the conclusion of the project will use at least one session to discuss personal growth and will assess both their own experiences, as they are willing, and submissions from others: those who have been invited to keep a journal, and those who have responded to the open invitation.

3. Group Growth

This is main aim of the project. As such the assessment of it will be covered to a considerable extent by section D1 above. In addition a representative individual from each of the groups mentioned in section D2 above (with regard to journaling) will be invited to comment on the outcomes. They will be asked to comment on three areas:

- a. whether Christian networks in Bowburn are more significant than they were;
- b. whether this is making a difference to the quality of community in Bowburn;
- c. what kind of impact this is having on the mission of the church in Bowburn.

They will also be asked to comment on any other significant changes in which the project has been instrumental.

An open invitation will be given (at the final meeting, through e-mail circulation, the website and a final newsletter) to anyone who has been part of the project to contribute to this assessment through a short written summary.

The site team in its meetings after the conclusion of the project will use at least one session to discuss group growth seen in the network. They will bring their own contributions and will also consider submissions from others: both the representative individuals, and those who have responded to the open invitation.

4. Instruments for Obtaining Data

In summary the main instruments to be used will be as follows.

- a. Structured interviews—for questions see section 4a below.
- b. Count of participants and nodes.
- c. Assessment of final outcomes.
- d. Journalling.
- e. Final brief questionnaire for participants—for draft format see section 4b below.
- f. Comments received as a result of a final open invitation about personal growth and group growth.
- g. Site team discussion.

a. Questions for structured interviews

Basic information to be recorded:

Name Gender Age
 Church affiliation (place and denomination)
 Connection with Bowburn, and for how long this has been

Main questions. While these will be used initially, further supplementary questions will be used depending on the initial response, to clarify the question, to follow up points of interest, and to illicit more detailed replies.

How do you think your church/congregation understands mission, and what does it do to put this into practice? (More particularly ascertain whether mission has any relationship with the local community.)
 How are you involved in this?
 Are you aware of this changing over the last few years?
 Does this satisfy you at the present?
 In what ways do you see yourself living out your faith? (More particularly ascertain whether this happens in the context of the local community.)
 Does a more mobile population with less interest in the local community concern you?
 How do you think the church’s relationship with the local community differs now from in the past?
 How do you think changes in society over the past forty years have affected the church?

b. Draft of final questionnaire

Name				
Gender		Age		
Church affiliation	Yes/No	If yes, name of church		
Please state your connection with Bowburn, and for how long this has been				

Please tick against the following to show how you have been involved in the Bowburn Christian Network since January 2005:

Attending the launch party	
Replying to initial questionnaire	
Reading newsletter (paper copy)	
Reading newsletter (electronic copy)	
Accessing web-site	
Submitting at least one contribution to a web-based discussion	
Attending at least one Lent group	

(further possibilities can be added depending on what happens during the course of the project)

Please indicate how far your involvement with the Bowburn Christian Network has helped you do the following things. If you think the statement refers to something which you don't want to be doing, then tick the final box. Tick one box for each statement.

	Helped a lot	Helped a little	Not helped	Not applicable
I have engaged with information about the changing nature of society.				
I have thought about how changes in society have affected Christian life.				
I have questioned how my church relates to local communities.				
I have benefited in some way from meeting Christians I had not met before.				
I am more aware of prayer needs in the local community.				
I have thought about what God wants Christians to do in local communities.				
I have changed my views about how Christians should relate to their local community.				
I have changed my practice regarding Christian engagement in the local community.				
I will be doing something with other Christians in Bowburn in the next year.				

Please make any comments you wish to about how the project has worked. What has been effective and what has not been effective for you?

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