

Neocharismatic-Evangelical Christianity in Britain: Religious Growth through Public Engagement

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Abstract

The thesis examines the under-studied contemporary phenomenon of White British growth-focussed, “apostolic” neocharismatic Christianity, in a local context. The neocharismatic-evangelical constituency of “Folkfield,” a city in the east of England, is sampled and analysed using an ethnographic group case study, centred on two of the city’s largest churches: one, a Hillsong-affiliated independent, the other a Newfrontiers “multi-site” church plant. Also presented is a sample of other local neocharismatic figures, groups and initiatives, all of which were active within the city between 2011 and 2013 when fieldwork was undertaken.

The case studies, having described and locally historicised the actors in question, focus on the organisation of social welfare provision advanced by these groups to the local population. These services are found to be at the core of emerging efforts by charismatic “post-denominational” churches to incorporate themselves visibly as local public actors alongside secular institutions. The services are found to be designed not simply in response to the local needs of the population, however, but in accordance with a given group’s internal culture: its religious and theo-political ideology, and the membership structures enforced by self-determined “apostolic” leaders. At the same time, to the extent that a biblically sectarian group *does* advance an agenda for public engagement, it is found in this study to be kept necessarily aware of its position in a wider evangelical Christian polity (in this case, that specific to Folkfield): A polity comprised of other independent churches and church leaders, some allies, some not; and in which modern neocharismatic groups must also consider their position within the pre-existing Christian establishment – that is for instance, whether or not to partake in co-operative ventures with local denominational actors, including of course the Church of England.

The primary lens for understanding the religious subject is therefore socio-political, generating insight upon these groups as public institutions using a data record compiled through participant observation, document analysis and interviews with relevant local actors – neocharismatic, denominational, and secular. The thesis concludes with a summary of possible future avenues in research, in order to further advance the political as well as sociological understanding of “post-denominational” Christianity in Britain.

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Chapter 1: Study outline

This thesis examines the public institutional advancement of independent charismatic-evangelical (“neocharismatic”) Christianity in Britain today. It is a modern Protestant sub-culture based in congregations of “born-again” worshippers, pursuing “a life in Jesus Christ,” practising supernatural “spiritual gifts” under the leadership of Biblically-styled preachers and “apostolic” pastors.¹ The primary institutional unit for its social scientific analysis is the local church. A particular focus in this study, however, is the range of sub-institutions – some familiar in modern religious organisation, some recently emerging – through which British neocharismatics are strategically advancing a social and theological culture to the wider public: hoping to maximise congregational growth, and influence, in local community realms.

With an empirical analysis at the local organisational level, I propose to advance British neocharismatic religion for further interdisciplinary study. Using original ethnographic data, I seek to formulate and refine working hypotheses for understanding these innovative and dynamic religious groups at a normative political and economic as opposed to merely sociological level. This will be attempted by documenting some empirical examples in a local context. Thus in chapters 4 through 6 of this thesis, I present a sampled population

¹ In the New Testament, the authors of Ephesians write of “one body and one Spirit … one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4: 4-5). Contemporary neocharismatics believe these and other passages to articulate God’s intended design for the single “true” Christian church, which is against any form of denominationalism. Within this “one body,” it is written further that Christ “gave gifts to his people,” interpreted by neocharismatics (and Pentecostalists before them) to mean various supernatural abilities:

There are different kinds of gifts … To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge … to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing … to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12: 4-10.)

These “gifts” are promoted – in various ways, according to a given church and its leadership – among the general congregation. As to the Biblical sanction for the leaders themselves: In Ephesians it is stated that Christ,

gave himself the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4: 11-13.)

of neocharismatic groups advancing within a single suburban locality, “Folkfield,” in the east of England. The account takes the form of a cross-comparative ethnographic case study compiled over a two-year period. It is based on data obtained through my own participatory observation of events, materials, and interviews with a range of local actors.

Findings will be suitable for transference to other empirical locations for further research application. In addition, though, it is intended that they contribute to a richer understanding of ideologically-driven public institutionalism at a more general level, perhaps beyond the realm of the “religious” association as conventionally perceived. Such an agenda assumes the continuation of moves by neoliberal governments away from democratic structures of state provision in favour of private corporate (indeed, in recent British state rhetoric, “localised”) systems of enterprise. I investigate in this thesis whether neocharismatic institutionalism, hitherto unexamined in the U.K., can be understood as a special case of the latter.

The investigation does not aspire to making predictions about the future growth of neocharismatic Christianity in Britain, nor to theorise its “religious” significance more generally, though some insight on these matters will inevitably be drawn in conclusion. The social significance of the neocharismatic phenomenon is instead sought to reflect recent analyses of voluntary or third sector organisation (Alcock 2003). This work articulates a perspective from which the local religious group stands alongside other “volunteer-driven associations [that] have slowly adopted entrepreneurial and market-driven initiatives” in pursuit of social service goals (Billis 2010b: 13). Such a perspective on churches and other faith-based organisations (FBOs) is not new in the academic literature: in Britain (Torry 1995; Harris 1998) or in the United States, from where much practical and theoretical insight continues to be drawn as a result of insufficient domestic research (Rochester and Torry 2010: 121). Nor is it especially controversial among the religious faithful, particularly its leaderships. For the latter, the undertaking of more commercially strategic approaches to advancing the role and relevance of the Christian church in contemporary society is legitimised by the continued loss of capital and labour resources brought on by an ever-declining active church membership (Archbishops Council 2004).

Neocharismatic congregations, on the other hand, have achieved considerable growth throughout the very years of the historic denominations’ most penetrating decline (Brierley 2006). Given this, it is curious indeed that they have been left “relatively unresearched” by scholars (Bruce 1998: 230), even if only on the subject of an observable increase in worship

services: never mind the social effects of neocharismatic growth on local community life, a subject which remains largely unexplored in scholarship.

Conceptualising the local religious group: recent formulations in policy analysis

In conceptual terms, what distinguishes the nominal religious group in local public orders remains its preservation of a *religious* imperative.² For Christians, it is observed, the “primary purpose” of their social existence is worship before God (Cnaan 2002: 80). British Christian congregations generally, it is recently argued, can therefore be seen “as a distinctive form of the archetypal third sector” organisation, with this distinction articulated via the “special case voluntary association” exhibited by the religious collective:

Much of [the local congregation’s] organizational behaviour can be explained by key features of the associational form which are markedly different from the practices of the bureaucratic “world”. In the first place, involvement is “essentially voluntary” and members will leave if their expectations of material, social or psychological benefits are disappointed. Secondly, their needs and demands are directed to “expressive social and personal benefits such as friendship, mutual support and exchange of news” ... rather than the achievement of instrumental goals. Their leaders have a very limited range of tools for persuading members to follow their suggestions and there is little interest in formal procedures and deadlines.

(Rochester and Torry 2010: 116, quoting Harris 1998.)

Within this, moreover, the authority of religious *leadership* is conceived as especially unique:

Unlike [secular] associations ... debate about the organization’s overall purposes and long-term aims ... simply do not happen: the religious or theological principles underpinning congregations are simply not open to question [by ordinary members] but accepted as a condition of membership. Religious functionaries ... do not occupy the same position in the life and work of congregations as lay paid staff ... they have a special kind of authority which

² It is essential that this be publically recognised so, at least in terms of legitimisation by the state: as it stands a matter of historical record, not moral judgement. Whilst contemporary British law ensures freedom of religion in the sense of the right to personal belief and to voluntary association among believers, restrictions emerge at the formal institutional level, specifically in applications for Charitable legal status (something which provides considerable economic benefits). This issue has become a more public one in recent years, including with regard to religious groups. Neocharismatic churches themselves, although rarely the subject of attention, have been advantaged by certain legislative developments. This will all be discussed in more detail further on.

is based on tradition and charisma and is independent of the congregational association.
(Rochester and Torry, p. 116.)

These authors tentatively conclude that religious groups, by their very nature, cannot be pulled too far into state policymakers' designs for increasing the integration of voluntary sector "partners" into private sector modes of welfare provision, and not least due to the threat of imposition by "orthodox business practices" on non-profit companies (Haugh and Kitson 2007: 991). For them, the "associational norms" of the congregation are synonymous with its *theological values*, and these appear to be incommensurable with "the ideas of civic responsibility and public service which underpin public policy and shape the work of those who implement it" (Rochester and Torry 2010: 130).

Other observers may well take issue with that claim, but they would necessarily be *religious* observers also. I am not one of those, and therefore take no position, but note that this is clearly a normative matter. The authors above concede as much by concluding with a reflection on its "roots in the distinctive entrenched characteristics of religious organizations," which generate "constraints" on the latter's "enhanced involvement" in government agenda; constraints which, it is suggestively phrased, "go beyond common diagnosis": here being an implicit suggestion that the core value characteristics of local religious groups are beyond the reasonable comment of secular practitioners (Rochester and Torry, p. 131).³

Christian theological values, or the assumptions made of them, thus do not only serve to define the local church as an organisation for public welfare provision in common, historical understanding, but are additionally argued in recent political discourses to underpin the local church and FBOs' identities as third sector institutions. This is a response to the conceptualisation of local religious groups by state policymakers under a contemporary "managerialist" welfare agenda, originally devised by the "New Right" governments of the 1980s but really implemented in Britain from the political centre-left by New Labour (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin 2000). Those "Christian values" cash out in the "expressive social and personal benefits" of structured religious association described above. This helps to explain religiously sympathetic scholars' analytic tendency to preserve Christian groups from the profane controversies associated with any deployment of "market-driven initiatives"

³ Perhaps on this view, not just beyond secular comment but beyond objective social scientific inquiry itself – demonstrating, at least, how swiftly the familiar conflict between "religious" and "secular" reasoning are raised.

within a charitable, non-profit domain; such rational-economic initiatives being a natural feature of privatisation processes, of course.

Hence a general conclusion in research by voluntary sector and social policy specialists: the suggestion that church groups in Britain,

can make an important contribution to the implementation of the twin policy agenda [of delivering public services and encouraging community engagement] but that their theological underpinnings and organisational characteristics also raise questions about their suitability to play a major role in public policy implementation. (Cairns, Harris and Hutchison 2007: 413.)

Introducing the neocharismatic congregation: clarifying the research interest

Significantly, recent studies have emphasised within this analysis the “holistic” nature of local Christian provision, a notion which necessarily belongs at the level of the cultural. Empirical studies tend to agree that for Christian leaders and volunteers, “working with, and serving, the local community is an integral part of living a Christian life and a motivating factor in its own right,” and that “serving the community and worshipping is all part of the same thing” (Cairns et al. 2007: 417). However, it is remarked in the literature as a *general* fact that this holistic account does *not* “extend to converting people to Christianity”: that,

[as a] widely accepted theological approach ..., service to others [proceeds as] an outward expression of personal faith, compassion and solidarity, rather than as an evangelically inspired approach to “soul winning.” (Cairns et al., p. 418; following Clydesdale 1990.)

This may well be accurate in the case of mainstream Anglicans and other historic local denominations. But a very different account is suggested in the empirical example of independent, non-denominational neocharismatic groups. For their own “accepted theological approach” to social work – and on a deeper level of social interaction itself, one suspects – categorically emphasises members’ pursuit of new Christian converts. This may even entail the receiver’s own assent to a neocharismatic conversion as a preferential condition of welfare recipiency. Here, the process of conversion is re-encoded as entry into a totalising *lifestyle* of health and well-being: “supernaturally” experienced in the minds of its members, whilst purposefully evinced to non-members in profoundly holistic terms. On such terms, a charismatic born-again identity may be promoted as the supreme welfare-provider itself, in a

sense. But crucially, personal belief alone is not an option, as the major factor here is social participation in the congregation: in “the life of our church,” to quote the pastors of my own church cases to come. A result of this profound social immersion may well be the concealment from general public view of the specific behavioural imperatives that characterise a psychology rooted in literalist Biblicalism: some of which, such as on sexual matters, are highly socially regressive.

British neocharismatic associations have been mostly ignored by scholars not merely in the context of policymakers’ recommissioning of the voluntary sector and its delivery of welfare goals, but also as regards the intrinsic sociological significance of the movement’s growth since its inception in the mid-1970s (Walker 1985). This suggests two different research programmes, separated by academic discipline if not by empirical subject matter. The first is narrow, recent, and empirically specified to the theme of local social provision and its structured organisation, as articulated in the literature referenced above. The second is broad and polymorphous, characterised by a conventional sociology of religion emphasis, concerned to explain the popularisation of neocharismatic religiosity (its “belief and practice”) amid an intensifying climate of societal secularisation, referencing familiar theoretical frameworks.

The proposed study, as indicated, selects this latter analysis. But there are important qualifications which must refer to the matter of neocharismatic Christianity’s domestic sociological neglect – in short, the lack of its descriptive and theoretical account to date. Also to be clarified, though, is the actual profile of these groups as social providers in the legislative sense: of their general relevance to the policy discussions cited, as far as can be ascertained by preliminary account at least.

It should be recognised that these initial matters are all internally related, and that the observed facts, in any case, are predisposed to conventional sociological understandings of the “religious” form in question. This is to speak, for example, of accounts that might typologically define neocharismatic churches; or suggest how their religious culture is to be rationalised on “sectarian” lines, observed in the traditional assumptions of “church-sect” analysis (Wilson 1967); or that categorise them to “conservative evangelicalism” generally, presupposing of neocharismatics a reactionary political motivation in the style of American Christian Right movements; even to “resurgent fundamentalism” at the global level – a category liable to embrace all contemporary “orthodox” religious expressions under its theoretical scheme.

These scholarly categories, and their relevance, will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, in which I review the social scientific literature on contemporary charismatic Christianity in the West. For the purposes of clarifying the proposed study, however, it is sufficient that I lay out some ground-level facts about British neocharismatic organisations, drawn largely from my own preliminary local fieldwork. By placing these observations within the framework of recent discussion around voluntary (religious) welfare provision and the state, some principle research questions can be formulated.

It has been remarked by scholars and consultants to the state that there exists in Britain “no typical relationship between local and regional government and faith-based organisations” (Fentener, Daly, Foster and James 2008: xi), and furthermore that “sustained government interest in the potential contribution” of FBOs to social provision on the state’s terms “is relatively new” (Cairns et al 2007: 415). This explains the recent nature of scholarly efforts to delineate local Christian groups in practical organisational terms at all in Britain – albeit in the language of broader (and characteristically transitory) state policy narratives. But it indeed constitutes, I think, the initial development of a *sociopolitical* examination of local religious agency where before there was none. The ethnographic case-based methodology typical of much of the work cited would alone suggest a new departure for religion’s study in Britain, one that neither presupposes particular sociologies of Christianity, nor excites debate with the accepted generalities of societal secularisation (Voas and Crockett 2005; Glendinning and Bruce 2014; cf. Woodhead and Catto 2012). I will discuss in the context of a literature review in Chapter 2 how emergent approaches in fact manifest a common purpose with recent work in American sociology of religion directed to the sustained *cultural* exposition of religious groups, similarly commended there as moving beyond the theoretical assumptions of previous decades’ scholarship, in pursuit of changing “religious” realities (Edgell 2012).

Renewed interest in British congregations’ public provisions has been said to reveal a widespread ignorance over the churches’ historical centrality to “the development of systematic responses to social need.” Governmental discourse around the “faith contribution” to society is seen to be set apart by its direction of research “towards small-scale activity which takes place at a local or community level,” instead of being concerned with “those large national or regional institutions whose role in the welfare mix is taken for granted and whose religious origins are forgotten or overlooked” (Rochester, Bisset and Singh 2007: 43). Community studies scholars and religious practitioners alike have agreed an ambivalent and sometimes openly critical view of the Government’s post-1997 agenda, a view reinforced by

their findings from testing its empirical applicability in local domains. Many have realised that the state's embrace of citizens "from a much wider variety of faiths" than were represented in previous welfare settlements – back to the nineteenth century, indeed – reflects typical political instrumentalism; What else, they ask, given the public sector's traditional policy of rejectionism towards faith-based providers. In short, the state's enthusiastic advocacy of a "multi-faith" welfare and voluntary sector no longer incurs the excitement among the scholarly or faithful that it did it in the first two terms of New Labour (for a collection, see Dinham, Furbey and Lowndes 2009).

The general terms of the political agenda, though, may well have warranted interested scholars' exclusion from their own accounts of the growing base of neocharismatic congregations, and there would appear to be a good empirical rationale for this. Independent neocharismatic groups exist outside of the parish system by institutional definition, and outside the historical nexus of church-state relations by additional fact of their adolescence. As supposedly "sectarian" or "deviant" religious entities in classical sociological terms, they are not either part of the British social welfare landscape as formally conceived. Now one might surmise that these claims only actually matter under scholarly perspectives, and not in the views that prevail in the real life of ordinary local populations: it is an empirical question, and empirical accounts of local neocharismatic relations are indeed few and far between (Hunt 1997; Hocken 2009).

Nonetheless, it might be reasonably inferred that neocharismatic churches are concerned to exclude *themselves* from participation in formal welfare enterprises, and plausibly on account of their more controversial religious practices. Supporting this, leading sociologist of religion James Beckford remarks in his critique of New Labour's courting of "inter-faith" bodies in the early 2000s that "[r]epresentative religious groups or organisations that were not content to fit into" emerging policy categories were excluded from consideration, for only those which "shared the same values and were prepared to respect any outstanding differences with other communities qualified for, *or sought*, membership" (Beckford 2010: 127; my emphasis).

Beckford does not identify the discontented groups he has in mind. Consider, though, that the tendency in policy research to exclude neocharismatic groups appears less than reasonable from the point of view of mainstream church institutions themselves: for it is they who supply the quantitative empirical data confirming that neocharismatic and Pentecostal Protestantism is the only positive growth sector within the whole Christian church in the last

half a century (Brierley 2006. For equivalent U.S. sources, Thumma 1996; Roozen and Hadaway 1993). More significantly for the *qualitative* account this study proposes, neocharismatic institutions' functional independence from the state-religious sphere strongly resonates with their incorporation as legal charities. This now a standardised practice, though it, too, remains unremarked in the literature. In recent years it has been encouraged effectively as a licence for commercial market-led institutional innovation. Further, still, this is not only promoted by charitable sector overseers across the West states, but is found in recent scholarship to have been promoted more persistently by British governments than any others (McKay, Moro, Teasdale and Clifford 2011). This can be explored directly in my case studies by looking at both the formal character of the local neocharismatic church as a Charitable Company, and the sub-institutions presently branching off from what appears to be an increasingly corporatistic, decreasingly ecclesiological model. The real significance of neocharismatic organisations in the social policy literature (and vice-versa) is likely to be revealed on this account.

The phenomenon's general exclusion from research is similarly unreasonable in respect to neocharismatic leaders and members themselves, of course, and this opens to the other missing account important to this thesis: that of participants' subjective determination as providers of public welfare (of general or specific kinds, as examples might reveal). This subjective account would almost certainly place neocharismatic public actors outside the rational-legal structures assumed by social policy scholars to define "participation" in voluntary sector outreach. This issue was already introduced above: via the notion that a religious conversion to neocharismatic membership may, in fact, substantiate a great deal more than is presently understood in cultural terms.

Let me now summarise some ground-level observations about the local neocharismatic church, as they would appear on a preliminary basis: drawn here from my own case samples, but evidenced more much widely in public documents, from Charity Commission financial accounts to the church's own literature.

Pivotal, I suggest that neocharismatic groups appear to be better-equipped for local public service on the very measures emphasised by state government. In terms of its material resources, the larger local neocharismatic churches are likely to outperform any nearby mainstream congregations on several levels: On the number of members and attendees; on its intake of cash through members' and other corporate donations; and, increasingly it would appear, on its quantity of asset stock, from in-house equipment to buildings (secured via lease-hold if not outright ownership). These accomplishments are certain to be due in large

part to Western charismatics evangelicals' synchronous relocation in recent decades to suburban city environments, giving them access to a younger, more culturally modernised and more affluent population base. But in any case, as overwhelmingly *local* achievements, such impressive material and organisational gains must be hypothesised as evidence of some significant cultural advance by neocharismatic movements themselves. The membership gains in particular, meanwhile, speak urgently to public welfare practitioners' emphasis on the *voluntarist* dispensation of public services; a special expectation on Christian cohorts, as discussed.

And yet as mentioned, under conventional assumptions – ultimately enforced largely by sociology of religion accounts – independent supernaturalist evangelical groups have continued to be regarded as essentially sectarian entities within British society; this to judge specifically, but certainly not *only*, by their exclusion from recent literature seeking to operationalise local religious groups for analysis within theories of third sector change. The case of British neocharismatic organisations, therefore, presents a paradox for further investigation. This can be pursued with the following research questions:

1. In view of their increasing stock of material and cultural resources (people, cash, and assets), what is the actual state of neocharismatics' local "welfare provision"?
2. How in practice do neocharismatic groups as registered Charities balance the benefits of state legitimisation with the conversionist imperative that underscores their culture and, presumably, their public social engagement?
3. How, then, can British neocharismatic Christians be more appropriately objectified for social and political analysis as institutional entities operating within a secular public polity?
4. Assuming these developments continue into the future, what are the prospects of closer alignment between neocharismatic groups and parish-based (primarily Anglican) organisations?

Before introducing my own case samples, with a brief account of each (detailed discussion follows in Chapter 3), I must first say more about the neocharismatic subject, its nature and its origins.

Neocharismatic Christianity: innovative, growth-focussed, conversionist

Whilst incorporated independently of any historic denomination, neocharismatic churches are usually allied to a company of similar congregations across other locations, often referred to as a church “family” or “network” in native and scholarly language respectively. Institutional membership of such a network, often bearing degrees of international affiliation, may furnish the local congregation with extra material support; but it provides cultural and organisational fellowship much as a conventional denomination would expect.

Allan Anderson, a British scholar of Pentecostal Christianity, invokes a general definition of “neocharismatic” for “the vast number of independent churches” – representing some 300 million people worldwide, according to recent survey (Pew Research Centre 2011) – that practise charismatic “gifts of the Spirit” like literal communication with God, miraculous physical healing, and prophetic foresight (Anderson 2010: 14). These abilities comprise a supernatural addition to the formal ritual of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” as this was developed by British and American Methodists in the nineteenth century. Their comparatively modest objective was to outline the way to a perfect Christian life. Pentecostalists, however, sought to distinguish for every individual an experience of subjective supernatural *empowerment*: advancing “spiritual gifts” to “equip” the individual lay Christian not merely for a sanctified life but to witness, evangelise, and convert other people (see note 1).

Such practices, historically suppressed among the religious populations of Europe by powerful clerical authorities, were characteristic of Christian “renewals” and “revivals” throughout the centuries after the Bible was written. However their mass engagement by African-American congregations in California in the early 1900s, coming on the back of intensifying racial hatred and cultural rejection (Anderson and Hollenweger 1999), brought “spiritual gifting” to the attention of New World Christian believers. From here would eventually form the worldwide denominations of “classical” Pentecostalism – the Assemblies of God, the Elim Pentecostal Church, the Potters House Christian Fellowship, and many others. The neocharismatic churches, in Anderson’s definition, thus comprise a contemporary subset. As well as organising outside of the classical Pentecostal denominations, global neocharismatic variants do not even formally require the physical manifestation of spiritual gifts (Robbins 2004: 121). Instead among their membership, emphasis is laid upon one’s cultivation of a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, supernatural ability and experience – particularly perhaps as rendered in the expressions of *social power* necessary to effective evangelism – remain basically central to neocharismatic congregational orders. Acknowledging this fundamental feature, the

present study posits a more specialised definition for the British neocharismatic research subject. It extends to those independent evangelical churches which, so far as can be qualitatively evidenced, are presently advancing on the sociopolitical dimensions I have outlined above: in growing congregational membership, in strengthening financial resource, but most importantly, in developing public relations in the local sphere (whether with individual citizens, groups or organisations, formally or informally, as the evidence reveals).

This organisational definition of the neocharismatic subject does not centralise particular theological beliefs and practices in quite the way that the religious scholarly literature is obliged to do so. Its authors, quite appropriately, are concerned to delineate a religious movement among many other religious movements (often in its global significance, moreover). This, of course, is necessary first-order descriptive work. In a British context, it provides the definitional points necessary to recognise what one is *observing* when faced with an auditorium full of local suburbanites with their hands in the air, eyes clenched, voices praying aloud in a somewhat dissenting image of unrestrained joy and servility. It assists as well – but I think notably less so – with what one is to understand of members' talk and behaviour *after* the charismatic worship service, in the unmistakenly secularised antechamber, as participants expound over herbal teas and cappuccinos the “radical” role that the local church plays in their life. Or, just as likely, the role that it plays in their *new* life, since joining it: as there is frequently disclosed here an intimate account of injurious emotional struggle finally overcome in Christian salvation.

This latter scene, bifurcated as it is from the privatised rituals of worship and prayer services, signals the beginning of an additional account of this religious culture as it moves into familiar public spaces, and from there into secular environments: where a social psychology of Bible-based supernaturalism must be assumed as unexpected by the non-convert, and as very likely alien to their sensibilities; at which point, of course, questions of cultural compatibility arise. The subsequent social scientific account would remain a “religious” anthropological one were it confined to the individual and microsocial analysis of charismatic actors’ beliefs and experiences (see Luhrmann 2012 for a notable recent example in U.S. research). But, the empirical evidence of more substantial recent efforts by neocharismatic leaders and their volunteers at formal institution-building, at real ongoing projects constrained by local bureaucratic and economic arenas, makes necessary a resolutely political analysis as well. That is demanding of a case-based methodology, as undertaken here. This is a serious advance on general descriptions of representative “religious movement,” deduced using standard sociological “explanation of variance” procedures – an

approach that is indeed “forced upon social scientists by a lack of data or of fine-grained theories,” as leading sociologist Jon Elster remarks (2007: 12).

An alternative analysis of social order *in situ* is strengthened by a prefacing of key historical events, in this case at the national level. In Britain, charismatic practices had begun to appear in mainline denominational services by the 1960s, causing no small amount of upset among the reserved middle-class parishioners of time. The phenomenon soon earned the epithet “charismatic renewal,” gradually replaced by “neopentecostalism” among sociologists of religion, who by the late 1970s were referring increasingly to its broader Western scope. “Ecstatic” spiritual incidents had occurred in quick succession in North America, Britain, Australasia and South Africa. An Episcopal church in Los Angeles is usually credited as the original site of unsolicited charismatic “outbreak,” its British-born priest having announced his own spiritual baptismal experience to a surprised flock in 1960; he was forced to resign and found his own congregation.

In Britain, similar events soon motivated some supernatural converts to organise outside the parish domain. Sociologist Stephen Hunt, summarising his discipline’s contemporary literature on Pentecostalism and its late modern descendants, acknowledges the emergent British context directly with his discussion of “sectarian expressions of neo-Pentecostalism outside of the mainstream churches,” rightfully crediting the origins of British neocharismatic organisation to the “Restorationist” or “house church” movement of the mid-1970s (Walker 1989, 1997).

Restorationism, as a hybrid form of Pentecostalism, seemed more active, through its distinct dogma, in demonstrating the power of God, restoring a “lost” Church, and rebuilding the Kingdom of Christ in the End Times. (Hunt 2010: 185).

The theological tone of this description is not misplaced: such objectives were literally advanced in Restorationists’ plans, and continue to be so (Percy 1997; Kay 2007). Perhaps some qualification is required upon Hunt’s “End Times” comment, however. For it has been pointed out that churches conforming to the contemporary Western neocharismatic model, although endorsing the core doctrine that Christ will “return to Earth” in damnifying judgement on mankind, have placed decreasing emphasis on such “End Times” as a point of culture. Such fatalistic oaths inject an awkward dissonance into professed ambitions for indefinite growth in public life, especially as expedients to structured influence in the long-run. As noted already, institutional neocharismatic proposals are likely to require a minimum

amount of local validation; the rationalities behind which, to say the least, are unlikely to harmonise with Biblical “End Times” commentaries.

Certain of the political and economic interactions stipulated of recent neocharismatic advances in Britain will be held as characteristic of liberal democratic life (if not reducing to a “post-Christian” society, as some provocative voices suggest). A fundamental one is, indeed, the freedom of voluntary religious associations to form and to advance themselves within the bounds of a secular state polity (see note 2 above for conditions arising here). Such freedom is a famously Constitutional feature for the U.S. Naturally enough it is from there that neocharismatic culture originates as a theological system and, very importantly, continues to be referred to by many leaders for the latest in cultural knowledge trends and organisational innovations, for church design and more. Knowledge is channelled through a massive global evangelical publishing industry (Bartholomew 2006), but more informally through the regular contact between neocharismatic leaders within their respective networks. British leaders inevitably look to their American counterparts, some of whom lead congregations in the tens of thousands, for inspiration. This is not obviously driven by needs for theological consultation, and resembles conventional streams of “American Culture” export in those regards.

But the empirical evidence here, again not covered in objective sociological accounts, reveals the major role also played in American neocharismatic institution-building by the social sciences, particularly the post-war literature in organisational business management (Watson and Scalen 2008).⁴ In recent years, neocharismatic leaders have only increased their appetite for management consultants and various other business experts (I will return to this briefly in chapter 2). Incidentally this appears not simply to be for the purpose of increasing their own organisational expertise. Such figures may address the congregation directly, in the regularised “visiting speaker” role. This signals something more significant, perhaps related to the enculturation of popularist strains of capitalism within specifically neocharismatic Christian communities (Maddox 2012).

Not surprisingly, digital information and communications technologies, principally the internet, have enhanced all these processes as much as one might imagine (indeed, the

⁴ The development of possibly the very first non-denominational “megachurch,” Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, was in notable part a co-operative venture between its ambitious young founder, evangelical pastor Bill Hybels, and America’s most well-known management theorist, Peter F. Drucker. See Jeff Chu, “How Willow Creek is leading evangelicals by learning from the business world,” *Fast Company*, December 2010; Rich Karlgaard, “Peter Drucker and Me,” *Forbes*, April 2014.

phenomenon of the “online church” has provided a new site of research into the maintenance of religious “belief networks” in recent years; Hutchings 2011). A relevant topic for my empirical chapters, though, will be how these communications may have facilitated changes in *non*-virtual social environments, given the real importance of internet communications to growth-focussed industries, which perhaps include a locally-bound Christian constituency – if evidence can be presented for it, representing Christian interests across a specific urban locale, for example. Again, on preliminary observation alone, the dynamic potential displayed by neocharismatic congregations strongly predicts some form of organisation beyond the individual church, further challenging sectarian conventions.

This generally sharpens empirical inquiry into the administrative contact that exists between local neocharismatic churches and non-charismatic “faith-based” agencies, and of course in potentially any number of public sector domains: physical and mental health, recreation, education, perhaps others.⁵ Outside the occasional journalistic probe it is seldom considered how involved evangelical churches are in public sector affairs, and this leaves little idea of which domains they might favour, and why.

The empirical evidence for neocharismatic growth

The years 1970 to 1974 were heady days of great excitement, and discovery: a discovery of meeting groups all over the country with similar beginnings and common aspirations. Those aspirations, on the whole, were related to “walking with God” in such a way that the experiential and the supernatural became a living grace that seem to have done away with religious legalism once and for all. The legalism of clericalism, church order, standardised liturgies, denominational certainties, and dogmatic doctrines, were seen to be swept aside by the coming of the Spirit … [Those men] experienced those early days as freedom *from* the old religious order; how this new freedom would develop (i.e. what they would become free *to* do) was simply not known. (Walker 1989: 58).

These remarks, by the historian of British Restorationism Andrew Walker, sketch the humble origins of what would become the Restorationist movement, but characterise also what, by

⁵ It can be noted here that one of the very first associations formed for the purpose of promoting charismatic Christian fellowship to the world was the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International, founded for lay businessmen in 1952 by a Californian dairy farmer. The Fellowship did not maintain unity for long, as is the norm with modern evangelical enterprise; but it continues in various attenuated forms, including in Britain, and indeed in my own case location of Folkfield, where annual meetings are convened in a local hotel.

the 1990s, would became more frequently acknowledged by concerned ecclesiologists and church growth observers as the “new church” movement. Anderson (2004) later notes that in Britain, the neocharismatic church forms originally described by Walker in the early 1980s, and largely overlooked by social scientific scholars thereafter, were probably outpacing the established Pentecostal churches in local Christian presence and influence. My empirical cases will suggest this to be a considerable understatement, in fact.

Let us consider at this point, however, the statistical data available. The only comprehensive effort made in recent years to survey Britain’s church population is the English Church Census (ECC), funded by Christian Research. In 2005, the census identified 277 different denominations active in England. (Given the negligible churchgoing figures for Britain – less than 7 per cent of the population, on recent measures – most of these are sure to be vanishingly small.) “Neocharismatic” does not feature as a category. The census researchers asked for the self-identification of churches through their leaders only. For this reason, of course, matters were fated to become unclear within ex-denominational realms; the ECC’s designers, concerned to acquire as colourful a picture as possible, seem to have anticipated this. In its questionnaire, the ECC did not pre-specify any denominations to a strict degree; with the result, for example, that a pair of Anglican respondent churches could identify themselves as “evangelical Anglican” and “other Anglican” respectively, to be subsequently listed in the ECC’s “Anglican” group but as different “denominations.” Alternatively, such a dynamic taxological approach may have followed from the Church of England’s aspiration to maintain some impression of national leadership over Britain’s Christian churches, and thus its Christians. To quote respected religious statistician Peter Brierley (2006) in his summary report of the ECC’s findings, Christian Research had set out to find “signs of hope” amidst a popular narrative of terminal decline for the Church in Britain. It sought to do this, with the ECC, by surveying the anecdotally apparent but systematically unexamined “diversity” that characterised active church membership in England.

The statistical picture uncovered by Brierley and the ECC records a remarkable relative expansion of membership in non-denominational, independent charismatic and evangelical churches since the 1980s. Prominent is the Newfrontiers “family of churches,” which had indeed emerged by the early 1990s as the most significant of the Restorationist networks founded in the 1970s. At the time of writing, Newfrontiers counts at least four congregations in the pseudonymous city of “Folkfield,” the location of the case studies that follow here. According to the ECC data, between 1998 and 2005 Newfrontiers nationally

achieved growth of 70 per cent, counting a regular attendance figure of some 34,000 people in England, across 191 separate congregations (Brierley 2006). The “new churches” as a general group, the ECC records, declined in popularity by 8 per cent between 1998 and 2005; but this is against Newfrontiers’ own three-quarter increase. In the period specified this is bettered only by the neocharismatic California-born Vineyard Church, which records an attendance increase of 78 per cent up to 2005; Vineyard, incidentally, presently runs two congregations in my city of Folkfield. Many of these churches – indeed, according to Brierley, the larger share of “new church” congregations generally – are located in England’s southeastern counties. This geographic dispersal, with London at its centre, would not cause problems for the typical demographic analysis of neocharismatics: white, professional, and middle-class (Bruce 1998).

Chapter 2: Literature in review

The research questions I have presented reflect on a body of local empirical observations, made during a preliminary phase of field-based research conducted prior to the in-depth case studies presented in chapters 4 through 6. In chapter 3, I will discuss in more detail the circumstances by which those initial engagements came about, the selection of primary cases that followed for the planning of this thesis, and specific methodological warrants for the ethnographic case study agenda which frames this investigation. In short, though, these are all locally-situated issues, and so I reiterate that the inquiry, as proposed, is fundamentally empirically-derived; thus it remains, in a strong sense, a particular *research process* that leads the empirical account.

The fact follows that this study does not depart from any pre-existing theories of “neocharismatic” Christianity, nor of its broader evangelical, religious (etc.) kin. In the first instance this seems appropriate given that no account in the British literature has so far examined the wider subject outlined in chapter 1. The public institutional ordering of neocharismatic culture, as proposed [here](#), is a longitudinal and contextualised phenomenon. It is not presumed to be a “religious movement” in the conventional sense (at least not at this early stage of its investigation; future developments are another matter, of course). The major empirical elements of the groups’ public advance – economic and so on, as suggested – shall not reduce to individual-level religious or theological causes. For on the assumptions I have advanced, the practical organisational affairs of neocharismatic church leaders have become too much interfaced with the wider social and political environment for any kind of narrow explanation.

This is a difficulty broadly reflected, indeed, in the existing literature on neocharismatic and nondenominational Christianity, the significant body of which dates only to the mid-1990s. Scholars in all Anglophone countries have observed a sectoral shift within conservative evangelicalism towards a form of Christian membership that is more religiously committed yet less socially reactive; doctrinally orthodox, yet accessible and “popular” in a way only made possible with the advance of social media technologies. Research unsurprisingly reflects the challenge this has raised both empirically and theoretically for sociologists of religion, particularly in the U.S., where the largest active western [Christian](#) populations reside. Shibley (1996, 1998), reporting on first-hand observations, had offered an

Commented [L1]: Where? In the British literature, in chapter 1, or do you mean here?

Commented [L2]: Nigeria is Anglophone and has larger active Christian populations than US

important first formulation of the general phenomenon, describing the emergence of de-sectarianised, “world-affirming” evangelicalism, of peculiar appeal to the lives of comfortably-off White middle classes. In an essay for *The Atlantic* in August 1996 journalist Charles Truehart, drawing similar reflections on his own excursions, added that the churches in which these Christians met – offering “a panoply of choices” well beyond prayer and worship – were attracting a substantial membership of people “with patchy or blank histories of churchgoing.” He described the results as a new class of “independent and entrepreneurial congregations”: adding that “[c]enturies of European tradition and Christian habit are deliberately being abandoned, clearing the way for new, contemporary forms of worship and belonging.” Truehart was sensing their potential for impact well beyond the confines of the churches themselves. Remarking on what he saw as “a distinctly American reformation of church life,” he proposed that its rising membership would represent “something more: a reconfiguration of secular communities, not just sacred ones.”

Twenty years on from these accounts, and those important formative insights, academic scholarship is still in the process of discerning the general topography of this new Christian population with any kind of real theoretical consistency (see Ellingson 2010 for recent summary). Part of the reason for this slow progress is that empirical accounts have largely remained focussed to a single-institutional unit, the church entity itself: in which fragments of a “religious culture” are easily specifiable, and hence researchable. Even without stepping outside a sociology of religion framework – say with a view to exploring the cultural politics of neocharismatic-secular engagement – scholars have yet to expand analysis, for example, to *populations* of nondenominational churches in specific locales. The “animating debates” not just in the sociology of religion but in “organizational and cultural sociology” are poorly represented in studies of nondenominationalism, Ellingson has noted. For example, how “world-affirming” evangelical congregations “mature and begin to wield greater power within national and local religious ecologies” – a profoundly contextualised affair, clearly – remains unknown (Ellingson 2010: 263).

In brief, standing suggestions about the potential of “full-service” evangelical churches to effect deeper social change has not been followed up in academic study thus far, which can perhaps be explained in a discipline where more formal sociological concerns prevail. Generally speaking, the non-denominational church entity has been idealised to select domains for the purpose of more *theoretical* and less *socio-empirical* exposition. These important domains principally include the spectacle of born-again Christian worship; the architectural design of contemporary church buildings and utilities; doctrinal orthodoxy as

communicated by preachers; and, rather more broadly, the “spiritually therapeutic” nature of the neocharismatic religious experience. A further encompassing category reflects on the managerial and “businesslike” approach taken by pastors and professional church growth consultants, both to refine their religious “products” and to maintain a strategic focus on congregational expansion. These analyses are frequently embedded in broader “postmodern” narratives (Hunt 2010: 192), drawing on salient themes like globalisation, the “post-secular,” and new theories of religious consumerism.

In an attempt to inscribe a more coherent research field, studies in the last few years have increasingly classified these inquiries to the study of the contemporary Protestant “megachurch.” One effect of this is to further circumscribe the study of nondenominational culture – in all its potential local complexity – to a readily quantified institution of “2,000 or more” regular attendees (Bird and Thumma 2011). There can be no doubt that this work, which effectively indexes neocharismatic religiosity to the very *largest* worshipful groups within a (national) church population, has been effective in delimiting some of the major empirical elements of what many believe to be Western Christianity’s most likely persisting organisational form. To date, however, research has relied mostly on traditional survey methods (“church” responses usually representing the views of pastors only), perhaps accompanied by a record of observational data, but typically restricted to worship services and mid-week small group meetings (for a leading account see Miller 1997). These approaches, of course, follow standard conventions in sociological inquiry, and in doing so have served to extend traditional theoretical models. Ellingson, for example, in his recent review of new research on “nondenominationalism and sectarianism,” concludes that megachurches “offer a new avenue to develop church-sect theory,” insofar as they

are growing not by distancing themselves from the secular world but by pragmatically embracing it and mimicking the infotainment, consumerist, MTV culture of the American middle class, and in doing so they demonstrate how Christianity is relevant to those who live in a post-denominational world. (Ellingson 2010: 248).

Note here the convergence of classical with contemporary sociological explanation. On this account, the recent advance of corporate megachurches represents not merely “one of the most significant changes to Christianity in the past twenty to thirty years” (p. 247). It also offers a way to bring new relevance to older and perhaps outdated theoretical assumptions – a

view that is by no means shared by all observers to Pentecostalism's modern permutations, particularly perhaps those outside the United States (see Hunt 2002).

But note further the presumptive conceptualisation of such institutions as inherently *religious*: for they are only “mimicking” the (implicitly frivolous) habits of the secular cultural sphere. In common with other reflections on growth-focussed evangelical groups since the mid-1990s, this suggests a moral privileging of Christianity within the very analysis of its newest organisational forms. The latter's “success” – which is a touch too literally quantifiable for some religious observers – remains difficult to square with mainstream and socially liberal religious intellects, which includes many sociology professors. Perhaps the strong tendency to abstract and thus decontextualise conservative neocharismatic forms is symptomatic of religious scholars' wariness of looking too closely at the social realities of renewalist orthodoxy, lest its broader benefits to Christianity's survival are undermined.

Consider, in any case, that these are the persisting problems in the American scholarship specifically. This should give a good idea of the knowledge deficit likely to persist in Britain: where neocharismatic congregations are a far smaller fixture on the social landscape; where individual churches numbering members in their thousands are practically unheard of; and where modern evangelicals are challenged to advance among a general population of drastically attenuated religious faith, compared to the United States', and with no comparable pluralistic religious history. Here at home, research into neocharismatic culture is not so hindered by a theoretic fixation on the decontextualised church entity. Unfortunately that is because it has been little discussed at all from a rational scientific perspective. For insight into the British experience of post-denominational organisation one is referred to a small and scattered literature, historically and sociologically sensitive, its main sources more prominently endowed with a liberal theological perspective on the “new churches” and their “renewalist” mission (Perman 1977; Walker 1983, 1989; Martin and Mullen (eds.) 1984; Hocken 1986, 2009; Percy 1996; Hunt, Walter and Hamilton (eds.) 1997; Kay 2007; Weir 2014). This indwelling and particularly English feature of religious critique can be traced to the little-remarked rapprochement between theologians and sociologists in the British academy since the 1970s (Brewer 2007; Martin, Mills and Pickering 1980). This distinguishes the British study of new religious phenomena rather sharply from the more abstractive approach taken by American scholars. (And of course, a tendency to theological analysis is commonly unreflective of socio-political concerns by its nature.)

The British arrangement has become yet more complex over the last fifteen years or so, specifically in the context of a revitalised Religious Studies discipline. I will discuss the

key elements of this situation further on with respect to the last decade's neocharismatic advances, which have been little noted amidst alternative scholarly preoccupations.

Neocharismatic formulations in the U.S.

Insights from the American experience are essential to review on their own terms, for they have advanced most of the key theoretical contours of new evangelicalism in Western society since its emergence. By the early 1980s, motivated by nationwide polling suggesting that up to a third of the American population – some 50 million people – claimed to be “born again,” sociologists had begun to critically reflect on their neglect of evangelical Christianity as a national phenomenon. In a noted 1979 article, R. Stephen Warner accused liberal-minded scholars of ridiculing and dismissing evangelicalism as if its subscribers were “denizens of the zoo” (Warner 1979: 3). Familiarity with its subjects among scholars was apparently weak enough that Warner had to define “evangelicalism” in terms that are quite widely known today – resonant, in fact, of its specifically charismatic forms:

Biblically-based Christianity that emphasizes a *personal relationship* of the believer to Jesus Christ. Often enough, the evangelical believes not only in the literal truth of the Bible stories but in the potentiality of such miracles today. (Warner 1979: 2, original emphases.)

It is very interesting to note that a year before this declaration, leading American sociologists were offering retrospective summaries of “a period of spiritual ferment” experienced by the U.S. and Europe, “characterized by an upsurge of exotic ‘cults’ and novel quasi-religious therapeutic movements, as well as a strident evangelical, and neo-pentecostal revival” (Robbins, Anthony and Richardson 1978: 95). The neo-pentecostal revival cited there, and in much other work of the time, was indeed the religious location for subsequent nondenominational innovations of the kind described in the previous chapter; later acknowledged to be the work of teams of young and radically-minded charismatic evangelical pastors disillusioned with the denominational institutes: the founding neocharismatic generation, in fact (Walker 1989; Sargeant 2000; Hoover 2002).

Scholarship to that time, however, had failed to operationalise “evangelicalism” as a variable (as a “belief system” broadly speaking): that is, in such a *sociological* way as would be expected for a religious movement considered to be more than transitory; more than

another passing phase of revivalistic fervour, familiar to observers of the standard American history (McLouglin 1978; cf. Lambert 1999).

Demonstrating his prescience, Warner remarked that he did not argue “that evangelicalism is the wave of the religious future … [but] that we sociologists ought to be prepared to consider the possibility” (Warner 1979: 8). A Gallup report from *Newsweek* in 1976, meanwhile, had reported the extraordinary finding that nearly half of all American Protestants believed the Bible was to be interpreted literally. This statistical evidence of the growing breadth of conservative Christian ideology in the U.S. was enough for Warner to declare that evangelicalism “is, in fact, a social movement.” Ahead of its denominational locations, he went on, its adherents were to be found in new religious groups “from devotional affinity groups to charismatic fellowships” (p. 3).

Even so recently as 1979, the subject types of the present study were evidently sufficiently minor in terms of public presence that Warner was compelled to say that these new groups may well turn out to be “evanescent.” Concurring with the thrust of Warner’s larger thesis, Hunter (1981) and Ammerman (1982) extended operational formulae for discerning the multiple strands of American Evangelicalism, a task that they agreed would substantiate “the historic identity of conservative Protestantism” (Ammerman 1982: 170), but more importantly prepare appropriate categories for “survey research” (Hunter 1981: 363). Hunter, after presenting what he described as the “four most important traditions” in contemporary evangelicalism – Baptists, Holiness-Pentecostals, Reformed-Confessionals and Anabaptists – argued that “denominational affiliation” was the “most viable means for operationalizing these distinctions in religious heritage” (Hunter 1982: 370); he then presented a sample list of these denominations, noting the “[clear] diversity *within* all of these traditions that falls along doctrinal and behavioural lines.” The problem within this approach has been already provided by the present discussion. Neocharismatics and their churches, by definition, do not present as denominations themselves. Commenting on the inevitable slippage in his classifications, Hunter (p. 371) asserted there to be “enough similarities on the larger questions of doctrine and religious practice to justify” them. Of course, it is just such a restrictive operationalisation of the “larger questions” that I have suggested clearly need advancing beyond for the case of contemporary neocharismatics. Thus in 1981, already extant “full-service” institutions (its prototype, Chicago’s Willow Creek Church) were

excluded from Hunter's sociological scheme by definitional fiat, though by his time they were already emerging.⁶

So it can be observed that during the formative years of post-denominational organisation, after the late-1960s novelty of Jesus People movements (Eskridge 2013) but before the "megachurch" phenomenon twenty years later (Chaves 2005), scholarship in the U.S. passed over much of its empirical development, at the level of the local church and thus beyond. As suggested, this can be understood as a consequence of theoretical sociology of religion's disjoint with empirical observation, namely of the qualitative kind, within local communities. But there, congregational shifts were perhaps too numerous to document. The British historian of charismatic renewal, Andrew Walker, implies that scholars simply could not keep up with events. Reflecting on neocharismatic movements at that time, he writes that by the mid 1980s:

strange things began to happen. As [leading sociologist of religion] Bryan Wilson put it to me at All Souls, Oxford, religious changes were taking place at a bewildering pace in the late twentieth century. This speeding-up process meant that Christian religious formations were coming and going, starting and stopping, with the speed we associate with New Religious Movements. Restorationism in a ten-year period, for example, underwent the kind of growth, changes, splits, and realignments, that took [Classical Pentecostal denominations] Elim and the Assemblies of God 60 years to undergo (Walker 1997: 33).

Walker's comparison of evangelical Christian change with the capricious associations of New Religious Movements more apt than perhaps he realised. For as Hunt recently observes, the diversity of charismatic neo-pentecostalism towards the end of the 1960s and into the early 1970s had been stark enough to those observing America's wider "new spiritual ferment," that "many sociologists preferred to designate it the [sic] New Religious Movement (NRM)" (Hunt 2010: 185). By the end of the decade, the study of NRMs would become widely regarded as the "sociology of cults" (Turner 1983); its subject matter by then outside any accepted Christian realms, and contributing to a broader crisis of theoretical legitimacy for sociologists of religion to last some years yet (Robbins 1988; Beckford 1985). But the

⁶ As mentioned earlier, Willow Creek Church was founded in 1975. Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California, which now welcomes over 20,000 worshippers each week, began meeting in 1980.

swift categorisation of new charismatic Christian expressions in the early Seventies had allowed sociological theorists – already agog at the religious changes taking place, Left and Right, in the wake of the Sixties’ “counter-culture” – to push forward with broad theoretical modelling of “new religions” at a general level. Debates henceforth were typically set between the familiar poles of classical church-sect theories, or else transcended them entirely in favour of the even more abstract narrative of a “new religious consciousness” in Western society (Glock and Bellah 1976; see Berger 1974 for a critique). Participants in the “new religions,” particularly it would seem those of the more affluent social classes, partaking in the most deviant-looking supernatural worship, were declared to be either resisting or withstanding rationalistic, valueless modernity; in either case, turning to spiritual practice in order to “cope with their life experiences and compensate … for the difficulties thrown up by the modern world” (Hunt 2010: 186).

Regardless of the much-debated merits of “deprivation” theories and the like for explaining contemporary religious devotion, it is not difficult to imagine the influence such authoritative accounts would have had on scholars’ empirical research decisions.

Throughout the 1980s, scholarship on evangelical orthodoxy and its movements was quiet on the (evidently growing) popularity of *non-politicised*, i.e. more secularly-embracive, local-level evangelical association. As the descriptor implies, its politically partisan equivalents were a rather different matter. There has amassed a large academic and popular literature on the right-wing political reawakening of evangelicals led by American Fundamentalist factions during the Eighties, most famously the Moral Majority founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979, later revitalised under the George W. Bush presidency. Non-fundamentalist Christian conservatives and the emerging neocharismatics, strict on the Bible but preferring personal Christ-centred conversion to public political activism as a means to advance the new Kingdom, did not at first exclude themselves from the Reaganite movement in religious politics (Marty 1987); they distanced themselves from it (at least publicly over time, alive to the fact that the image of Christian extremism did nothing to grow local churches. In any case, the historical account for this period is very complex, and repels easy summation. What can be inferred for present purposes is that nondenominational groups and leaderships (in both Britain and the U.S.) continued to do then as indeed they do now – absorbing practices and ideas from the *spectrum* of evangelicalism, from liberal ecumenical quarters, to Fundamentalists, to prosperity-themed Pentecostalism, however it suited *their* strategic imperative: to grow their churches, by putting “the Church” – that is, Christ *not* politics – at the centre of members’ lives; home, work and leisure.

Anthropologist David Stoll (1990), as part of his original historical account of American evangelical entries into Latin America during the 1980s, cites neocharismatic “Restoration” practices as described in its British case by Walker (1989). Observing that by the mid-decade many charismatic evangelicals in the U.S. “had despaired of renewing established denominations,” Stoll identifies a small and persistent class of born-again leaders (the direct counterparts to Walker’s protagonists) urging new charismatic Americans “to defect to dynamic new charismatic fellowships that would ‘restore’ the authentic New Testament church.” Echoing Walker’s description of British neocharismatic ideology, Stoll notes that the American leaders “hoped for mass revival to sweep the globe and usher in God’s kingdom. On the foundation of the restored church, the world would be built anew … they saw themselves as corulers with Christ, spiritual lords of a new world order” (Stoll 1990: 60).

At a (national) leadership level, American restorationist theology and organisation would thereafter take an increasingly extremist character, effectively dovetailing with the many elements of politicised Right-wing Christianity. One result of this was the Christian Reconstructionist movement, the political project of a somewhat loose evangelical theology known as “Dominionism” (Wagner 2008). According to this ideology, writes sociologist Sara Diamond (1995), “Christians are biblically mandated to ‘occupy’ all secular institutions.” This is to be achieved by taking an aggressively evangelistic approach in all one’s social spheres, but also by mobilising support for conservative evangelical political candidates. She suggested this to be the “central unifying ideology” for the Christian Right; and indeed, links to the movement abound among the far-Right of the Republican Party today. Whilst there would appear to be no notable political equivalency in British neocharismatic circles, early associations were indeed made between leadership elements of this and of the emerging non-politicised U.S.-U.K. neocharismatic movement. (See Springer 1987 for theological discussion, including there a chapter by Terry Virgo, leader of Newfrontiers; see Walker 1989: 85-87 for account of the ill-fated contact between Britain’s neocharismatic leaders and a group of unstable American pastors in the late 1970s).

In this context, a significant category of the latter has been the so-called “Third Wave of the Holy Spirit,” a divine “movement” discerned by C. Peter Wagner, an American evangelical theologian. Wagner is of central standing to the intellectual wing of Christian Reconstructionism to the present day, and is therefore held in a mephistophelean regard by opponents to the religious Right; yet he is also a former seminary colleague of John Wimber, the founder of the Californian Vineyard Church – a leading neocharismatic association today.

Wagner has described the “Third Wave” as “a gradual opening of straightline evangelical churches to the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit without the participants becoming either Pentecostals or Charismatics” (see Stetzer, *Christianity Today*, October 2013⁷): a potentially major insight into recent directions in local independent church life, in fact, to which I will return later.

Returning to the 1980s account, again, the story is a complex one, especially in respect to the actual *congregational* advance of Restorationist elements; that is beneath the internecine controversy and bravado of prominent and politically contentious evangelical leaders, to which media and scholarship alike paid more attention. For a clear flavour of the empirical complexity this period presents, take Stoll’s revealing summary of the situation after 1985:

This was the dynamic, expanding fringe of American evangelicalism. Restoration charismatics tended to be young, recently converted from lives of sin, and still undergoing spiritual crises. Some were disoriented products of the counterculture looking for a way to go straight. Certain leaders were formerly rock musicians [Vineyard’s John Wimber was one]. Occasionally, the personal magnetism of leaders, their claim to special relationships with God, and heavy demands on followers led to accusations that they were setting up cults. Without firm traditions or higher authorities except the Lord himself, these churches could have a ‘loose cannon’ quality about them, as if anything might happen. At one moment, they seemed to be wallowing in the consumeristic self-gratification of the ‘name it and claim it’ movement. Take another look, and they were shock troops for the religious right.
(Stoll 1990: 61.)

Remove the references here to American political currents, and the account is basically of a piece with the available record of Britain’s vastly smaller “radical” new church scene during these same years. At the same time, though, the latter’s reduced scale cannot discount British religious entrepreneurs’ cultural proximity to their magnetic American counterparts, which inevitably results in some export of political values alongside the theological ones. Walker’s attempt to summarise the issue reflects its difficulty for empirical researchers:

⁷ Accessible online at www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/third-wave.htm.

Clearly, we can see from an international perspective, that the British Restoration movement is part of a much larger phenomenon. Admittedly, there is no international organisation, and many of the groups have nothing to do with each other – and are sometimes opposed to each other – but they all adhere to a kingdom/apostleship/discipleship nexus. *Like so many apparently indigenous religious movements in Britain, we are able to note firstly the international dimension, and secondly the domination of this internationalism by North American Pentecostals.* Noting this is not only to recognise the importance of the American connection, but also to realise that the tale of British Restorationism is only one chapter in a much larger story. (Walker 1989: 87; my emphasis.)

Throughout this period, of course, social scientific surveys of American church growth and decline at the national level had continued, supplied by well-established data sources among the denominational churches themselves. Shibley (1998) notes of the whole period, however, that membership data – upon which the scholarly understanding of church growth trends nationwide was entirely based – *excluded* information on “new and independent religious organizations,” of the Vineyard and Willow Creek variety (Shibley 1998: 68). Acknowledgement that the general movement of American religion was towards conservative and evangelical churches and away from the liberal mainline was well-entrenched, of course, as noted; furthermore, the qualitative characteristics of the general phenomenon were under much discussion. In 1993, R.S. Warner (the author of the earlier 1981 article on research methods for evangelicalism) wrote his highly influential essay heralding a “New Paradigm” in American sociology of religion. One of its major theses was that contemporary religious institutions in the U.S. were “constitutively pluralistic, structurally adaptable and empowering” – standard terms recently employed for the description and theoretical signifying of nondenominationalism, among others. Nonetheless, the extensive literature that Warner’s article precipitated retained the macrosociological aim of theorising the wider socio-structural conditions under which contemporary (American) institutions maintain a market of “religious suppliers”: in large part intended as a counter-thesis to the general secularisation model (Edgell 2012; Bruce 2001).

However Shibley’s point, and in a sense the crux of the present review, is what he identified as the “tendency to confound” two very distinct cultural associations within post-1990 conservative evangelicalism. One was morally reactive and politically confrontational,

turning on its visceral opposition to the “permissive” social legacy of counterculturalism; the popular-scholarly model of the 1980s Christian Right. The other, however, was a growth-focussed, establishment-defying evangelicalism of “reaching out” to new converts: an evangelicalism that was “at ease in the world … blending with elements of popular culture in surprising ways, driven by the need to be relevant for a new generation” (Shibley 1998: 72). The empirical research object here was to be identified at grounded suburban levels, indeed adjacent to the secular communities that Truehart (1996) foresaw to be impacted as neocharismatic institutionalism advanced. Alas, Shibley’s explicit nuancing of the class of evangelical churchgoers he was attempting to describe testifies to the degree of academic non-acquaintance with contemporary nondenominationalism – and as recently as 1998.

Shibley writes that although survey data of evangelical institutions evidences a growing moral seriousness among younger Christians – indeed linked directly to their biblical beliefs – Donald Miller (1992) is correct in his claim that

religious relevance is a function of achieving in each new historical epoch a compromise between the radical teachings of primitive religion and the culture in which the religion is now being practiced. Religious institutions that do not change inevitably decline; churches that survive and grow will adapt to their culture. (Miller 1992: 3, quoted in Shibley 1998: 72.)

In other words, these authors were directly observing an emerging congregational class achieving what social scientific accounts of conservative Christianity up to then had, by virtue of entrenched theoretical assumptions, precluded as a possibility: proclaiming the biblical “eternal truths” and moral rigidities of southern Fundamentalists, and the physical supernatural empowerment of Pentecostals, but somehow without foregoing any of the material (and few of the social) pleasures of non-religious, consumption-oriented life.

These “contemporary evangelicals,” Shibley crucially suggested, “are increasingly like modern other Americans” for whom standard ethical norms (like that of gender equality for example) “is a taken-for-granted feature of ordinary life” (Shibley 1998: 73). Note that this does not claim that contemporary born-again Christians endorse secular norms explicitly. Rather, this new evangelicalism appeared as a “flexible ideological resource for reconstituting” relationships of kin, and so on. “To summarize,” writes Shibley:

evangelicals are in the world and, strategically or unwittingly, have absorbed many of the core values of contemporary American culture. This portrait of changing gender roles and family structure is no anomaly. The same pattern has occurred in many other aspects of evangelical life. For example, secular rock and roll (once the devil's domain) has become Christian rock music; psychology and therapeutic culture have become Christian self-help books and twelve-step programs; the scientific methods are utilized in historical biblical scholarship and creation science (as in the archeological search for Noah's Ark); materialism and consumer culture become name-it-and-claim-it theology (one can have worldly success if one prays hard enough). In this way, evangelicalism has fused with American popular culture, thus making the tradition accessible to non-Christians in new ways. *Paradoxically, it is also now possible to be a born-again Christian without being very different from other Americans.* (Shibley 1998: 74; my emphasis.)

Shibley's research advances the further thesis that as evangelicals in America have moved to "engage the world" since the 1970s, the sectarian characteristics associated with the Religious Right during the 1980s have inevitably been compromised too, resulting in its transformation "to a nonsectarian political organization"; changes in the "leaders, the issues, and the tactics," he claims, "amount to a kinder, gentler Christian Right" (p. 78). Shibley was writing before the election of George Bush II and an ensuing decade in which right-wing Christianity again became a prominent, politically uncompromising phenomenon. A legacy of that time has been a veritable insurrection in the Republican Party itself, which is presently subject to the leadership of various Christian politicians very much in the extremist "Dominion theology" mode.⁸ Shibley's wider claim, then, appears rather dubious in retrospect, but in any case takes this review beyond issues of relevance here.

The "world-affirming" suburban evangelicalism identified by Truehart and Shibley describes the religious subjects that I presented at the outset of chapter 1. These accounts read, then, as initial efforts to move those subjects beyond the descriptive level, by presenting born-again Christians within the historic landscape of the American Religion. The latter is characterised by a "bewildering pluralism" which is unique to that nation (Marty 1976: 18). Its landscape has thus long been regarded as a sociological project by many scholars. That

Commented [L3]: Kindlier or kinder but not kindler

⁸ Prominent Senatorial figures include 2008 Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin; 2012 Republican leadership candidates Michele Bachmann and Rick Santorum; and 2016 candidate Ted Cruz.

project has, as previously mentioned, been revitalised since the late 1980s by circumstances transcending the development of any one religious tradition alone (Hadden 1987; Warner 1993).

In view of this, it should probably not be surprising if neocharismatic and nondenominational phenomena have tended to be assigned – or assumed – their greater significance within this larger academic religious narrative. Subsequent in-depth studies of nondenominational groups, while few, have typically been brocaded with the long romantic view of the American nation’s religious identity and destiny. Miller (1997), for example, places a sociological cross-case study of several congregations within a greater narrative of “renewal and religious change found throughout the history of Christianity and well illustrated in various periods of religious revival in the United States” (Miller 1997: 177). This, however, compels Miller, an Episcopalian, to postulate “post-denominational” churches from the outset as the bearers of another “Great Awakening,” even a “second Reformation”; his analysis, in turn, is not only religiously structured in its conclusions, but also seemingly in its intent.

There are important issues of scholarship here, however. Recent historiography has concluded that what lay behind the colonial Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, and repeat incidences a century later – events famous for intense, charismatic conversionist fervour – was less the spontaneous movement of God than a pioneering effort in public relations by the leading Christian evangelists of the day (Lambert 1999). This thesis, far more interesting than any divine explanation, surely undermines the above standard refrains of American sociologists in the post-war era, particularly those whose social scientific approach to understanding religious change is leavened by personal religious insight. It is not even so much that “Great Awakening” explanations implying supernatural will are non-scientific, though of course they are. The question rather must be of a *narrative* so deeply ingrained as America’s record of periodic popular Christian “revival”: one that, after all else, has depended for its survival upon testimonies of increasing generational remove from original events, and from a time that largely pre-dated the social sciences. In short, it must be argued that with an ethnographic eye, the “revivals” of present times – as some observers have been persuaded to declare the emerging post-denominational culture – can be examined for their economic and political properties *without* the risk of forsaking analytic contexts for the gains of an appealing but potentially spurious “religious history.” And it will at least secure the historical record to come – no small benefit.

Parallel advances in “cultural” sociology of religion

Such issues have been approached in recent years in the context of other perceived problematics in the sociological scholarship of (new) religions. Naturally given the empirical fact of conservative evangelical resurgence in this same period, these critiques are particularly relevant to the latter’s social scientific study. The academic nature of these discussions tends not to draw out the implications for analyses of specific phenomena; I shall briefly do so here.

First, a summary of review thus far. Towards the end of the 1990s, a small flurry of U.S. accounts attempted for the first time to delineate nondenominational churches as peculiar organisational entities (Thumma 1996; Truehart 1996; Shibley 1996, 1998; Miller 1997; Sargeant 2000; Hoover 2005). These basically sociological descriptions had the fortune of advancing for future research a definite *cultural* account of the processes necessary to sustaining (and publicly advancing) the formal institutions of a “new paradigm” in White Protestant evangelicalism. Applying the term advanced by Warner (1993) in an article that had helped consolidate econometric approaches to the macro-survey of American religion, “new paradigm” Protestantism appeared to outline the main stream of the post-war generations’ rumoured “return to religion.” “To the extent that there is a dominant direction to changes within the post-war generation in the 1990s,” it had been suggested, “it is into family formation and parenting, mid-life career concerns, and some re-examination of value commitments, the latter often in a more conservative direction.” In the early years of that decade, amidst “far more speculation than actual research,” the return to religion was “presumed to be [towards] evangelical and fundamentalist congregations” (Roof and Johnson 1993: 294).

The presumption has turned out to reflect a long-standing lacuna in the Church Growth studies discipline, representing the institutions which many suburban “baby boomers” had, in fact, been attending: not merely attending though, but *pastoring and managing* on a lay and professional basis, thus outside the view of denominational authorities, and the data sets they supplied to sociologists. Until that point, in addition, research into the growth sector of conservative evangelicalism in the U.S. had generally been designated under pre-existing theoretical models. These dated back to the early 1970s, and assumed always a positive relation between congregational growth and the ascetic social and moral “strictness” of a given church and its leaders (Kelley 1972; cf. Tamney 2002). The methodological warrant for such a theory was only sustained by progressive econometric

modelling of the “religious market” (Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Warner 1993). Rising incidences of “born-again” experience, then – left unexamined in qualitative, community contexts – were subsumed by this.

More qualitative and ethnographic approaches were, however, begun upon the Sunday service destinations of the “boomers” of middle-class suburbia, part of the peripheral advance of a “congregational studies” sub-discipline in sociology of religion (Thumma 1996). There was discovered here a class of Christian true believers who had dispensed with many of the sectarian trappings of fundamentalism partly by incorporating the everyday secular habits of their non-religious peers *into* the organised schedules of the church – for example, in locally advertised “programmes” of advice and discussion focussed on personal and familial issues, activities outside traditional religious spheres of experience, never mind conventional “church-going.” The proposition advanced to newcomers – in a language of free and rationally active *choice*; as a “gift” offered for one’s refusal – is conversion to a life lived within this “spiritual community.” It is advanced as preserving one’s own autonomy and decision-making in personal matters (against religious “rules”), but under the “accountability” of one’s fellow disciples, with whom each member is encouraged to integrate as fully as possible, outside the church service as well as inside. For some pastors, this is an explicitly contemporised modelling of the congregational bodies they believe to have existed in the first century immediately following Jesus’s death: forms soon corrupted, on their view, by 2,000 years of Episcopalian rule and denominationalism – a classically human perversion of “the master builder’s plan.”

This new church form is typically but not necessarily Pentecostal in its theological practice, however, for its organisational emphasis is always upon (strategies for) *recruitment*: in the first place to the congregational worship body, of course, but subsequently, and as importantly, to a (voluntary) labour force, something required for the running of any complex institution. This can be understood in terms of the vanishing significance, there, of traditional denominational functions. Sargeant, for example, observes that nondenominational churches “create a new type of denomination, one based on methodological contract rather than theological covenant,” that compels them to “downplay formal theology” in their services (Sargeant 2000: 134-5). The theoretical description of new “denominations” is really a terminological matter. It is important to Sargeant’s analysis for he, like Miller (1997), envisages the abstract incorporation of “new paradigm” church culture into an economicistic market theory model. But his point about empirical “methodologies” being at the core of “new paradigm” church life – in fact taking the place of doctrinal orders – is correct.

What unites these recent accounts in an epistemological sense, then, is the necessary delineation of an internal, single case-level *culture in progress*. As discussed, it is such work as this – along with contemporaneous qualitative accounts of American megachurches (Thumma 1996; Ellingson 2007, 2010) – that has belatedly brought neocharismatic and nondenominational phenomena to an academic gaze at all. Prior to this, as Shibley (1996) pointed out, religious growth sectors in the U.S. were measured exclusive of the institutions of dynamic new evangelicalism. Their leaders are in fact motivated by an emphatic breaking with the historic “religious heritage” that sociologists like Hunter earlier had presumed a natural part of their discipline.

Clearly these new congregations, to judge from their case study so far, express a profound empirical development at ground levels. This aligns very well with recent higher-level accounts in the sociology of religion that are pushing hard for a renewal of “cultural” study approaches to religious phenomena in this new century. This agenda represents an explicit move beyond the so-called “master narratives” of religion’s social significance in the West (Edgell 2012; Gorski and Altinordu 2001; for reflection on sociological “master narratives,” Martin 2010). Notwithstanding its own investigatory benefits, this development is partly a result of routinised scepticism towards the “secularisation paradigm” (Bruce 2011; Wilson 1966, 1982). More generally, though, it follows the observation that “existing concepts fail to capture the empirical diversity” within groups pursuing religious objectives (Turner 2011: 1).

Resulting studies often reject positivist assumptions, of course. Clerical and theological reflection, implicit to much work in the sociology of religion (for pivotal comment see Robertson 1979; Robbins 1983) remains a function of the shift away from quantifiable analysis. As mentioned though, this has been of particularly salient presence in the study of post-denominational Christianity thus far in Britain and the U.S. Although different disciplinary histories are to be discerned for each country, in both it is reasonable to judge this as a natural consequence of any significant “new” religiosity emerging within the population, especially one professing to renew Christian traditions. In sociological domains, however, theological interests are able to overlap quite substantially with disciplines in cultural analysis, such as phenomenology, which have been given an enhanced role in recent research approaches to religion (Spickard, Landes and McGuire 2002). These approaches (returning us to points made earlier about the idealising of “megachurch” domains) frequently preserve “postmodern” analytic assumptions. For example, for Miller (1997), the unique culture of growth-focussed post-denominational Protestantism is definitively “postmodern” in

the context of our age, while ultimately an attempt to retain “the sacred” at the core of traditional Christianity (Miller 1997: 153-155); Walker (1997) and Percy (1996) make the same case for the British example (though Percy, unlike Walker, is profoundly critical of neocharismatic leadership in this regard). With such practices as placing “Spirit-led” congregants at the heart of the church’s social services, and rearing lay members to pastoral leadership positions, these churches have “eliminated many of the inefficiencies of bureaucratized religion by an appeal to the first-century model of Christianity” (Miller 1997: 181; a model that incidentally no scholars, Miller included, have attempted to substantiate).

In a recent review of “new directions” in the sociology of religion field focussing cultural approaches, Edgell (2012) remarks on work that is “renewing a long-standing emphasis on meaning, identification, and moral order in the sociological study of religion.” She sets up a keenly optimistic review and prospective of social scientists’ explanations for contemporary religious phenomena. For some, however, recent culturalist directions have encouraged more profound conceptual shifts within the subdiscipline that may be cause for concern. In a meta-analysis of the broader literature, Smilde and May (2010) indeed confirm over the last twenty years “a move towards active, agentive concepts of religious practice” intended to “capture the richness and vitality of religious manifestations in the late 20th century” (Smilde and May 2010: 1-2).⁹ They note among the results of these developments, however, an emphasis on “empowerment [as] religion’s main function.”

This, the authors believe, marks a significant shift within the field: Attention by a previous generation of scholars to “the construction of meaningful universes and the maintenance of plausibility of deviant beliefs” has been replaced by an interest in what religion *does* for its adherents. Religious participation, in other words, is now typically theorised as a “strategy of action.” As a result, religious phenomena – particularly at the individual and small group levels – is opened to what they call its “socio-evaluation” by researchers. Many of these writers, however, are concerned to promote the *positive* effects of religious involvement. And they do so, furthermore, quite aside from the question of religious doctrines’ internal truth contents (pp. 5-6). This, the authors observe, “frequently amounts to a surprising and courageous position” within the academy; an ironic conclusion, perhaps,

⁹ Introducing their study, the authors write that sociology of religion is “experiencing a period of renewed vitality yet, at the same time, one of critical paradigmatic reflection”; that “it is clear that over the past two decades scholarly, media and societal interest in religious phenomena has increased at the same time that considerable renewal of the concepts and methods used by the sub-discipline has occurred.”

given that it basically upholds Max Weber's belief that "specific value commitments" should be central to identifying problems for sociological analysis (p. 9).

Recalling the examples discussed, if post-denominational organisation is, as Miller and others suggest, the *most* significant phenomenon in Western Protestantism today and for the foreseeable future, its scientific understanding is likely to be reflected in these epistemological shifts. In the British case particularly, this has indeed been signalled by a move away from the suppositionary constraints of secularisation, and heavily in favour of a subjectivistic interpretation of "individualised" religious authority. It is something that Matthew Wood, addressing a huge increase in invocations of "spirituality" in sociological analyses, posits as "a sociology [that] lifts people out of their social contexts with the result that it fails adequately to address social practice, social interaction, and the wider contexts of people's lives and biographies" (Wood 2010: 268).

For the present study, then, I can reiterate a (provisional) demarcation between the organisational and individualist aspects of cultural inquiry, understanding that the latter aspect is not to be explored in great depth in my own case studies. This is not merely because it would open onto questions around personal religious belief and intent, experience and so on, that are sociologically problematic. It is more a question of appropriate scheduling of research moving forward. For I propose that British neocharismatic religion as an object of research cannot presume but must be informed by an empirical account of the local institutions in which its human authorities are presently based: the issue here being, of course, that this has not yet been done at all.

This is more important still, then, because it helps to define a research proposal for post-denominational culture that is properly contextualised to its Britishness. Consider, for example, the obvious but underrated point that the immense literary repertoire of facts and interpretations on the United States' pluralistic and profoundly evangelical religious history does not exist here. Consider, too, that American sociologists generally agree on Britain's continuing Christian decline; its "exception" to resurgent religiosity in the U.S. and the wider world (Berger 1998; Davie 2006); and, not least, the plain idiosyncrasy of the American "religious economies" model (Lee and Sanitiere 2009: 159-176; Finke and Stark 1989; Iannacone 1994; Warner 1993), which has structured much of the last two decades' work (Edgell 2012: 252).

Efforts must be sustained by British scholars wherever necessary to distinguish aspects of the U.S. account, whether drawn directly from its social and political history or from the theoretical frameworks specified to it. (For influential theory statements based on

the local survey analysis of evangelical subcultures, see Smith 1998; Emerson and Smith 2000.) While studies on specifically American religious growth and change are to be read closely, their theoretical conclusions should be transposed to British contexts with care. Religious theories' implication in their supporting data and that data's historical contexts is something well understood, for example, by David Martin in his detailed qualifications of the secularisation thesis (Martin 2002, 2005).

Generational factors revisited

Truehart (1996) described post-denominationalism as a “distinctly American reformation of church life,” and I have mentioned two socio-historical events with which scholars have evidenced this claim: the Constitutional convention of voluntary religious association (Tocqueville 2000 [1835]; Putnam 2000); and in the last years of the twentieth century, an observed demographic shift in patterns of religious affiliation identified to a more affluent and discerning post-war generation (Roof 1993, 1999). It may of course be asked how the “baby boom” in post-war Britain impacted our religious landscape as well. This may sound like a question for another study. Yet some recent statistical findings do yield insight into the changing circumstances of British Christianity at the turn of the new century: certain of which do acquiesce to key aspects of the neocharismatic attitude as it has developed here.

In chapter 1, I cited evidence from recent surveys of religious membership in England that confirms a shift towards neocharismatic congregations among the existing (denominational) Christian population (Brierley 2006). Woodhead (2013) describes this as an extraordinary “realignment” in the Christian population which is “hardly ever commented on.” Conversions from non-religious lifestyles, it appears, are much in the minority (for a Canadian perspective, see Bibby 2003). Leading secularisation theorist Steve Bruce has thus argued that Britain’s charismatic movement is nowhere near sufficient to reverse overall church decline in Britain, and is unlikely ever to do so (Bruce 1998). Even he, however, concedes its peculiar qualitative interest.

The English Church Census (2005) revealed not merely that neocharismatic groups are the only Christian growth sector, but that the majority of that growth in the last two decades is constituted by people born after 1970 (the second and third generations of the post-war boom, in fact). In addition a majority of these new charismatic converts are middle-class Whites (for supporting comment, see Bruce 1998: 229; Poewe 1994: 55-57; Hunt 1998:

90-91; Robbins 2004: 122; Coleman 2000). This of course, is entirely consistent with the well-documented American data.

Comparing data between three European Values Surveys (EVS) from 1981 to 1999, sociologist Yves Lambert (2004) identifies a number of indicators for shifting “religious values” in Western European states that are particularly pronounced among the 18-29 age group (born, then, between 1975 and 1986). He observes a progressive *increase* in religious seriousness among the younger generations of all European societies (Lambert 2004: 37; of some states – though not Britain – he concludes a “Christian renewal” in progress).

Lambert’s general conclusion is that the falling trajectory of Western European (Christian) religiosity has not reversed, but has notably slowed since the 1980s: a particularly strong effect in the measurement of *attitudes towards* religion and its institutions, including the churches themselves.

Research analysing neocharismatic leaders’ rejection of traditional evangelistic methods (Sargeant 2000) suggests they recognise very well that public attitudes to Christianity are as real a concern as rates of membership; arguably more so on a longitudinal perspective. This compels one to look for survey findings that reflect *attitudinal* change and not just actual religious engagement. Several items in Lambert’s dataset might indeed accede to neocharismatic leaders’ redesign of the Christian lifestyle, as it has been qualitatively observed.

Lambert reports for the twenty years from 1981 some apparently mixed findings. He sees that Europeans’ positive view of the church for “personal/family needs” has increased; that the proportion of its citizens self-defining as a “religious person” meanwhile has decreased; while the number stressing the importance of “faithfulness in marriage” has gone up. At the same time, he finds that attitudes to homosexuality, abortion and drug-taking have considerably relaxed in the last decades of the century (pp. 31-7). Taken together these results may sounds somewhat less than conducive to the ambitions of a conservatively biblical social culture. That is not necessarily the case, though.

First, a declining tendency for “religious” self-identity fits comfortably with post-denominational Christians, who explicitly renounce “religion” in both nounal and adjectival form, identifying it as mankind’s corruption of a “universal church”: one intended by God’s neocharismatic agents to be society in its full constitution, under no authority of human office. With no “religion,” there is no “irreligion,” and vice versa. My own observations included pastors who attacked the very concept before their congregations.

Secondly, this cultural system strongly endorses the church's centrality to the family as much as to its individual members (bearing in mind, again, that nondenominational discourse interprets the local church *as* its members incorporated; not the concept held by most of the EVS's respondents, it can be assumed). Marriage, furthermore, substantiates the metaphorical church "family," and in a most conspicuous fashion, as the engagement ring-count among young service attenders quickly reveals. Members of the neocharismatic family are strongly encouraged to marry within the church, whereupon the partnership becomes another item for pastoral care, and necessary regulation. It behoves the leadership not to sanction the termination of a union overseen (perhaps even engineered) by the church body.

The final variable mentioned here – Westerners' greatly increased tolerance for homosexuality, abortion and drugs – would appear to be a problem for neocharismatics; perhaps enough to ensure stagnation in British nondenominational membership, if not in the U.S. Even here, however, a qualitative proviso may obtain. Recall Shibley's suggestion that the religious culture, to the extent that it invests in any explicitly doctrinal sanctions, functions for members as a "flexible ideological resource," available for "reconstituting" modes of human relationship that are accepted in the wider society (and, crucially, by church members' secular peers). Sure enough, in my own exchanges with participants in the field,¹⁰ their responses to traditionally impassable subjects, especially the sexual, may be articulated with a clearly deliberate ambiguity: as a strategy in communication, that is, if certainly not on the question of their biblical sanction. Of course, whether prohibitive behaviours are perceived in quite the way Shibley implies is a question for empirical case study.

Anthropological currents

In a 1997 essay for Hunt et al., Walker, having earlier asserted that British Restorationism's "heyday" was begun and ended by the late 1970s, concludes that it is doubtful that neocharismatic Christianity in "post-industrial societies" is "well equipped to survive in the future." His pessimism emerges from a religious view that has been deeply impressed by abstract sociological considerations, specifically those related to what he calls the "cultural obsessions of late-modernity." Due to the latter's "pluralistic nature," he says:

¹⁰ For an excellent example in recent media, see "Carl Lentz won't preach on homosexuality," a filmed interview at the Huffington Post with Hillsong New York's pastor in 2014, at <https://youtube/yyqRxBFwf88>.

the inevitable syncretistic strands of a religion of experience have become increasingly volatile. Far from seeing Pentecostalism rushing into the new century with the force of the old I believe that it will be buffeted by theological confusion and social fragmentation.

Walker remarks that “post-modernism … distrusts the lordship of the self and inner experience”; that:

If the world emerges like Foucault’s landscape, where reality is seen as a discursive achievement and the certainty of universal truths are denied, what will Charismatic utterances mean? It mattered not in modernity if tongues were interpreted as babblings because they were seen to release or realize the self. But with the self on hold what will glossolalia come to signify? (Walker 1997: 37.)

Putting aside the extreme philosophical relativism underpinning these remarks, Walker’s conclusion to his years of observance of neocharismatic growth in Britain is that the religious movement is ultimately imperilled by the very nature of its psychology: specifically, members’ claims to honour supernatural *experience* over propositional religious narratives in constructing a worldly reality.

This sociology of neocharismatic Christianity contrasts strikingly with a parallel literature developed from the late 1980s that has employed the methods and insights of anthropology, understanding neocharismatic religion rather differently as “one of the great success stories of the current era of cultural globalization” (Robbins 2004: 117; Poewe 1989, 1994; Martin 1990, 2002; Coleman 1998, 2000; Anderson, 2010). The majority of this empirical work has been undertaken in the countries of the global South, where as Robbins (2004) points out in his review of the literature, some two-thirds of charismatic and Pentecostal Christians now reside.

Interestingly, the most influential early theorist of global charismatic culture was a sociologist, David Martin (1990, 2002). For anthropologists, Martin helped to clarify a distinction between “fundamentalists” (of the sectarian American variety) and charismatic Pentecostals. (This distinction, recall, underscores Shibley’s later sociological thesis (1998) delineating American nondenominational groups, whom he argues are not fundamentalist in the sectarian sense as is stereotypically assumed. It had also been raised rather earlier by Ammerman (1982) in her comment on Warner’s (1979) operational scheme. These facts are

further evidence of the disunity among scholars (and departments) in understanding new charismatic forms in recent decades; not to mention the sheer length of time over which basic definitional confusions have persisted.)

Robbins observes how in lieu of “precise historical” knowledge about Pentecostalism’s path of growth, “cultural differences” have been discerned in the present, by scholars looking to secure an analytic foothold on the phenomenon. Martin’s thesis has in fact been a social political one. His broader argument, Robbins notes, is that “fundamentalists react against modernity, whereas [charismatic] Christians find ways to work within it” (Robbins 2004: 123). Martin’s empirical case is Latin America, not the Western realm (but see Martin 1981). Nonetheless, consider his own words. He reflects at length on the “probable political and economic implications” of charismatic evangelical emergence among the poor and disenfranchised in Brazil, arguing it to be “at base” a *cultural* shift (a “revolutionary” one, even):

They emerge, after all, as the exemplars of religious laissez faire and competition, and they run their churches as entrepreneurs seeking a market. In doing so they gain skills and capacities capable of redeployment in secular avocations, and they inculcate a discipline and priorities of consumption that could lead to modest [economic] advancement ... They could also be creating a new personality, with a novel sense of self and of responsibility, capable of being converted into initiative. *All this, one has to say, is latent and implied rather than realized and documented.* (Martin 1994: 84-5; my emphasis.)

The secular socio-political gains potentially to be made with a charismatic identity and church life are part of Martin’s general argument that Pentecostal growth in Latin America is a “democratising” social force for its disenfranchised local adherents (Martin 2002). Nonetheless, these potential gains must be construed as *principles* of charismatic evangelical participation globally. Martin writes that against the case – echoing Warner’s (1979) complaint in regard to evangelicalism’s treatment generally – “social scientists [in the West] have tended to dismiss the phenomenon as reactionary or insignificant,” even though its increasing global expansion evidences, he believes, quite the opposite. For many “Western intellectuals,” he observes, “the political and economic spheres are the primary realities from which impulses are transmitted to other spheres”; among which peripheral realms stands the “religious” one, which is considered “strictly reactionary” in a political sense – hence why

“the expansion of evangelicals … remains a curious blip on the accepted picture of genuine and efficient events,” and is thus insignificant in the opinion of most scholars (Martin 1994: 73-4). This is to say that the socio-political gains he theorises are conceived ultimately to be the rewards of a charismatic religiosity at the individual level. And it has been the nature of this experienced reality (thereafter extended in analysis to interaction among members – to the “culture”) that has attracted anthropologists to the subject.

American anthropologist Karla Poewe for example, developing an account of “Charismatic Christianity as a global culture,” builds on Martin’s reflections by focussing on the way in which Western scholars have misappropriated the charismatic individual’s moral and intellectual experience of the world:

Charismatic Christianity reverses emphases that we have taken for granted: the centrality of the rational, of calculated doing, or articulate verbal skills, of doctrine, of things Western. It does not deny or reject these things. Rather it comes to *them* in unexpected ways. A charismatic Christian comes from the nonrational to the rational, from happening to doing, from experience to talk, from sign to metaphor, from spiritual gifts to utility, from receptiveness to action, from demonstration to theology, from indigenization to globalization … For the devoted charismatic Christian, tongues, not exegesis, is the explicit language of worship, healing, and turning people around … And yet, these people are eminently rational, sometimes scientists, often businessmen. (Poewe 1994b: 12.)

The focus of her own work, she says, is “to get to the bottom of this turn of thought,” suggesting a highly abstractive anthropological engagement. Though she continues with a reiteration of Martin’s idea of an empirical causal progression between a charismatic’s supernatural experience and their real-world social action, remarking that “the transformation of actions into organizations is the first surprising characteristic about a form of Christianity that purports to emphasize holiness and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” Here, Poewe expresses the idea of a peculiarly *enhanced* proclivity for social change in charismatic circles: peculiar because the apparently introverted, non-offensive, and seriously esoteric nature of their worship would not suggest much in the way of organised structures. The fact that it does is a property of the *contemporary* (neo) charismatic groups Poewe is interested in, moreover: consider that earlier classical Pentecostal gatherings were notoriously unwieldy affairs. Poewe’s insight should therefore draw my attention to the very nature of my case churches’

organisational routines, perhaps even their predictability; a caution not to take them for granted.

The impulse among charismatic participants to organise themselves is especially strong, says Poewe, when these gifts “are revealed to individuals through dreams, visions, inner prompting; in short, through what I have called the passive or receptive imagination”:

Simply put, this form of Christianity is so convincing that charismatic Christians act out their gifts and revelations. Many become religious entrepreneurs, even against their will. They realize in action what is revealed to them in dreams. They build large corporations. These building goals, and beyond that, the goals to turn around cities, nations, and the world, motivate and actively involve hundreds and thousands of their congregants. The Holy Spirit story, without question, motivates sacrifice ... and this is in so positive a manner as to make the very sacrifice a reward. (Poewe 1994b: 13.)

As the tenor of these remarks may have suggested, Poewe’s empirical references are not fixed to ethnographies of Western religious communities, but rather to the broad observation of high-profile and high-finance evangelical enterprises (such as the more familiar American ones) alongside supporting theological accounts. Her own ethnographic fieldwork, meanwhile, is on Black South African charismatics, though its data is mainly drawn from detailed life-history interviews (Poewe 1993; Hexham and Poewe 1994). Poewe suggests that only this method is capable of “showing what was most unique about charismatic Christians, namely, their daring visions, creativity, patterns of thought, and their energy, trust and courage to actualize these visions.” Hers is a partly phenomenological approach then, it seems; in any case it certainly does not consider the actual (and avoidably socio-political) products of their organisation, beyond general assertion.

This approach is designed, again parallel to Martin’s own admonitions, that it may “dispel” popular and scholarly prejudices against charismatic movements, in South Africa in Poewe’s case. This not only pre-concedes a highly positive interpretation of participants’ oral religious testimonies, but also questions the validity of such accounts outside the subjective sphere of the charismatic practitioner. This is not a concern for Poewe, in any case, whose theoretical aims divert from any sociological objectivity. But Poewe does attempt to account for her and her co-authors’ “awareness of the great variation” in “economic [and] political” matters, and its possible criticism on methodological and scientific grounds. Describing their

field approach as “a slight modification of a standard anthropological approach,” she claims that:

[i]nstead of being participant observers in one church or one community, we became participant observers of charismatic Christianity at large. In other words, we became participant observers of a phenomenon, or of an international community, *whose members defined themselves in terms of a first-century Christian schema* rather than territorial space, skin color, or ethnicity. (Hexham and Poewe 1994: 66, my emphasis.)

This methodology is proffered as a corrective to previous accounts of charismatic evangelicalism in the Western literature, precisely because its authors claim to take seriously participants’ assertions to have transcended forms of religious selfhood based on propositional belief orders and to have “moved beyond” to a state of sheer “knowing” (Poewe 1989, 1994; Johannessen 1994). Poewe claims that this epistemology – one that is to be shared by the researcher – is “more explicitly global”; by which she means that charismatic Christianity is intrinsically “global” itself (1994: 16). The “experiential and imaginative aspects” characteristic of Christian renewal movements result in a “global popular religiosity which is transcultural, eclectic and fluid”; the “Holy Spirit, alive and active, is taken to be a fact,” part of what she calls a “constellation [constituting] the charismatic Christian experiential gestalt” (Poewe 1989: 362-5).

It is worth noting that this work shares Martin’s description as offering “latent and implied” tendencies of its subjects “rather than realized and documented” facts. In addition, like this and ensuing anthropological works at the time, these accounts “make the global spread of [charismatic Christianity] central to their discussions” (Robbins 2004: 118). The “purpose of examining how they have globalized” is the research problem pursued here. As Robbins points out, this necessitates a broad categorisation of “Pentecostal-charismatic” Christian churches everywhere, based on “their common features, most notably their shared emphasis on ecstatic experiences.” It does not discern different churches or even sub-groups within the movement, for which “systematic social scientific (as opposed to theological) work … has hardly begun,” he notes (Robbins 2004: 122).

Post-denominational and neocharismatic “streams” are some of the leading contemporary derivations of “global Pentecostalism,” and this is now acknowledged in cross-disciplinary accounts (see Anderson 2010 for a recent collection). So the now well-

documented facts of charismatic evangelicalism's propagation and promulgation beyond the western Anglophone states is evidence of the phenomenon's "sociological significance" at a world level; expedited no doubt by the macrosociological account of religious-ideological resurgences since the mid-1990s (Casanova 1994; Norris and Inglehart 2004). Since then, sustained field-based scholarship has built on Martin's observation that charismatic Christianity has become "the natural carrier" of mass mobilisation in the developing world (Martin 2002: 40). It is in this sense that Pentecostalism's growth has been characterised as a "paradigmatic case of global cultural flow": beginning in Western societies, but thereafter spreading worldwide. This specifies the nub of anthropology's global engagement: the processes of this cultural flow have been held as constituting either a case of successful "indigenisation" in non-Protestant realms, or else evidence of Western "cultural domination and homogenization" (Robbins 2004; Boudeijnse et al. 1998; Meyer 2004). From his authoritative sociological position, bestriding both, Martin labels Pentecostal religion a "global option" in monotheistic religion's overall capitulation to modernity (Martin 2005: 141-2).

Research has addressed conventional "religious" aspects like individual belief and practice, though has begun to extend analysis to socio-political issues (Freston 2001). More generally, one may observe in empirical field study and socio-theological reflection alike how the globalising emphasis warrants interest in those societies where the phenomenon's public impact appears to be most embracing: Latin America, Africa and, increasingly, Southern Asia. It should surprise no one that ethnographic research on local charismatic communities has honoured the traditional preference of the Western anthropologist, finding her comfort in foreign surrounds, recalling the historic practice of Comparative Religion of course.

In recent years the insights of a global analysis have been largely shared by the Sociology and Religious Studies disciplines as well, though. Consider, for example, that two of the most recently-established research institutes – the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative at the University of Southern California, and the University of Birmingham's Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies in Britain – have both directed their programmes largely at developing world phenomena, focussing relatively little on their respective domestic spheres. (Miller, one of the few sociologists yet to publish an extended study of Western post-denominationalism, was a director of the former; his recent research (see Miller and Yamamori 2007) extends highly positive appraisals of global Pentecostal spread.) In Britain, the tendency to overlook White neocharismatic growth can be somewhat

emphasised by scholars' quicker attention to ethnic minority membership in urban Black congregations: which, being mostly Nigerian, enunciate the "global" object itself, of course (for example Goodhew 2012, chapters 7-9).

Much of the impetus behind charismatic evangelicalism's broad-based political implications, a topic more suited to sociological than anthropological investigation, has been similarly consistent. As mentioned, the Pentecostal movement's "spectacular" proliferation in non-Western domains since the 1980s (Hunt 2010; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001) has generated a political narrative centred on the phenomenon's "challenge" to non-democratic social structures (Martin 1990, 2002, 2005; Stoll 1990; Comaroff 1985; *cf.* Bastian 1993). This line of theoretical inquiry has remained influential, but its essence is not new. It is noted that the focus on global southern Pentecostal churches' "potential contribution" to movements for political liberation was "staked out early" in the literature, having been "based on judgements of the relative novelty" of charismatic organisation "in relation to the political structures of the surrounding society" (Robbins 2004: 134). Quoting from one of the very first anthropological studies on Latin American Pentecostalism by Willems (1967), Robbins notes that "the emphasis on egalitarian and lay control in Pentecostal congregational church structures [equates to] a 'symbolic subversion of the traditional social order' organized by notions of hierarchy."

The "traditional social orders" invoked in such accounts are those of non-democratic states, but over time a discourse has generalised around "developing" societies as part of a global world order. There, charismatic church growth has been held to effect an "empowering" socio-cultural dynamic against patriarchal familial orders: something that potentialises change at the structural societal level. While central to the theologically-informed analysis developed in the 1990s by Martin and others (see Sherman 1997; Jenkins 2002), this is reminiscent of a handful of phenomenological studies of charismatic "healing" in the late 1970s and early 1980s America (see McGuire 1982; Neitz 1987).

The societies targeted are thus non-Western by definition. But crucially, they are assumed as a rule to be both desirous and deserving of substantial social and economic change along Western designs, i.e. in the capitalist-democratic mode. Prefacing his recent study of evangelical "cultural agency" in Venezuela, Smilde comments on the interrelation between the "democratisation" theory of global Pentecostalism and concurrent neoconservative agendas in political science (see Harrison and Huntingdon 2000). Certain Rightist political scholars, Smilde remarks, had been advancing a strongly instrumentalist view of "culture" as an "autonomous factor that determines who prospers" economically, and

thus socially (Smilde 2007: 10-15; also Steinenga 2001). For them, the competitive market-driven tradition of modern American Protestantism (as advanced by Warner (1993) and others mentioned) was the obvious best carrier. Thus for Latin American Catholic populations, sorely oppressed by statist patriarchy according to free market (Christian) observers to the North, the growth of evangelical Protestantism conferred a “cultural innovation” package ideally suited to fermenting “social development.” Social development, in this narrative, denotes private capital investment and entrepreneurial business models under programmes of neoliberal state “reform” – “globalisation” in its really-existing political-economic guise, as directed by Washington and its allies.

But the sociological analysis therein, of charismatic evangelicalism as a socio-politically “transformative” process at the grassroots, is important to this review not in regard to its particular global specification by observers, right-wing or otherwise. The point rather is that such a narrative – and the anthropological studies that have engaged them – has indeed foregrounded the charismatic religious identity of the subjects in a way that the sociological accounts discussed earlier have not. Thus more importantly still, they have developed an academic approach to local community forms that makes a specifically “charismatic culture” central to analysis.

To put it differently, I would observe that the contemporary ethnographic literature, focussed largely on global Southern evangelical realms, has articulated an approach to the local institutions that charismatic cohorts may well be actually building the world over. It yields a methodology that views the phenomena through an appropriately emic cultural lens, but in doing so necessarily takes seriously – and here it is necessary to borrow a theological term – the “pneumatological” characteristic of charismatic Christians’ interpretation of the world and its events (for a flavour, see Roelofs 1994; Droogers 1994; Kärkkäinen 2010).

Take Smilde’s critique, which was not of neoconservative politics itself, but of shortfalls in neoconservative authors’ “optimistic” operationalisation of religious “culture” (similarly so for the diametrically “pessimistic” view among neo-Marxist theorists; see Castells 1997, chapter 1 for an influential statement). Each, he suggests, evidently “lacks an adequate sociology” of charismatic religious organisation. For him, the ideologically-driven “empowerment” narrative, though he thinks correct in its neoconservative view that “people can adopt culture that helps them to address their problems and maximize their situations,” obscures the localised context in which evidence of “social change” is to be empirically and dispassionately observed (Smilde 2007: 14). The case he makes is for further ethnographic research that seeks to understand the significance of charismatic cultural agency within the

context of (in his case example) the “ground-level effects of global restructuring” in Venezuela (p. 13). The political and economic circumstances of the indigenous case are given the key explanatory role, but the dependent variable in this analysis is the “cultural agency” refracted through a charismatic religious psychology.¹¹

His study does not labour over definitions for charismatic belief (in doctrines, supernatural experiences and so forth). Smilde in fact introduces his Venezuelan subjects simply as “Evangelicals,” whom he can later assuredly remark “are primarily Pentecostal” along familiar indices (pp. 29-30). This would appear to underscore an emerging understanding of the notion of a regularised charismatic identity, at least among students of Pentecostalism in the developing world. Importantly, then, we can refer here not to the notion’s description, but to the fact of its reality for charismatic members, in their lives and work.

In an essay for Anderson’s 2010 collection on global Pentecostalism, Robbins articulates this idea in a way that complements Miller’s (1997) and Ellingson’s (2007, 2010) speculation about the “total institutional” character of post-denominational churches in the West. Noting that born-again converts are encouraged by their pastors and fellow disciples to publically assert a complete “break” with their pre-Christian lives and behaviours as well as beliefs, Robbins quotes Dombrowski’s notion of American Pentecostalism as a “culture against culture”: meaning against the secular culture of the world outside the institution, of course. As Robbins remarks,

[one] form this cultural rupture can take is the overthrow of local traditions of historical narrative in favour of a new historical sensibility in which groups situate themselves within the universal Christian rendering of the past. (Robbins 2010: 260).

¹¹ The research question Smilde poses is why some Venezuelans of the poorer classes *choose* to adopt Pentecostal beliefs when others choose not to, despite their apparent psychic benefits: a distinction he claims to have uncovered in the course of ethnographic work. The study can be seen as an answer to Steinenga’s (2001) call to address the excessive theoretical divergences that have resulted in field studies of global Pentecostalism in the years up to 2000.

In this connection, Robbins (2004) in his review approvingly quotes Corten (1997: 321) that “the study of the cultural processes underlying [Pentecostal and charismatic] spread has been beset by a ‘lack of precision.’” This is a general problem, then, resulting in part from the over-generalisation of descriptive accounts in explanatory theories of the phenomenon’s rapid growth (precisely what was implied of Poewe et al earlier).

This begins to articulate more anthropologically – and I think, more theoretically – what Ellingson was referring to by a post-denominational “Christian world in which attendees can live”; and what Miller (1997), Walker (1989, 1997) and Poewe (1994) had only described by reference to neocharismatic leaders’ attestations to “first century church” models.

The question of whether this anthropological concept of a charismatic culture is a familiar one among observers to Western Christian realms would surely be answered within an equivalent ethnographic literature concentrated upon Western locations: an elusive item indeed for the British case, less so in the United States’, as discussed. Regardless, it must be reiterated that the operationalisation of a “charismatic culture” on the lines introduced above remains a live concern for scholars involved in the ethnographic study of evangelical Protestantism: which must therefore include the subjects of the present study.

In fact, in recent work it has been explicitly linked to entrenched problems in the field-based study of Christianity generally. In a much-commented article, Robbins describes a “disciplinary tendency” among anthropologists of religion “to assume that Christianity cannot be culturally important” at all (Robbins 2007: 7). This is an effect, he argues, of anthropology’s deep-seated theoretical assumption of continuity as a condition of culture: summarised as an attitude asserting that “culture comes from yesterday, is reproduced today, and shapes tomorrow” (p. 10). This assumption is incommensurable with the conversion-based culture of Christianity, he says, because “many kinds of Christianity stress radical change” in members’ personal identities and receptions of reality, and furthermore “expect it to occur” (p.1). Now the most explicit socioempirical evidence for such “radical change,” I surmise, would be born-again charismatics’ practising of “spiritual gifts” and “healing,” dependence on “prophetic signs,” and so on; especially so in secular Western contexts, where such phenomena can reliably expect to receive incredulity from the uninitiated.

I take this as confirmation that a study of the present kind cannot shirk an engagement with the most recent concerns of anthropology, and indeed must embrace them moving forward: emphatically so if an understanding of neocharismatics’ present institutional advances is to extend beyond – or rather beneath – the presumptive framings of a mainstream sociology.

Robbins’s article is of course intended to articulate a problem for anthropologists engaged in the study of Christianity in non-Western domains. Indeed his main point of critique is an influential work by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, 1997) on Protestant missionaries to South Africa in the nineteenth century. But the cultural-analytic problematic he outlines naturally applies to any qualitative study of conversion-centred Christianity,

regardless of its time and location. Robbins is light on the particularities of a “converted” Christian life, necessarily so given that his article is concerned with “Christian ideas about change, time and belief” (p. 6) at a general level. Nevertheless, the sole mention he makes of Pentecostalism in this article – citing its global study, sure enough – is to note this as the only subject in research to have so far advanced a meaningful “anthropology of Christianity”: vis-à-vis precisely the literature discussed above, that foregrounds a “charismatic culture” in its social analysis.

In comment, Howell observes:

Robbins’s point about the ethnographic absence of Christianity in non-Western studies is also supported by a counterexample, the anthropology of Christianity in North America and Europe. Here, anthropologists such as Bramadat (2000), Greenhouse (1986), Peacock and Tyson (1989), Coleman (2000), Frederick (2003), and Harding (2000) (to name just a few) manage to treat Christianity as fully formed – an internally and culturally integrated system – even as they explore the same economic, political, linguistic, and social elements of the religion developed by others. (pp. 22-3).

“Similarly,” he goes on, a number of “anthropological studies of conversion in the West … seem to be able to take seriously the religious motives and convictions of Christian subjects,” in ways that would appear to “discomfit” many of their colleagues.¹² The studies mentioned above by Howell – with the exception of Coleman’s – are all case inquiries of American Fundamentalists, as opposed to nondenominationalists. That is because Howell is referring to a general category of “conservative Christianity,” which is the preferred Anglo-American specification of conversion-centred Christian religion.

This remains an unfortunate terminology – for the very reasons Shibley (1998) earlier argued, evidently to limited effect – because it includes in its purview the more notorious

¹² Pondering anthropologists’ reasons for “denying the importance of Christianity,” Robbins offers among them “the aversion one would imagine that those attracted to exploring cultural difference would have to studying a religion that is dominant at home (it seems that even capitalism, with its notorious mystification, is more exotic).” Another intriguing but less obvious example “would be the fact that empirical understanding of kinds of Christianity forged in opposition to modernist scientific outlooks presents an affront to disciplinary self-understanding such that for anthropologists to say that those Christians make sense in their own terms is to question whether anthropologists make sense in theirs” (Robbins 2007: 9). That is precisely what Poewe attempts to do in the concluding essay of her edited 1994 collection, in fact.

public manifestations of orthodox Biblicalism in the contemporary West, such are included among the agencies of the Religious Right, for example. (The movement is broader than they alone: it includes non-Biblicists such as Mormons, Unificationists and fiscally conservative Catholics.) Many of the leading Protestant figures of the movement, such as the Southern Baptists, actually oppose the practising of supernatural “gifts” and “apostolic” social orders on Biblical grounds. Many *do* share with apolitical neocharismatic movements, though, the imperative of a “radical change of lifestyle” brought on by the experience of being born again (Gritsch 1982: 91). This, in the end, appears destined to be the common denominator of membership in a Christian world that warrants anthropological explication precisely for its “cultural difference” from wider society (Robbins 2007: 9).

I have suggested, then, that the socio-political account of charismatic Christianity in the West is likely to have been advanced by the contributions of anthropology of Protestant evangelicalism in the very different arena of the global South. The analysis might be seen as a determination of Pentecostal Christianity’s entrance into “public life” *not* as defined by the jurisdiction of a sensation-hungry global news media, but by its emergence in enough community arenas that the charismatic cognition of actors is made a necessary part of its qualitative social scientific account. Local by definition, and politically resonant by implication, it is not answerable to abstract sociological (or indeed theological) narratives alone.

David Martin observes that “[i]nsofar as Pentecostalism spreads it does so principally through a charismatic movement partly inside the older churches and partly ‘breaking bounds’ in every sense, even displaying faith affinities with New Age ‘spirituality’” (Martin 2002: 3). The latter tendencies are a hallmark of “cultural innovation,” wherein for contemporary charismatics dwells an order of “antirationalism [that] allows religiosity to reenter the world” (Hunt 2010: 195). In other respects, it is perhaps not inconsistent with what Woodhead (2011: 131) recently commends for analysis as “super-social relations [with a] Christian God”; but without endorsing her claim that such phenomena are resistant to empirical observation by conventional means.

To sum up, I retain a working assumption that the charismatic culture present in neocharismatic organisations in Britain correlates with those of other “global Pentecostal” sites on a descriptively adequate level. I would posit here, though, not merely a consistency in belief, doctrine and religious experience – indices, alas, that are as evident as they are statistically pliable. One must also consider a consistency of sociocultural processes, under the specifics of an ethnographic analysis. The key addition to the proposed empirical account

are the “selectively sectarian” advances of neocharismatic groups; in my own case of Folkfield, this should principally alight upon the new private commercial agencies created amid neocharismatic leaders’ developing approach upon secular realms. In chapter 1, I cited a recent theoretical framework under which those agencies might be considered: one that, conspicuously in my view, did not consider neocharismatic institutions. This is evidence itself that the entwined moral conservatism and supernatural rationalism now argued to define a “charismatic culture” indeed remains some distance from being taken seriously by analysts and observers here.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction: general structure restated

This chapter is not to be an extended critical discussion of the methods employed in this thesis, though the fact is that from a general methodological perspective, the strategy undertaken – that of the case study – has engendered enough controversy and dispute in the social sciences that a number of essential aspects are inevitably called to account here. I will deal with these, however, very much in the context of the study's aims and content: thus aiming to build this chapter as a continuation of chapter 1 and a preface to chapters 4 through 6, which present my empirical field analysis. The methodological account that follows is intended therefore not simply to avoid excessive conceptual verbosity, but to articulate the fact that this study and its specific inquiries were very much the product of a case research approach from its earliest stages.

Setting aside chapter 4 for a moment, what follows in chapters 5 and 6 is a comparative cross-site analysis of two neocharismatic church organisations operating in the same city, “Folkfield,” where I have lived for the past fifteen years. As distinct corporate entities¹³ the two churches, pseudonymised as “Journeymen” and “City Life Church,” are presented here separately and in turn. Given their real world local proximity, however – presenting two churches effectively engaged in “ministry” to the same local population, and presumably respondent to the same local social and economic conditions – a substantive common reference is to be assumed of them: the social and political climate of the city, its people, its customs, its common culture in short. This directly applies to my experience of data collection and analysis on each church, which whilst carried out in a generally systematic order, has proceeded within the cultural confines of one city, Folkfield, to which I am no mere visitor, but a naturalised inhabitant. As a result of this, I am particularly sensitive to the possible local nuances of information received in the field; whether formally invited, or offered as gossip. But as will be seen in the case studies themselves, this shared (sub)urban

¹³ “Corporate” necessarily at this preliminary stage: “theological,” for example, is a category that would have to *emerge from within* the account – on the methodological design to be explained further here.

arena is of far more than incidental significance to the objective account of these churches and their people. It is, in fact, of major subjective import, not just to Christians individually, but to the institutional programming that constitutes the neocharismatic churches as (local) “Charitable Companies.” As a general preview to this documented reality, recall from the previous chapters that one of the core characteristics of neocharismatic cultures and their expansion appears to be their (ambiguously “sectarian”) proactive engagement with local domains.

To speak of this process of constitution – or incorporation – is of course to speak in sociopolitical, not religious terms. Indeed an important insight from the classical church-sect approach holds that such “institutional programming” may begin as informal planning (i.e. among religious idealists), but becomes increasingly formalised: as I seek to investigate it, through the organising labour of church actors, of course, but vitally as new forms of material support are made available to them – by secular public or private providers, as the facts turn out. These processes may be found to hold in different and interesting ways from one church to the next, as would be expected of their selection as cases for *comparative* analysis, a crucial element of the case approach taken here.

These two cases are preceded by a third case in chapter 4, ambiguously “bounded” in its empirical description, and thus differently constituted as compared to the church samples: it ought better, in fact, be called a context-setting observational account. This chapter offers evidence of an emerging site for significant Christian association in Folkfield *outside* the familiar church-led realms. This is something which appears formally sustained through evolving practices of third sector incorporation, specifically as local charitable initiatives pursued by some of the most active members from different congregations. This story might not have been relevant to the wider empirical account but for the fact that there appears to have developed, quite recently, a dominant neocharismatic influence among such entrepreneurial “outreach” proceedings (something which cannot be presumed to have gone unnoticed by local non-charismatic denominationalists). Those observations provide some evidence, then, for a site of “local neocharismatic growth” running parallel to latter’s conventional congregational bounds; encouraged, perhaps, by the social “empowerment” culture allegedly fostered in charismatic congregational life.

Importantly though, this account was not envisaged prior to the main period of fieldwork that informs the primary church cases. It rather emerged during it, in the course of informal exchanges with senior neocharismatic members with whom I had established friendly relations. Very interestingly, as was frequently the case in this research, previously

observed phenomena, perhaps initially disregarded in my notes, were recalled to significance as a result of such revelations.

Case study analysis foregrounded

For this thesis, primary methodological questions concern (i) the *selection* of cases for detailed study, and (ii) the *methods* of data collection and analysis used. These questions are preceded by more familiar ones identifying the broader “research tradition” in play. As warranted at some length by discussion up to now, my analysis of “neocharismatic Christianity” advances no preconceived theoretical framework, and so any generalised knowledge offered of the subject is understood to be generated directly from an interpretative analysis (Denzin 1994: 500) of the raw qualitative data with which the cases are inscribed (participant observation entailing semi-structured interviews and document analysis; Jorgensen 1989). This locates the study within a standard research tradition commanding the constant comparative procedure as a tool for empirical theory and hypothesis *generation* as opposed to *verification* (i.e., of some pre-existing theory). Its classical exposition can be found in Glaser and Strauss (1967). Those authors originally advanced a comprehensive methodology for “discovering” social theories from unprepared (typically case-bound) qualitative data. That is an approach seldom endorsed in its systematic entirety today (Thomas and James 2006; Corbin 2008), but has become established as to its principle techniques in a range of academic disciplines, from health and social work, to educational and development studies, to sociology and political science.

What would precede and therefore structure my empirical study then, if not any pre-existing theory of neocharismatic religious culture, are the specific research questions presented in the opening chapter. These questions are designed to drive subsequent empirical analysis, as per good qualitative research practice. But while the research questions informed both the unfolding case selection and directions of analysis in the field, their status started the empirical enquiry that followed. The study inclusive both of its empirical object(s) and its social scientific aims are to be understood more fully in terms explicative of the case design process as it in fact occurred. Explaining how this process unfolded in its earliest stages takes its own narrative form (as do the case studies themselves). Just as the individual (cross-analytic) cases are intended here to advance working hypotheses for a research agenda moving forward, so were the preliminary stages of the whole thesis – a period of initial fieldwork and literature review in combination – determinative of the primary research

questions that guide subsequent data collection and analysis. And of course, the research questions articulate the overall topic and focus of inquiry.

This is fair and standard practice for interpretative case study research as put forth in recent methodological discussion. For example Simons (2009), explicitly identifying the case *not* with any specific methodology, but with its proposed *research problem* (see also Stake 2005: 443), advances the concept of the “bounded system” or “overall case,” within which specific case studies (“sub-elements”) are selected for in-depth (i.e. field) analysis. Each of these cases, she remarks, thus serve as “a database for the overarching case” (Simons 2009: 35). Data collection and its analysis is dual process throughout, which inevitably makes conceptualisation of the case(s) themselves an ongoing activity as well. Boundaries will (and in fact probably should) shift in the course of compiling the case. Standard procedures of theoretical sampling are employed for this reason, by which “the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes” data, deciding “what data to collect next and where to find them” (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 45). This is a *logic* of selection, dependent on “the researcher’s ability to make decisions about what to observe based on constraints such as opportunity, personal interest, resources and, most important, the problem to be investigated” (Jorgensen 1989: 50).

Meanwhile, though, the practical tactic of “casing” phenomena, which Ragin (1994) argues is essential to checking and re-checking the relationship between theoretical ideas and empirical evidence in all social science research, is under-acknowledged by researchers; and contributes to persistent confusion both over the noun “case” and to disputes about the *generalised* methodological status of cases’ use. At the centre of those disputes (see Verschuren 2003 for more recent summary) is the ambiguity that is implied by this concept, “case” – which is one routinely used simultaneously in statistical inquiry (referring there to quantified variables often a great distance) and interpretative analysis (denoting qualitative contextualised wholes).

It may be assumed then that for qualitative observers, including ethnographers, such general methodological issues could be dissolved at a stroke simply by making clear one’s own definition of “the case” as a *process* of in-depth inquiry: that is, as a strategy for understanding the *singular* complex phenomenon or entity, and not as an individuated unit for statistical aggregation (Simons 1980; Stake 1995; Cresswell 1994). This points to the approach most developed in the last few decades by educational programme evaluators, to which I will return shortly.

Alas however, Flyvbjerg (2006: 221) argues that “conventional views” have persisted in questioning the “very status of the case study as a scientific method,” doggedly placing at issue the “theory, reliability, and validity” of in-depth (typically but not necessarily wholly qualitative) case inquiries just as readily. As appearing to claim their warrant from the standards of natural scientific inquiry, however, these “conventional views” should be answered not on their own terms, but in the context of the phenomenal domain with which in-depth case study is actually engaged: *not* the natural world, but human social life – something very different and immeasurably more complex. Flyvbjerg cuts to the matter directly by noting that “[p]redictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs,” and so “context-dependent knowledge” is all we may hope for in explanatory regards.

He expounds further in his own work (see Flyvbjerg 2001) the pedagogical role for case study as tied to a “theory of human learning” drawn from phenomenological research. But the principal claim against rejecting in-depth case study on the grounds of its non-suitability to hypothetico-deductive theorisation is quite strong enough as stated here. The objective of the case study, whatever else, is to provide evidence for the propositions for which it has been explicitly designed: but in relation to which, any kind of natural scientific *proof* is simply ruled out. The study of human affairs looks rather likely to remain, in Flyvbjerg’s apt phrase, “at an eternal beginning” (p. 224). This is not a weakness of inquiry itself, but is an irrevocable reflection of the nature of cognition in our species. And that is before one even begins to reflect on the empirical complexity of the human affairs to which our unique biological endowment has given rise: cultural, political, moral, religious, and so on.

Case-based research and evaluation in education studies: a template for the social sciences?

For such reasons it helps also to explain the particularly impressive value of case study for the *evaluation* of policies and programmes in the institutions of public life. The clearest such warrant obtains in the case of policies enacted within publically-funded domains, to which measures of *public accountability* are due on plainly democratic grounds. An understanding of this lays behind the expansion of case study approaches in the educational research disciplines in recent years, which in I suggest offer some good methodological practice for other domains.

Interpretative case study strategies were advanced as a more anthropological approach to theorising classroom activity, to understand specific educational policies in a systematic and representative way, but alternatively to the hypothetico-deductive study of “outcomes” (see Hamilton, Jenkins, King, MacDonald and Parlett 1977 for an early collection of discussions). The quality and volume of work produced over the years in this discipline has impacted deeply on case study methodology generally, but this has been largely in respect to the conceptualisation of “the case” in qualitative research at a general level (for a fine example, Stake 1995). The fuller enterprise advanced by educational evaluators – as developed for example in the school of “action research” – has not transferred to sociology departments in the same way; quite unsurprising really, given that the emphasis there remains on scientific “objectivity” in the conventional sense (featuring, of course, the replication of general theory propositions). It will help here, then, to lay out some specific strengths, methodologically relevant to the present study.

Educational researcher Kemmis (1980) presented a “new perspective” on case study in which social scientific justification “is derived not from logical or theoretical forms but from the nature of the phenomena studied in their social context, i.e. within the case itself” (Kemmis 1980: 93, editor’s introduction). On this perspective, the grounds for inquiry into social phenomena are driven by a desire for public access to policy outcomes *in action* as part of the justification for scientific theory-building. The “validity” of case study analysis as explanatory science is not thereby relegated, then, but rather expanded – and on politically communicative grounds:

Justifying a case study depends on making the process of the study accessible. The preparation of the reader to understand is a necessary condition for communication of the understandings reached through case study. The problems of science are not just problems of seeing the world “as it is,” they are problems of seeing and saying.
(Kemmis 1980: 126.)

On this account, academic work can be advanced as “a social system for the collaborative production of knowledge through research”: as “systematic inquiry made public” (Stenhouse 1979: 4). The validity in a case study approach is examined for the latter’s particular suitability to a given area of action, policy or expertise.

A genuine analogy may present, I suggest, in the case of the phenomena comprising neocharismatic Christian institution-building. Keep in mind that the case is *not* a collection of

methods or procedures for data analysis, or determinative of such: it is but the “process and product” together of a qualitative research engagement (Stake 2005). Local neocharismatic activities, as they have appeared from my early observations to be advanced through programmes of (sub-) institutional innovation, thus present themselves to an interpretative case-based approach quite unproblematically. However, their status as highly “innovatory” undertakings – a proposition routinely advanced in the literature on (American) post-denominationalists, as reviewed – carries within it the general range of characteristics by which “social programmes” have been objectified for academic analysis in other domains (specifically the educational one). Such characteristics can be meaningfully expressed by participants, and analysed by observers, as the desired “outcomes” or “products” of such innovative regimes. In social analysis these products are ultimately, of course, behavioural ones. Their study can be understood in reference to social scientific approaches at a general level, which is to say that practices of investigation, theory-building, etc., have traditionally transcended particular empirical domains in social life; hardly a revelation itself. But it just happens to have been educationalists that have done the most work widening the methodological horizons in this respect.

So consider Simons (1971), when she notes that primary or elementary school teaching

is a complex activity strongly influenced by the environment in which it takes place, but it is rarely studied in this light. Sociologists have been largely preoccupied with the allocation of pupils to secondary school, psychologists with individual learning. (Simons 1971: 118.)

In a much the same way, religious enculturation, such as the kind I have introduced of neocharismatic organisation, is itself “a complex activity strongly influenced by the environment in which it takes place”; sociologists of religion have been largely preoccupied with the allocation of believers to churches; and various psychological approaches have contributed to common assumptions that religious culture reduces to “outcomes” in the form of individual “beliefs” and behavioural tendencies (dogmatically so as regards popular conceptions of evangelical conversionism, as noted).

These facts, then, identify a further dimension to the interpretative case study of equivalent neocharismatic “policymakers” – namely that “evaluative” element. Of course independent Christian movements and their churches are private enterprises, and their

programmes are obviously not subject to direct state design or control. But that does not seem a relevant objection here. The point of the comparison is not to establish formal normative warranty for the proposed investigation, but to identify similarities of *institutional purpose*, for which the case study approach outlined was indeed developed as a method for social scientific understanding. But on the subject of normative warranty, in any case, there are clearly factors of considerable reckoning in the ascendance: namely, of course, those associated with the increasing state support for private enterprise in public realms, as presented in chapter 1. (In this respect, state control of neocharismatic cultural policies – in their form as public services – is hardly so distant a proposition.)

Evaluative case study in social research domains is supposed to be of benefit both to professional investigators *and* practitioners, of course; such is the purpose of a publically-accessible case record, ethically as well as instrumentally. The question of whether the present study should be of use to neocharismatic church leaders is also misplaced, then, if it is presented as a question that should have any bearing on the methodological options under discussion here. It does not: the study is qualitative *survey*, not critique. A more interesting issue arises here, though, directly pertinent to the research objectives themselves: as to *how* neocharismatic leaders might receive its results, and indeed its *processes*, given their role as participants and contributors to it. Members' reactions to the inquiry's (and my) advance may, in that case, be an important source of insight in themselves (Lofland and Lofland 1984).

Thesis development and the cases defined

Flyvbjerg (2006) observes that the unique existence of context-dependent knowledge in social settings, and thus in their inquiry, “rules out the possibility of epistemic theoretical construction.” This is a claim developed further by Elliott and Lukeš (2008) in respect to case study. They attempt, however, to restrain attitudes towards case study that “cast [it] as the bearer of an alternative qualitative methodology to quantitative methods,” an implication that has (perhaps unsurprisingly) developed among researchers disposed to ethnographic inquiry more generally. They reiterate the argument, outlined above, that a “case” be conceptualised in weaker terms, as a particularised “instance of a general class of things,” in order to leave case-based inquiry *methodologically* open (Elliott and Lukeš, 2008: 88). The choice of methods used is to be undecided in advance. Whether even qualitative *or* quantitative (see Ragin and Becker 1992 for a range of discussions), the broader objective of a contextualised

participant research approach to understanding innovative social programmes is more important: as should be expected, again once pretensions to positivistic “truth”-finding have been exposed for their inapplicability to the study of human cultural affairs.

Among other things, this approach begins properly to regard the role of the researcher and her situated viewpoint *constructing* both the wider case and the sub-unit cases for in-depth analysis. In the case of the present study, these steps began during an extended period of local engagement and reflection commencing prior to the thesis’ formal proposal. An early, preliminary period of local observation was motivated by a series of informal conversations between myself and my subsequent doctoral advisor, prior to my completion of a Master’s dissertation on broadly the same “neocharismatic” subject – albeit at the time unformulated in those terms. The subject of those conversations had not been neocharismatic Christianity precisely, nor indeed the Christians of Folkfield, but the status of the Pentecostal worship tradition as a growing movement within the British church population. That topic, about which I knew very little, arose in the context of a taught module in which I was enrolled on the subject of religion and politics in an International Relations perspective. My own interest in (Christian) religion at this point was basically philosophical; though it was socially informed to a limited degree by the presence of several charismatic evangelicals in my immediate family (in another county, and about whose church/religious lives I knew nothing particular; at least beyond occasional incidences of tension with non-Christian family members, typically over the administration of funereal events).

In short, I departed in my investigations from a position of general ignorance of the charismatic religious subject, and certainly knew nothing of the *institutional* developments that would turn out to be taking place among these “Pentecostal” cohorts: developments, in the form of locally-based initiatives for charismatic church growth, which would subsequently comprise the core empirical subject for this thesis. My realisation of these developments are recounted by the social engagements which I undertook locally over a period of several months during which time my doctoral registration was accepted, but which were characterised by a series of unanticipated empirical revelations and experiences. These incidences turned out to strongly contribute to the selection of my primary cases, Journeymen and City Life Church. They included several that took place some distance away from the designated field, on my own university campus, and even in my local neighbourhood: where I met the acquaintance of several neocharismatic Christians, some from each of the two churches investigated here; at least one of whom I was surprised to find I already knew through unrelated social channels.

A Christian researcher would likely regard such events as Providential in some way. By contrast, I might regard them rather as evidence of the socio-demographic spread that neocharismatic Christian cohorts have effected from their inception, as documented in the literature to date. This mobility has resulted, so it would appear further evidenced from this, in a significant concentration of young adult membership on university campuses, as well as in more economically mobile neighbourhoods. (The latter condition comes to interesting acknowledgement, and challenge, by the Christians of chapter 6's case.)

In such ways, opportunities emerged almost from the start for the so-called "snowball" sampling of cases proposing, in this case, to illuminate the significant features of local neocharismatic culture. One excellent example in the university context was the Christian Union (the "C.U."): no ecumenical forum at all, in fact, but one which I found to be overwhelmingly oriented to charismatic-evangelical interests, quite contrary to the assumptions of my colleagues and fellow (non-Christian) students. Alas this account was not to be included in my final case selection. However it did contribute to the latter in its own way. As I was to discover later, the salient young adult constituency of the contemporary neocharismatic church congregation has apparently formed a regular routine for "conscription" by local churches on the occasion of new undergraduate arrivals to the city. Young Christians, moved away from home for the first time, were encouraged by awaiting chaperones of the C.U. to select a "home church" for their period of stay at the university. A deeper significance has evolved of this. The salvific status of this targeted population has become a special fixture in evangelical "church growth" discourse (the special preserve of neocharismatic innovators, as noted), wherein an important site for their strategic attention is the "18 to 24" bracket – the typical age of a university career, of course. Social scientific survey has confirmed this as the stage of life not only at which a pre-existing Christian faith is most likely to be abandoned, but after which the church is most likely never to reclaim its holder (a finding pointed out to me by more than one neocharismatic leader, in fact). Evangelical Christian wisdom has in turn deduced reasons for heralding the university experience as an archetypal secular danger to Christian identity; stories subsequently recounted in opportune times and places by church pastors.

This very brief example illustrates the readiness of the local field to turn out sites for investigation – cases, indeed – that appear to be as well-established in local orders as they are unseen by academic investigation. It emerged in participant accounts also that a majority of new university arrivals in Folkfield each year were claimed by one of the two churches, Journeymen and City Life, the cases presented here. In fact that information was received only

after the commencement of official field work, so well after I had settled on these two organisations – taken from among a population of at least a dozen independent evangelical churches in Folkfield that presented (or at least could have) as candidates for this inquiry. As it happened, Journeyers and City Life had come to prominent attention through several channels, not restricted to the social occasions mentioned, but also through my active searching of local listings. Recall that for an initial period of perhaps several months, my knowledge of (i) their sub-institutional innovations, (ii) the general order of voluntary enterprise on which these depend, and (iii) the social policy significance of these things together was barely developed. Their initial selection for an exercise in comparative case study, then, was not warranted by a view on these three core interests or any of the more specific institutional affairs laid out in chapter 1. Instead, the two churches were selected for the differences they expressed as quasi-denominational religious bodies.

To be clear, they were very distinct on a first observation of Sunday services alone: Journeyers loud, raucous and direct, yet seemingly precisely ordered; City Life restrained, reflective, and altogether looser in its direction of attenders' "experience." These observations were then reflected on by cursory reading around each of the churches' wider network affiliates. This took in not simply accounts of organisational history (themselves rather limited), but inevitably also something of the theological, religious, and more generically "cultural" purposes and ambitions of each church and its wider network, as expressed in literature sources disseminated in services or communicated through websites and (social) media accounts. By certain of those more emphatically cultural goals – though the deeper meanings of which of course could not be understood on first viewings – I was now being exposed to the products of that "entrepreneurial" social licence which would come to define the neocharismatic agenda described in fuller account in what follows. It did not seem to matter, therefore, that the more concrete institutional entities comprising these local churches' expansions were yet to be discovered. After all, anything more concrete than mere idealisation is necessarily built on the latter's foundations. One is inevitably (and sometimes excitedly) drawn to these first.

In the case of these two churches, those foundations were evident both in direct observation and wider historical account. City Life Church, which was the very first evangelical congregation I had visited, is the main congregation in Folkfield for the Newfrontiers network, a founding institution in the British Restorationist movement that began in London in the 1970s, as discussed previously. The case study that follows in chapter 6 began by assuming City Life's city centre congregation (claiming, then, some 500 regular

attenders) as the main site for data collection. However this soon had to be revised in my case design, when I was informed that the church had launched a second congregation subsidiary to this, in a local suburban ward of Folkfield. At both sites I would find evidence for institutional innovations in local engagement, some of which were new enough to be barely established by the conclusion of my time in the field; some of which indeed, at the time of writing, continued to be evaluated for their feasibility. I did not consider it an option to choose “one or the other” of these congregational bases for study; not least because it was constantly emphasised to me that they were “the same church in two locations.” That was, indeed, a seemingly accurate description of the two sites’ workings: socially and institutionally, as revealed here.

The long-term plan for the “unchurched” of Folkfield suggested by City Life’s local expansion, thereafter confirmed to me in idiosyncratic terms by its participants, turned out to be only the fuller account of its organisational distinction alongside Journeyers, the second church selected for in-depth analysis, and the first presented here in chapter 5. Initial observation of Sunday services, as mentioned, presented Journeyers as a radically alternative expositor of neocharismatic Christian *worship*, indeed – but also teaching, to judge from the very personal style of its charismatic lead pastor: uncompromising, reactive, humorous and, somehow, pop-culturally reverential all at once. Unlike City Life and the Newfrontiers model, whose leaderships are held in the traditionalised ranks of an “Eldership” – an ostensibly unassuming coterie of mostly older males – Journeyers appeared to be marshalled in no uncertain terms by this single middle-aged individual, though (at least presentationally) supported by several much younger “associate pastors.” These pastoral lieutenants more consistently reflected the makeup of the congregation itself: which was a similar size to City Life’s, but a great deal younger, more given to levity, and suited to the “rock concert” mode of its Sunday services. (Unlike City Life, Journeyers held two services each weekend, one morning, one evening; the second of the day is “billed” to the appeal of younger members and visitors.)

Journeyers, as far as I could ascertain in those preliminary excursions, was fully independent of any network oversight; but was apparently affiliated with the Hillsong Church, the largest and most famous charismatic-evangelical organisation in Australia. (Hillsong remains officially a member of the denominational Assemblies of God in Australia, now called the Australian Christian Churches.) In any case, it was suggested by all preliminary observation that a closer scrutiny of Journeyers’ cultural programme would reveal a quite different organisational animal. Once again, it could not be clear at that early

stage how this would emerge on the terms of local institutional engagement. For the purpose of differential case selection, however, criteria appeared well satisfied, and so I proceeded from there.

Chapter 4: “Churches together in Folkfield”

To the interested visitor Folkfield appears a place of some conspicuous Christian heritage, captured by its striking over-provision of medieval churches. Many of these were built between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries by wealthy merchant families for private benefaction, before the sociopolitical upheaval of the Reformation two centuries later. Today, only a handful of the thirty-odd churches that remained standing by the Victorian era continued to be used for any form of religious worship.¹⁴ Most of the rest now provide public space to local artists, stall traders, antique sellers, and at least one community co-operative. The rest are maintained for public viewing by regional historic church trusts. It is interesting then that Folkfield is still routinely marketed by officials and residents alike by reference to a superabundance of churches for which any religious association has long since expired. This reputation not only marks much of the commercial image of Folkfield as a destination, it also structures common understandings among its citizens of the city as a place of still-perceivable religious culture; a religious culture that is therefore regarded as a long-deceased history, and as my exchanges with locals suggested, not knowingly manifesting as any design for the present or future social institutional landscape.

Against this common knowledge, I had observed in Folkfield a Bible-believing Christian constituency, gathered today in the empirical sites of the worship service, the “small group,” and the church-owned “community engagement” project, that does indeed proclaim for a fundamental redesign for “Our City”: a *social* design for a very different contemporary kind of “Christian society,” as ideologically as it is temporally separated from the city’s famous ecclesial topography and its medieval origins.

One legacy of that history is the state’s codification of “religion” as an object for public promotion, one that obviously pre-dates post-denominational cultures. It thus determines that renewed public expressions of Christian orthodoxy, as characterised the neocharismatic groups, is bound to the experimental industry of pastors and other leaders through the kinds of initiatives I will describe. This sphere of born-again Christian industry – action-oriented as a substantive topic for socio-empirical inquiry – is pre-theoretically conceived here as a *really-existing* Christian social order: comprised of actors whose voluntary involvement in their church’s activities, and/or professional employ in a Christian-

¹⁴ Nine, according to the ecumenical forum Folkfield Central Churches Together.

based charitable company, is made accessible by the researcher to observation over time, and seen therein to comprise the kind of local narratives I will attempt to articulate. To this end, one proceeds to circumscribe conservative evangelical collectives – churches *and* other organisations – within the general population of a city, which even in Folkfield – despite its enlarged non-religious sector – retains a majority “Christian” affiliation in national census data). This really-existing Christian social order is delineated by the webs of relations holding among a population not simply of committed church-goers, but of members whose lives orient to the needs of the church in a much more substantial way. As a social scientific account this immediately stands at the opposite pole to those indexing “belief” and “attendance” by quantitative survey.

It is similarly divergent in respect to the usefulness of the latter’s results, especially to vested parties. It should hardly surprise, for example, that church authorities will find more to benefit their interests in a research account that finds high levels of nominal “Christian belief” than in one that describes the fractious relations that exist between church groups in particular locales. To quote one local Christian, formerly a neocharismatic worshipper but now involved in the lay leadership of a charismatic Anglican group, such accounts threaten only to “make the Body of Christ look bad.” Even then, this asserts something about the nature of self-preservation among church authorities responding to the issue: in this example, that they would be more concerned to project a public understanding of “unity” among Christians, and among churches, than they would be to bring internal difficulties into the open.

At the crux of the issue for religious elites today is the question of shared prospects for control not over doctrines, but over the practical cohesion within what the ecumenical group Churches Together in England (CTiE) describes as “a newly diverse church world.” At the executive helm of this world stand, of course, the leaders of the primary historic denominations – specifically, in the association of CTiE, the Archbishops of the Anglican and Catholic churches. They have been more and more concerned in recent years, as their own church-attending communities across the country have continued to shrink, to institute public agreement between denominational bodies on an ecumenical future for British church life. Over the last decade and a half especially, this survivalist agenda has developed an “interfaith” component as well (a permanent feature, one should assume).¹⁵

¹⁵ See for example the AHRC-ESRC-funded “Westminster Faith Debates” that began in 2012. Interestingly, having been instituted as a regular forum for “advanc[ing] and inform[ing] public

This is something that on principle holds little interest to neocharismatics, not only because their doctrinal beliefs proscribe alternative interpretations and moral readings of Scripture,¹⁶ of the afterlife and of the (super)natural world. More pertinently in practice, they frequently express a belief that “God’s plan for Mankind” is the non-denominational local church of the born-again believer *alone*: and there can, by definition, be nothing “ecumenical” about that.

Some implications of this are evident at national executive levels. Take for example the six-man presidency of Churches Together in England. Alongside the national heads of the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, Black Pentecostal Churches, Free Churches and the Greek Orthodox Church sits Billy Kennedy, the present leader of the Pioneer network, a 1980s neocharismatic associate of Newfrontiers. Kennedy was invited to join the CtiE presidency after Pioneer applied for membership of the group, only very recently in 2012. CTiE states in its official literature that Kennedy speaks on their council on behalf of the so-called New Churches (incidentally it was Pioneer’s own founder, Gerald Coates, who coined the term, notes Walker 1985). Notably, Newfrontiers itself – by far the largest of the New Churches – is *not* a member of CTiE. Quite what Kennedy’s candidacy “on behalf of the new churches” actually inheres in, then – except, of course, as a confirmation of his own church’s endorsement of the ecumenical project – is unclear. Perhaps Newfrontiers’ leaders have extended their blessing to his “representation” on their behalf, perhaps they have not; but it is clear in any case that as a national movement, Newfrontiers has rejected any formal association with British ecumenicalism and the discourse instituted by CTiE. What’s more, Newfrontiers’ current “devolution” into autonomous regional offices – what they are calling “apostolic spheres” – only evidences a more determined move *away* from interdenominational futures; the network’s internal de-structuring potentially marking a de-unification of their own movement. Local neocharismatics in Folkfield appeared to recognise it as such. One, not himself involved with Newfrontiers or City Life Church, described the network’s national de-structuring as “bad ass” – commanding it as precisely *not* what would have been expected of a church in Newfrontiers’ commanding national position.

discussion of religion and society,” latterly the programme has been mostly engaging clerical discussion over reforms to preserve the Church of England specifically.

¹⁶ For example, one of the books on sale at the small table set up each Sunday morning at Life Centre Metre Crow (see Chapter 6) instructed readers on how to evangelise and convert local Muslims to Christianity.

A church like Journeyers (Chapter 5) is an even more pertinent example in this discussion, for it represents a significant local congregational body that pointedly keeps any quasi-denominational affiliation – in its case, to Australia’s Hillsong Church – at an implicitly honorific level. One aspect of this progressive post-denominational ontology is the principled repudiation of any form of “national oversight” for the Christian church; a serious challenge to CTiE’s mandate. A common response would be that some form of national-level organisation inevitably arises over time, which follows the assumptions of sociological church-sect theory. But then one might reasonably see Newfrontiers as a principal test case; its recent devolution, in that case, gives a telling response.

The main point to make is that as a concern at the level of national association, the ecumenical project is part academic and part bureaucratic, and neither part speaks at all to the concerns of “God’s plan” as neocharismatics hold it. The British ecumenical “movement” through the formal organisation of Churches Together in England is really a forum for the kind of rhetorical orchestration that it behooves the historically-placed leaders of a diminishing Christian landscape to engage in. In addition, the practical factors that may continue to compel membership in CTiE go only back in time, not forward. A glance over the national body’s 43 “member churches” is instructive: they are necessarily “denominations in England at a national level,” bodies with “a national presence” – and yet, each one’s membership of CTiE is an instrument for their own denomination’s recognition within church-state structures of a near-entirely historic kind.

For example, membership of CTiE remains a criterium for denominations’ appointment to chaplaincy posts in some state schools. Recent neoliberal policies in contemporary state governance are instituting reforms of the education sector in Britain that would make those conditions obsolete – potentially to the benefit of local neocharismatic actors, what’s more. Academies and Free Schools are principally unconstrained by the state’s jurisdiction beginning indeed with their hiring practices, which includes religious pastorships. The example of Folkfield’s first Academy conversion – a venture co-sponsored by the Anglican Bishop of Norwich and a local neocharismatic Christian businessman – is a case in point. The school’s Christian chaplain, recently appointed, is a conservative neocharismatic preacher who was offered the role by the new Academy’s evangelical sponsor. They also

happen to be brothers-in-law: the latter having been originally converted and baptised by the former's father and founding pastor, whose daughter he then married.¹⁷

“Transforming Folkfield”: an emerging narrative for the city’s neocharismatic constituency

That church, as it happens, was a leading participant in Folkfield’s own recent “ecumenical” narrative, and its account here is intended to contribute some empirical context to the foregoing case studies. It turned out amid my fieldwork that the city’s post-denominational constituency was not as atomistic as the individual cases may suggest. As noted from existing literature, independent neocharismatic leaders maintain informal relations with their equivalents in other proximate churches. But there exists too, in Folkfield, a regular association intended to facilitate cross-communication between church leaderships that are not compelled by existant denominational affinities: one whose roots are in the various local offices of one ecumenical “Churches Together” forum.

I will sketch this here as a narrative revealing the veritable “co-optation” of a Churches Together framework by a cohort of local pastors and ministers, driven by an evangelical and predominantly neocharismatic agenda. This story evidences the particularly strong hand now to be played by local neocharismatic actors – not just church leaders – in constructing a local Christian “ecumenicism” that bears rather noticeable differences to the fully interdenominational model edified at the national level by CTiE. It also updates that account in line with the qualitative emphasis on conservative post-denominationalism in Britain to be proposed by this study as a whole. The account is not to be construed as evidencing some deviancy from some accepted practice, but merely the outlines of a local reality. The ecumenical constitution of CTiE makes very clear the sovereignty of local realities. It summarises its own policy in the phrase “to do what the churches are doing,” and in recent years has duefully extended its coverage to the “new networks” that are now developing in cities, in towns and in regions, advancing the tradition of inter-church relations under new formal guises, increasingly locally-contingent; which, as the body puts it, in turn “guide the work” of CTiE and its associates.

¹⁷ At the the time of writing, this church has been recently “passed on” to the new leadership of a young lay member and his wife, who are in the process of fundamentally restructuring the church – with a new affiliation to Hillsong. Its former leaders have apparently decided to retire.

However, this does effectively leave open-ended the CTiE's own doctrines for what might constitute "interdenominational" practice in reality: that is local domains, where any instance of churches "working together" – presumably intended to denote *congregations* doing just that – is necessarily pre-conditioned by local church leaders' assent to meaningful co-operation in the first place.

The characteristic governance structure of nocharismatic churches places *all* corporate decision-making power in the hands of the leading pastors. This thereby undermines the CTiE's own expectations from the start: If congregational agency is held to be paramount, which formally speaking it is in the democratic practices of the historic denominations; and if the post-denominational local church is accepted as a participant to the interdenominational enterprise, which is confirmed by what I observed earlier of the CTiE's presidency and national membership. A desire to see churches "working together" does not in itself advance any prescription for minimum levels of denominational diversity, either. Thus, for example, a local Churches Together association might qualify for the name – that is, for recognition as an example of "the ecumenical journey moving forward," in CTiE's language – even if there exists a clear political imbalance in the association in question; say, by virtue of the presence therein of certain local actors, and the conspicuous absence of certain others, thereby requalifying the meaning of "ecumenical" in that instance.

This was something like the situation that appeared to have arisen over the last decade in respect to Folkfield's principal ecumenical Christian association, which originally went by the name "Churches Together in Greater Folkfield."¹⁸ In 2005 the association was reconstituted and "rebranded" as "Transforming Folkfield." This was done under the chairmanship of a local ex-Baptist Charismatic pastor who led a small independent congregation, now based to the south of the city, which had been around since the early 1980s under the name "Folkfield Christian Fellowship." That Fellowship, incidentally, had co-allocated its premises to the Folkfield chapters of two other Pentecostal groups: the Apostolic Faith Mission International (whose roots go back to the earliest days of Californian Pentecostal revivalism), and the Worldwide Church of God (also California-based).¹⁹

¹⁸ It was hard to find material on the group prior to 2005; it appeared to have been somewhat dormant until the "rebranding" recounted here. A *county*-affiliated "Churches Together" body remained, under the aegis of the Anglican Diocese: a separate association to Churches Together in Greater Folkfield and its evangelical replacement.

¹⁹ Both of the Fellowship's Pentecostal lodgers had controversial histories. The Apostolic Faith Mission's UK ministry was investigated by the Charity Commission in 2013 for repeatedly failing to register its financial accounts. The Worldwide Church of God, meanwhile, was until the 1990s the purveyor of doctrines devised by its original founder, a pioneering American televangelist called

One of the objectives behind Transforming Folkfield was to expand the local Churches Together's associational remit to include not just denominational but also "non-denominational churches" and "Christian organisations" – typically lay-run local charities, often with strongly evangelical mandates. By the time of Transforming Folkfield's second annual conference in 2006, the association was already betraying a strategic predisposition for evangelical outreach over ecumenical partnership, observable in the strongly non-denominational character of its participant cohort. Attenders at the conference numbered just 19 delegates on behalf of local Anglican and Catholic churches combined, while "New Churches" and "Christian organisations" numbered 27 representatives *each*. It was indeed remarked at the time that the new organisation was "maybe too evangelical for Anglicans and Catholics." This, though, has appeared to endure little redress in the years that followed.

Transforming Folkfield was not incorporated as a charity itself, and so had no formal governing documents. Instead it stated its "Aspirations": which were to,

facilitate and encourage the process of churches in Folkfield growing together in Worship, Witness, Service and Evangelism; Assist and encourage churches in a variety of areas including Evangelism and Social Action; Be a voice for all the churches and provide an effective communication network.

The years that followed Transforming Folkfield's launch appear to have been marked more by struggle than advancement for the group. At least once, Transforming Folkfield came close to being abandoned altogether simply because no local leaders would step forward to assume chairmanship. Discussion at the time suggested an unclear understanding of the purpose of the association among local leaders. More plausibly, perhaps, many were left uncomelled on ideological grounds. The four people who had chaired Transforming Folkfield since its launch were all original signatories to the association from 2005, and while appearing to represent an interesting denominational mix, all were personally aligned to the conservative or charismatic Christian wing. There was, in order, the Pentecostal "founder" of Transforming Folkfield mentioned above (who has since retired with the title of "emeritus pastor" for the Folkfield Christian Fellowship); succeeding him, an evangelical Anglican

Herbert W. Armstrong, that were "revisited" by his own church after he died, and declared to be "unbiblical" pretty much in their entirety. They included the claim that Western Europeans – conveniently the British and the Americans by association – were the direct descendants of the "lost tribes" of Israel.

vicar with ongoing relations with local neocharismatic churches, including Journeyers; next, the charismatically-leaning leader of a local Anglican church, St. Roberts, who is also a friend to Journeyers' lead pastor (see next Chapter); and succeeding her, the lead pastor of Folkfield Central Baptist Church, a conservative and intensely legalistic congregation itself. (In FCBC there exists a formal interview process for any new members, with each "reviewed" every three years, under threat of exclusion if they do not attend enough services. It is not surprising, given this, that several of the city's neocharismatic youths revealed in conversation their disapproval of that church – on account of its codified authoritarian structure.)

More significant than the successive chairmanships of Transforming Folkfield is the association's executive body, over 70 per cent of which remains charismatic and non-denominational. At the time of writing they include the director of Folkfield Youth for Christ; one of the recently retired senior pastors earlier mentioned; and a second of Folkfield Christian Fellowship's leaders – thereby in fact making this sectarian Pentecostal congregation the most represented body on what was once known as Churches Together in Greater Folkfield: some indication of its move towards a charismatic evangelical agenda.

A permanent member of Transforming Folkfield's executive body and one of its most enthusiastic and industrious contributors is June, a worshipper in the Anglican St. Roberts church's charismatic renewal group. June was originally a participant in Transforming Folkfield in her capacity as the director of a local Christian charity called Pregnancy Choices. Pregnancy Choices is a Folkfield office of Christian Action Research and Education (CARE), a "well-established mainstream Christian charity providing resources and helping to bring Christian insight and experience to matters of public policy and practical caring initiatives [sic]."²⁰ CARE was established in the 1980s by some of the original committee members of the Nationwide Festival of Light, a censorious Biblical pressure group famously spearheaded by Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge in the 1970s. Through its present executive the organisation retains close links with Focus on the Family, "one of the largest and best-resourced pressure groups of America's Religious Right."²¹ CARE was briefly the subject of headline press attention in April 2012, after two *Guardian* journalists discovered it had supplied interns to around twenty members of the British Parliament as part of the Christian group's "educational leadership programme." It was revealed there that the group had

²⁰ See www.care.org.uk.

²¹ David Modell, "Christian fundamentalists fighting spiritual battle in Parliament," *The Telegraph*, 17th May 2008.

recently co-sponsored a London conference on “homosexuality and Christianity” with the ultra-conservative association Anglican Mainstream, featuring a keynote address by psychologist Joseph Nicolosi, one of the U.S.’s most high-profile proponents of long-discredited Bible-based “cures” for homosexuality.²²

June, in fact, is something of a constant presence on Folkfield’s cross-church assemblies. Her conspicuous participation in Transforming Folkfield is emblematic of the association’s founding pledge to organise a local church “meeting point” that accounts as determinedly for evangelical charity groups and enterprising “Spirit-filled” Christians as it does for local churches themselves. Naturally, this enhanced remit speaks up loudly not just for the post-denominational constituency of the city, as represented by its congregational pastors and other leaders, but also as it is to be observed through the voluntary social agency of individual (lay) activists. In such cases, their “denominational” affiliation (recalling Churches Together in England’s challenge) is beside the point. What matters *is* the “social action” mandate to be advanced upon the city’s population. This is antithetical to any squabble over distinguishing doctrines and beliefs, so long as its supporters converge upon general evangelical rhetorics: conversionistic imperatives, shared as a corporate language. The individual “beliefs” expressed therein appear not be finely tuned to any respect – morally or theologically – but manifested simply as the vocabulary characteristic of a Bible-believing culture: Consistent across Baptist, Pentecostal, and evangelical Anglican domains; as constituting the executive body of Transforming Folkfield; and of course not shared by mainstream and “liberal” denominations – as reflected by their absence from this account, and indeed from the Transforming Folkfield group itself, throughout the period described.

As for the “social action” itself, this concept exists in the Transforming Folkfield context much as it does in the City Life Church case to come later: essentially as a welfare-themed proxy for “Kingdom-building,” a significant proportion of it organised as assemblies for intercessionary prayer and pledge-giving. Two welfare initiatives *were* successfully established in Folkfield with Transforming Folkfield’s support since 2005, a foodbank and a “street pastors” scheme. The latter of these was supported by a local United Reformed church and eventually incorporated by a Charitable body in Halifax called Christian Nightlife Initiatives; it ceased operating in 2012 due to “internal legal difficulties.”

²² Robert Booth and James Ball, “‘Gay cure’ Christian charity funded 20 MPs’ interns,” *the Guardian*, 13th April 2012.

The foodbank, being a legitimate anti-poverty initiative, continued to operate as foodbanks have across Britain in recent years, following ongoing cuts in state welfare and long-term wage stagnation, among other things. Interestingly, the trustees of the Folkfield foodbank – which included one executive from Transforming Folkfield – did not attempt to institute a Trussell Trust scheme here, but created their own foodbank charity intended to “imitate the Trussell Trust’s model,” which indeed it did, and with noticeably slim local Christian financing: the Folkfield foodbank relied largely upon regional grant-givers to fund its work (many of the same funders, in fact, as were annually appealed to by the City Life Church for its Metre Crow venture (see Chapter 6)). Donations from local church congregations to the foodbank totalled just £6,933 for 2013, though some increase on the £2,634 received the year before. Of course finance wasn’t the main requirement for the foodbank, and a number of local churches invited special offerings of food from their members to contribute to the scheme. In this way however, the Folkfield foodbank was able to become an organ for generic displays of Christian generosity on a church-by-church basis, perhaps rendering the local foodbank enterprise, conceptually speaking – in the minds of more affluent neocharismatics – indistinct from the overseas food aid offerings that they were accustomed to making.

Primarily, Transforming Folkfield itself existed in the form of an annual conference, and its core focus as an association was to “provide a forum for church leaders and Christian leaders to get to know each other,” as Reverend Claire, vicar of Anglican St. Roberts, put it. In its previous form as Churches Together in Greater Folkfield it had, she said, been “a bit of a sleeping organisation,” but “gotten a lot noisier” since its revisioning; the characteristic tone of Transforming Folkfield’s annual reports, however, was of a permanently optimistic hope for “even wider support in the future.” To this end, Transforming Folkfield annually emphasised an “open invitation” for attendance at its AGM, and for local membership of course. By the time of my fieldwork though, the association retained largely the very same electorate with which it began, evidencing something about the group’s perception within the local church population across the first decade of its existence, it would seem.

The propensity for non-clerical religious voices (perhaps referenced in the “Christian leaders” Rev. Claire mentioned, but surely including less-inhibited neocharismatic lay activists at any rate) to publically declare something significant of Transforming Folkfield’s “aspirations” as a group was evidenced from its launch. One incident recalled a national press story just a year before in 2004. This concerned Folkfield’s Assistant Chief Constable of Police, a committed Christian. In a “promotional video” for a local neocharismatic prayer

event, he had announced that “divine intervention can directly reduce crime, heal relationships and help bring broken communities together again”:

‘The drug scene and other crimes get reduced when people pray and relationships get healed when people pray to God, a father of all mankind, because he desires cohesion in our communities,’ he said. (“Police chief: ‘Prayer can beat crime’,” *London Evening Standard*, 24th September 2004.)

The same Assistant Chief Constable – at the time president of the Christian Police Association – was present a year later on the speakers’ panel at Transforming Folkfield’s inaugural conference in 2005, which attracted “160” of the city’s church leaders. The most significant of Transforming Folkfield’s annual events to date, the conference, which declared its aim to be “envision[ing] the church of the future,” was also addressed by: the chief executive of Folkfield City Council; the chief probation officer for the wider county; the director of corporate affairs at J—, Folkfield’s most famous department store; and the event’s chair, the (Anglican) Archdeacon of Folkfield. The city’s Assistant Chief Constable of Police here repeated his claim that “prayer and intercession has a vital role to play in combatting crime,” urging his Christian assembly to “walk the streets and pray in crime hotspots,” which he said would “change the dynamics of the streets and demonstrate that people do not need to be afraid on them.” Remarkably, he announced his readiness to “provide community criminal intelligence at a high level to help people pray for the right things,” while appealing to church members to “provide intelligence for the Police.”

It should be noted that the timing of this event – really a Christian meeting, but distinguished by the attendance of the leader of the city council – was coterminous with the general progress of the Blair Government’s “faith community engagement” policy strategy, which was reaching its apex around this time in the mid-2000s: proceeding beyond churches’ early excitement over New Labour’s promise of a new social contract for the nation’s “faith-based” welfare providers, and now accommodating many of them to a somewhat disappointing reality (Dinham and Lowndes 2009). This was not reflected in Transforming Folkfield’s burgeoning internal discourse though, as its charismatic ex-Baptist chairman expressed it then. He explained the conference’s purpose to

explore how the church might exist in the future so as to more effectively confront the realities of the present and organise ourselves in a way that will have a transforming effect on

the city of Folkfield ... We now want to broaden our approach to include all areas that the church is involved in – evangelism, prayer, celebrating festivals, looking out for the poor and speaking up for Christ.

In other words, Transforming Folkfield was no substantive part of central government's faith agenda. It was in fact characterised a great deal less by pursuit for practical negotiation between local government and the church(es) for concrete welfare programming, and rather more by a “transformative” evangelical vision, pledged and re-pledged, in the religious language quoted above, by a largely neoharismatic executive. It might nonetheless be assumed that the local council's appearance on the panel that evening *was* symptomatic of the wider “faith engagement” discourse: its coverage in the local press linked the two at least, as might be expected.

The government's “faith discourse” was in major part a policy narrative concerned with the “interfaith” landscape too, of course (Beckford 2010); something with negligible relevance for Folkfield. The original (i.e., nationally configured) Churches Together remit was clearly better-suited to New Labour's policy narrative, spurred as it was by multi-ethnic urbanism and the vocabulary of “social cohesion” associated with it. Folkfield's non-cosmopolitan social landscape, combined with a Churches Together body reconstituted as “Transforming Folkfield” – a reflection of the city's White evangelical base – clearly stood at some odds with central government preoccupations.

Though of course, the government's faith discourse was also a counteraction to a shrinking welfare state, and Folkfield, as mentioned, suffered deep deprivation in certain areas. It should not surprise then that there was a more serious attempt made by Transforming Folkfield's executive members to institute church-state “partnership” in Folkfield around this time, one more in line with officially announced state procedures. It turned out that Transforming Folkfield's members, proceeding the organisation itself by two years, had initiated contact with the council's Community Development officials to find out where “agendas overlapped,” branding this initiative the “City/Church Dialogue.” This instituted the presence of local church representatives – a noticeably more denominational presence in this instance – on various council “partnership” discussion boards. However these were, too, innovations of central government policy at the time, later abandoned; for example in Folkfield's Local Strategic Partnership group, a forum ended by the later coalition Government.

The “Church/City Dialogue partnership initiative” had itself gone quiet by 2010. Repeating the Home Office’s earlier rhetoric, Transforming Folkfield’s chair at the time had suggested that “churches could be commissioned, and paid, to do work that we are naturally good at, such as community building...” At the present time, it appears that Folkfield City Council’s “partnership” with local churches – at least through the prism of Transforming Folkfield – is largely comprised of arbitrary requests from the local council that willing congregational leaders appoint their members to help with local clean-up projects. Both City Life Church and Journeymen take what credit they can for their involvement in occasional “partnerships” like these. In pastors’ talk, such work evidences how “keen” the council are to call on them – on their volunteer labour force, in fact – but without distracting their proselytic business, which generally carries on in local schemes of the churches’ making only.

With an appearance before Transforming Folkfield at the 2005 conference, the city council’s chief executive appeared to support the state’s alleged “cajolery” of religious actors. Concluding her address to the audience of church leaders, she commended the “massive contribution of churches and their members in our city,” before exhorting that they “continue to be an inspiration to us, and continue to prick our consciences”; hardly an extension of substantial future partnership. (This was, recall, the same event at which the city’s second highest-ranking police officer – appearing in full uniform but apparently in less than a professional capacity – recommended intercessory prayer for crime reduction; perhaps the council chief was minded by such declamations.)

It was interesting to see diocesan leaders sharing a stage with local neocharismatic pastors as they celebrated the “launch” of some local Christian innovation under the auspices of Transforming Folkfield; the former then retreating from view, leaving their nondenominational colleagues to soldier on with the real task of sustaining local publicity and economic will for some local programme, perhaps requiring the maintenance of a premises and the upkeep of a staff. The difficulties associated with keeping a scheme going – the benefits of Charitable registration, if secured, notwithstanding – often provided the most telling perspective on evangelical programmes instituted during this period, before and during my time in the local field. It also perhaps was the source of the displeasure that *did* persist among local neocharismatic activists towards their senior denominational “representatives,” though this was generally difficult to get on record.

“Network Folkfield”

Generally speaking, it was this small number of local schemes and programmes that Transforming Folkfield had pioneered since 2005 that measured the association's success as an agency for cross-church communication in Folkfield. This was most concretely illustrated, however, not by any practical public outreach scheme or event, but by the founding in 2005 – coinciding with the launch of Transforming Folkfield itself – of a website, "Network Folkfield," designed to be an online "networking hub" for the city's Christian community. Network Folkfield could be described as the first genuine incorporation of an ecumenical Christian forum for the city, and its voluntary contributors update the site's frontal "newsfeed" daily with any item of local Christian or church interest. The site also features rolling advertisements for local and regional commercial businesses promoting a Christian identity among management or employees: the stirrings of a Christian service economy on non-charitable lines, perhaps.

Network Folkfield does not simply present the isolated realisation of a pan-denominational Christian information resource. It introduces an account of lay Christian innovation for "witnessing" to the public sphere: of a post-denominational flavour, in fact, given that it was the evangelical executive of Transforming Folkfield that lay behind Network Folkfield's launch. The site's original design is not theirs, but follows the template of an online "Christian community hub" pioneered in Leeds by the directors of the Leeds Christian Community Trust, a charity established in 2003 for the provision of grants for local lay Christian initiatives in the Yorkshire city. Transforming Folkfield's executive had invited the director of the Leeds trust to address them soon after the organisation's launch. He had impressed upon the local audience the need in Folkfield for such an online resource, sharing with them his Trust's own design in a series of slide presentations. Work on Network Folkfield would begin soon after.

In addition, the Leeds speaker introduced Transforming Folkfield's executive members to the model of the "Christian Community Trust" itself. As pioneered in Leeds, this is a Charitable organisation set up with the aim of "developing and supporting Christian mission initiatives" in the local area (Charity Commission reports online). The more precise nature of such initiatives were articulated by the charity using a similar discourse to that later advanced by City Life Church for its own "community initiative" scheme, as detailed later in Chapter 6. The objectives of the Leeds trust were to "promote social inclusion for the public benefit by preventing people from becoming socially excluded," social exclusion defined in relation to "social, physical, psychological and/or economic position."

The Leeds trust differed from the local examples to come in that it was not an affiliate of a particular church, but had evolved directly from the Leeds office of Churches Together. What makes the Leeds trust relevant to the Folkfield account, though, is not its organisational rhetoric of local Christian “unity” nor the influence of this rhetoric on Folkfield’s own Christian activists. (As seen, Transforming Folkfield’s evangelical executive had begun the effective reconstitution of the city’s public “ecumenical” narrative *before* the Leeds group arrived to share their own strategic wisdom.) Rather, what the Leeds actors brought to Folkfield was the economic template of the Christian “community trust” as a viable working model for “local Kingdom building”: one that not only had proved effective at instituting local Christian programmes (some 30 continue in Leeds at the time of writing), but that functioned explicitly under the freedom of local lay Christian control – specifically of the kind through which Transforming Folkfield had itself been established.

The Leeds Christian Community Trust restricts its grant provision to local Christian individuals with no institutional backing – church or otherwise. Such an organised structure for the enablement of local social provision, tailored specifically for the delivery of lay Christian innovation in local outreach, could itself be construed as an incorporation of post-denominational thinking. Grants are reserved for “individuals who have dreams and visions of how things might be different.” Cross-denominational co-operation is a welcome output in many of the projects supported, but the principal normative vision of the Trust itself – as articulated explicitly through its Charitable aims – is revealed more by its emphasis on the individual applicant: the Kingdom-advancing “entrepreneur.” Elsewhere, this is articulated as the “particular intention” to “release and support [individual] Christians.” The institutional co-operation that might be incurred in the execution of an applicant’s envisioned “project” – say, through a neighbourhood youth scheme requiring that several churches work together – satisfies very well the ecumenical agenda professed by the Trust. But this is to be held separately from the charity’s specific function as a grant-giver for the empowerment of individual “visions.” Accordingly, in practice, applications are evaluated according to the criteria expressed by the charity’s core objectives, which (again) necessarily include “advancement of the Kingdom of God” alongside conventional social and poverty-reducing aims.

This charitable organisational model – neither church-based nor church-affiliated, and thus to be placed perhaps within the expanding category of the “parachurch” – was very soon imported wholesale by the Transforming Folkfield executive. The “Folkfield Christian Community Trust” imitates the Leeds model precisely. Quite aside, though, from its

significance within the context of Transforming Folkfield and the executive's evangelical agenda – to which the grant-giving Christian “seedbed” trust was very well-suited – the Folkfield CCT evidences of its own accord one way in which neocharismatic local agency is being advanced beyond congregational confines: in groupings of individuals drawn from different local churches, broadly evangelical, and engaging in targeted social action. In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this discovery emerged in my case record from a quite different direction. For I was introduced to the Folkfield CCT not through my erstwhile investigation of Transforming Folkfield, but by a member of City Life Church, who has for the previous two years sat on the charity's board.

In its capacity as a charity supporting local programmes, Folkfield CCT has a secondary identity, going by the “trading name” of D— & V—: marketed as a decision-making body for the allocation of small grants (up to £5,000) for local Christians to start welfare projects in Folkfield and the surrounding county. Recent recipients have included the operators of a residential halfway-house for ex-offenders; an Egyptian Armenian Christian running a support service for asylum seekers; the managers of a “leadership” project at Folkfield Youth for Christ; a young woman planning a program of “rural evangelism” in a nearby village; a local primary school teacher running an after-school football and youth club on a deprived estate in the west of the city; and others, “between 20 and 30 new recipients” each year, I was told.

D— & V— does not sustain any projects’ funding, but awards sums on a one-off basis. Applicants are required to demonstrate their potential for self-sustainability into the future, and it is for this reason that D— & V—, like its Leeds counterpart, describes itself as a “seedbed” trust. Applicants are also required to demonstrate – which, in practice, means merely assert – their planned contribution to “Kingdom building.” Herein resides the conventional “inter-denominational” element, in fact, to the extent that “Christian-inspired” social action, for D— & V—’s managers, does not require pronounced conversionistic aims. In fact this has recently gone further. It was revealed to me that a grant had recently been awarded to a non-Christian applicant. As one member commented aside, this “potentially sets a precedent for the way we do things here.” He was the City Life worshipper mentioned earlier, one of the Folkfield CCT board’s neocharismatic members – and confessed to some unease about the charity taking such a direction.

Chapter 5: “Journeymers Church”

Introduction

Me: I wanted to talk to you as well about your time in Journeymers.

Eric: Well I can probably sum that up in five minutes. Journeymers attracts me for a number of reasons. One, it knows where it's going, and I want to go where it's going. I do believe that the church's job is to have an impact on society. Two, it has this strange structure – it's a charitable company, and therefore it doesn't have the old-style church meetings where every Tom Dick and Harry, every person who ever darkened the door, can turn up and *vote* for something. We don't *vote* in Journeymers. Wonderful. I have been in so many church meetings over the years that are heart-breaking. [He laughs]. Mostly people are niggling away at each other over the colour of the curtains, you know, or what sort of front door we'll have and all sorts of irrelevant twaddle, and really to be in a church where none of that stuff happens is quite nice. The internal politics of church are never pretty.

So I like the way the church is governed; I like the way it's organised; I like its outward focus. I can't say that I always like everything that's done, you wouldn't in any church. [But] I could talk to somebody with your sort of academic background, or a guy drinking his can of White Lightning down outside the station, and invite either of you along to Journeymers: And think, “Well you know, I'm not ashamed of it.” There's nothing I would need to hide: he wouldn't be made to feel ashamed, you wouldn't be made to feel as if you didn't fit in because we were all thick as two short planks; it's okay. And I like that, I like the fact that it genuinely doesn't judge people.

Eric was talking about the last seven years of his “time as a Christian,” worshipping and “serving” at Journeymers Church. These remarks came towards the end of a conversation during which he had told a story of schism and despair among the local cohort of neoharismatic Christians with whom he had worshipped in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The group at the centre of that schism – or “split,” to use their common label – was Journeymers, but it was not the Journeymers he described in the passage above. At that time, the church was a different organisation almost entirely. The same belief and practice underscored its mission: Bible-based; “prophetic” in its leadership and direction; conversionist; neoharismatic in all the general sense employed here. However, the church met in a different

place, with a different leader, and an almost entirely different congregation. The beginnings of the process by which the church was to be completely transformed in its membership, eventually leaving nothing recognisable of its original form but the name itself, was the source of the rupture Eric had described.

This chapter reports on some of the outcomes of that process by examining the local church that has been rendered of Journeyers by a new leadership over the last ten years. The reason Journeyers makes a good empirical case study for the broader research inquiry can in part be attested to the fact of its transformation from one organised, locally-rooted expression of neocharismatic Christianity to another, and the decisiveness of the change in this case. Recalling the methodological narrative discussed in Chapter 3, I was not aware of this history before selecting Journeyers as a primary case study. I was thus fated to endure a degree of change in focus as my fieldwork progressed. Because the corpus of participant-observational data on which this case report is based is of recent origin, I faced the task of compiling a degree of history as well, in order to understand the significance of Journeyers' institutional "second coming" on a fuller perspective.

This unexpected additional aspect to the case record was, I now think, most fortuitous. The "fuller perspective" I was compelled to pursue is further longitudinal one. This has become important here to appreciating neocharismatic culture's inherent unpredictability, and arbitrariness, as a locally-organised institutional presence.

In 1997, the founder of Journeyers, a much-respected Charismatic preacher and Bible teacher, the Reverend Dr. Philip George, had suddenly died. Journeyers had not originally been intended by him to become a "church" of the usual kind at all – that is, a situated regular gathering, with a premises for worship, a regular order of services and activities, and an integrated leadership structure. Under Dr. George, Journeyers began in the early 1990s as Journeyers International, an "international conference ministry," as Eric above described it. Dr. George had been a chaplain at Durham University and a lecturer at the London Bible College before becoming a full-time travelling evangelist. He was "brought to Folkfield" by John Crane, a well-known local businessman and, of late, a high-profile Christian philanthropist. It was his great wealth, together with a northern city premises – part of a large and still-expanding property portfolio – that Mr. Crane offered to Dr. George, that attracted the charismatic theologian to set up a non-denominational ministry in the city. As with many significant (and just as many seemingly insignificant) events in neocharismatic world, this opportune arrangement was later declared as a prophecy fulfilled. It was revealed to me that

Dr. George, longing for a source of finance to advance his ministry, had “prayed for a millionaire” shortly before meeting Mr. Crane.²³

Whilst in Folkfield, Dr. George founded the Coach Ministry as a charitable subsidiary of Journeyers International. As many as seven disused double and single-decker coaches were leased to Dr. George by a local company, with which he planned to evangelise to the public directly on behalf of existing local independent congregations (in Britain and considerably further afield, it transpired: one coach was shipped to New Zealand for several months; others are claimed by local members still to be in use in mainland Europe). The coaches were furnished with “storyboards” illustrating tales from the Old and New Testaments and parked in town centre locations. Passers-by would be invited on board, to read the stories, speak with the drivers (Dr. George, and associates he had recruited for the ministry) and, when possible, persuaded to go along to whichever local church(es) had commissioned the coaches’ visit on that occasion.

It was, in effect, a travelling street ministry, but with a unique *modus operandi* based upon these multiple local church “invitations”. Evidently, it was Dr. George’s high reputation as a practical evangelist from which the Coach Ministry’s Christian business flowed: a “good visit” from the coaches, it is said, could bring “thirty to forty new people” to whichever local church the coaches were serving on a given occasion. Quite aside his entrepreneurial initiative, however, Dr. George was considered to be an “exceptionally fine preacher,” and it is this that his former associates reflect upon most fondly. This as well as the depth of his personal generosity in the general business of practical evangelism: in which Dr. George, by accounts, attached no denominational bias to the act of recruiting new members to a church,²⁴ nor accepted any financial payment for his services.

By the time of Dr. George’s death in 1997, Journeyers International, together with its incipient theological “training college” nearby, had inadvertently borne the congregation that would eventually succeed the local reputation of its founder’s original vision. Dr. George had repeatedly declined to set up a regular congregation of his own at John Crane’s northern city premises. He did not wish “to be a threat to local congregations,” and was determinedly occupied with his itinerant evangelism, and published writings (a number of which retain the

²³ As told by a senior current member of Journeyers, who had been with the church during its previous guise as well. A number of older members had been present in the church through its transformation; many, of course, had left.

²⁴ This is not to say, of course, that Dr. George did not “vet” each of his local hosts for their theological and evangelical suitability first.

strong endorsement of independent Christian booksellers). In the last few years of his life, students and ministry associates had begun to arrive from increasingly far afield. Some of these – including a troupe of neocharismatic pastors travelling to Folkfield for leadership tuition from Barundi, a country “close to Dr. George’s heart” – found it difficult to integrate socially with the local congregations in which Dr. George’s protégés routinely worshipped whilst employed under the various arms of his ministry.²⁵ With no other option, they would begin to meet for Sunday worship together, and Dr. George would preach to them. Word of this soon attracted a flow of individuals from Folkfield’s existing neocharismatic congregations (quite likely, of course from the very churches he had resolved *not* to injure with his own presence). By the time of Dr. George’s unexpected death, up to 300 were in regular attendance at John Crane’s site to receive Dr. George’s “prophetic word”: now incorporated as a regular congregation under the “Journeyers Church” banner.

By this time, Journeyers had incorporated itself both formally and informally to a legal and cultural definition of “independent Christian church” as it presently stands: a “charitable organisation for the advancement of the Christian faith” on the rational-legal account; an object of much deeper socio-ideological complexity on the cultural one.

Some version of the latter is naturally conveyed in public understandings about what a “local church” is and does. These of course feed at some level into shared public discourses around “religion,” “faith,” “Christian” and so on; but inform also the relation that such common abstractions bear upon normative prescriptions for public life and governance – completing the circle through pretty narrow and very broad realms of civic knowledge, respectively. However, given very low churchgoing levels in Britain, common public understanding of churches, and the “church life” within and between them, cannot be expected to be more than superficial.²⁶ Similar but distinct conclusions might be drawn from the fact that over half the population can self-identify as “Christian,” but only seven per cent

²⁵ This points to the core need, even among prospective neocharismatic itinerants and entrepreneurs, of a regular schedule of corporate “fellowship” centred upon the Sunday service. Diversion from this institutional principle is unusual, but not impossible. One small neocharismatic Folkfield group I came across met in the backroom of a local pub on a Tuesday evening, and did not meet on a Sunday. In their case this was most intentional: the group, an association of individuals estranged from the local church constituency for various reasons – disillusionment with traditional church structure generally – saw their Tuesday evening services, and their public location, as a direct challenge to the norm.

²⁶ This is broadly acknowledged as a problem, for example, by the recent emergence of “religious literacy” campaigns – see www.religiousliteracy.org for the prominent British organisation, convened by leading religious scholars. “Religious literacy” speaks generally to issues of “globalisation” and the migration of world faiths to the West, not Christianity specifically (see Prothero 2007), but the general point holds.

be compelled to attend a weekly religious observance. The data first sought by the 2001 Government Census of the population's "religious affiliation" (not explicitly its belief or attendance) considerably deepens the prospects for any empirical inquiry by multiplying possible received meanings of the notion "Christian," not to mention throwing into rather sharp relief quite how distinct the former two measures of "religiosity" actually are.

Overall church attendance here is expected to decline yet further as time goes on. The evidence already referred to appears broadly to predict a continuing shift in the worshipful landscape – that is the "attending" population – towards post-denominational *evangelicalism*, mirroring developments long acknowledged in the U.S.²⁷ These have been summarised of the local American context in part as

the decline of denominational authority and attachment and the rise of congregationalism, evidenced by such trends as the increased numbers of members switching among congregations of different denominations and increasing eclecticism in worship and ritual life (Becker 1999: 213.)

If true for Britain, this translates to an institutionalised concentration of *unpredictability* among those Christians who are left or are yet to engage the faith, and may thus be an inherent feature of post-denominational organisation. Changes in "worship and ritual life," captured in the congregationalism invoked here, plainly focus empirical inquiry at the local level of practical religious life. The case studies here are preserved as a sample of such shifts in process.

The conditions for Journeymen's re-development were laid in the earliest days of the church's hand-over to a new leadership. The new leader, Pastor Roy, needed first to instigate a particular structure of human governance on the corporate body. Appropriately, the subsequent long and evidently tortuous saga that gripped an increasingly affected congregation after Dr. George died was no "theological" dispute, but a struggle over the human control of an institution that had already come to recognise itself on distinctive religious-cultural lines, sketched not to the prosaic needs of the world or of the local society, but to a shared "vision" of and for the church itself: a "vision" that had been ascribable in large part to the magnetic personality and vaticinatory skills of Dr. George, its pastor and founder, and suffused in the admiration of his congregation. Pastor Roy was appointed

²⁷ See Ellingson 2007, 2010.

having been advised that the church would “close within six months” were he not to take the job. But there had to have been a related breed of expectation upon the new man to continue what Dr. George had “planted”; some kind of prophetic agreement among its caretaker authorities that exceeded, or at least extended, the simple longing of the congregation that *they* not be disbanded as a place of fellowship.

In the end, however, recollections of this period survived as human accounts of very human strife, not divine tribulation. As a result it is quite easy to conceive the neocharismatic “church split” as, though not the defining trait, the defining *event* of the “Kingdom” postulated for physical restoration. This is inescapable if it is acknowledged that the latter is predicated not upon principles of “authority,” but effusively upon “leadership” – even if as politically regressive a kind of “leadership” as could be imagined by modern democratic standards.

During the period of “limbo” prior to his arrival, when Journeymen coasted by without any official leadership but its administrative trustees and a few ineffectual temporary appointments, emotions ran increasingly high. “Ownership” of the church was being claimed by John Crane,²⁸ its host and principal funder, who quietly harboured desires to take over pastoral leadership of the congregation; while pastoral authority now dwelled instead mostly among the leaders of the church’s small groups, who, despite their trust among the rank-and-file, were considered not Biblically authorised to lead the congregation. Beside that, John Crane had personally vetoed the assumption of lead pastorship by Dr. George’s own assistant pastor – a man popular with the congregation – instead presenting to the worshippers a different man to lead them: one who had been found by Dr. George in a psychiatric hospital, having been “thrown out” by his previous congregation for “impropriety”. He had never been intended to return to church leadership by Dr. George, who had simply determined to “help get him back on his feet.” When Mr. Crane presented him to worshippers as the deceased leader’s chosen successor, it was “understood by everyone to be a pack of lies.”

It is important to note here that amidst the heightening political turmoil, then, the congregation continued to suffer in part because it was not sanctioned to intervene.

²⁸ Dr. George would routinely write cheques for his ministry, leaving Mr. Crane to cash them; this was a source of much tension before Dr. George died, largely for reasons related to Mr. Crane’s ambitions for leadership, I was told.

Journeymen's first incarnation was organised on a similar model of "governance" to that so complimented in the opening remarks of Eric's, according to which the congregation are fully deprived of any decision-making power. This arrangement being a model of acceptance to the congregation, political strife such as that which gripped Journeymen during this period can be seen as a built-in risk in this model of "New Testament church" governance. But equally it can be appraised for the human turmoil it fosters.

This, nonetheless, is not how Eric would have seen it. In his view, the *removal* of traditional democratic structures in congregational life (whereby the minister is "hired to perform ritual and administrative tasks and to facilitate the process of congregational consensus-seeking"²⁹) is in fact the necessary means for removing the threat of political disruption that is most superfluous to the kind of "social system" believed by neocharismatic Christians to have been advanced, for example, by the writer of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This states that believers

will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4: 11-16.)

It would seem on this view that the form of politics that is avoided – the democratic consensus – is itself an evil of sorts. But this is not exactly just because it presents the nefarious voice of the masses. For the neocharismatic church there is no political objection to be made against congregational consensus because it does not conceive the church as a political body in the final instance. It is considered, rather, to be a literally "supernatural" one; politics and the "craftiness of men" are considered "of the world" and thus do survive a properly administered "spiritual organisation."

It can be reasoned then that the obviously power-related turmoil of Journeymen's interim phase caused such pain among the congregation because its presence obscured the "higher purpose" that is held of an aggressively evangelical institution. The turmoil's presence was an offence to the human sensibilities of individual true believers, yes, but not in the form supposed of a profane social organisation. The events that were taking place

²⁹ Becker (1999: 123) – essential to "universal priesthood" after the Reformation.

disparaged the very institutional culture itself – something preserved as ideas in communication, less forged in experience, though clearly damaged by it when pastoral relationships go awry. That culture is modelled so explicitly, and so routinely, on its “examples” in Christian religious scripture that available forms of individual expression can be delegitimated in advance.

This in itself is evidence that the institutional culture of the neocharismatic church must foreground any analysis of evangelical churches as public actors – as “outbound” communicative organisations – for it suggests that neocharismatic rationality is prepared against the most familiar secular concepts of political freedom (concepts that *are* honoured in plenty of modern denominational contexts; Baptist congregationalism, for example).

Of course, members who do not approve, or simply cannot bear it, will walk away. Many members were indeed “disgusted” by the events that comprised Journeyers’ power transfer, some “vowing never to set foot in a church again.” This reveals the very strong human reactions that indeed can and do emerge from a concoction of corporate “spiritual” intensity (translated as God’s “vision” for the church) and individual “spiritual” ambition: members, that is, who claim their own “call from God” to lead the religious body. Even then, it could probably never be clear at what point disapproval of human conduct at the pastoral level overrules faith in (and submission to) a concentrated pool of pastoral authority.

Take for example a member of John Crane’s current church (in 2013), worshipping now at the same site Journeyers did then, relaying a previous experience of “congregational consensus” at another evangelical free church (not in Folkfield). His membership of that church was rescinded by vote of the congregation – he was “kicked out” – after he decided to separate from his wife on account of her “destructive behaviour,” as he put it. Sharing the story with myself and a few other members, the larger share of opprobrium for his treatment was reserved for the congregation and its power to judge. “The thing is,” one said, referring to the congregation that had expelled him – motioning left and then right, “there is the *human* world, and there is the *spiritual* world; and there are too many Christians today who are too much in the human world and not enough in the spiritual world.”

The context for her remark, in fact, was the church’s censure of the *act* of leaving one’s wife; the broader point in the conversation (not made explicit on this occasion) was the charismatic sovereignty of “grace.” Grace – God’s salvation from sin and from sinful acts – is to be dispensed in no human office, which appeared to include here in its definition the “congregation,” too. This is quite rational given their broader account: To my neocharismatic hosts, the Christian church is *meant to be* “all of mankind.” To institute a formal process for

consensus among those present in a given building on a given day is about as morally significant as calling a vote among all the people of the earth; it is, in other words, completely beside the point of a supernatural institution, which transcends such profanities.

That particular conclusion was not explicated in their account, of course, but this evidences no defect in neocharismatic reasoning, only the different universe of references contained within it – as a “system of thought,” broadly speaking. The objection to congregational consensus follows logically *within* this system, shared in communication between members. This is one reason why, as it was insisted on several occasions, that a Christian cannot be a complete Christian without embedment in a local church of this kind. Neocharismatic Christians could never seriously deny the “presence of God” outside the social body of the church, but they can certainly only preserve the necessary communications within it.³⁰

This does not explain why a single “authority” – the pastor, one presumes – should be more desirable than a democratic one. But that is because these terms simply do not apply. The neocharismatic divorcee just mentioned, and his new partner, had been disinclined to return to active church life for a time after that experience. He explained that when he first arrived at his present church – not traditional evangelical, but modern neocharismatic – it was with great trepidation, and he approached John Crane’s assistant pastor to confess his status as a divorced man living with an unmarried partner. He feared rebuke. The pastor was unmoved by the man’s marital “sin,” however, and told him that if anyone in the church raised objections to his personal living he was to come and tell him (the pastor) immediately, for it was to be no issue in *this* church. Coming from a background of traditional evangelicalism, this was a new and replenishing experience for the informant in question. But even then the neocharismatic pastor was not *believed* by his congregants to be exerting *authority* to excuse the member’s choice of lifestyle: he was viewed, rather, to be appropriately denying the principle of authority as an artifact of human will at all. The expression of authority – as judgment on members’ lives – whether in congregational consensus or pastoral directive was illegitimate by this neocharismatic fiat.

Fiat still needs organising, however, and its organisation requires “leadership” for neocharismatics. Relatedly, lead pastoral accreditation is as important in the independent church world as professional qualification is anywhere else. Pastor Roy was appointed to take

³⁰ A recent Pew report in the U.S. on changes in the national church landscape reports on the many self-identifying “evangelical Christians” who attend no church – they suggest, on account of the “bad leadership” so often experienced.

up leadership of Journeyers in 2003 having been invited by intermediaries hired for the task from the international Assemblies of God (AoG). American-born and Australian-raised, he was an ordained minister with the AoG and had spent the previous nine years doing missionary work in south east Asia for World Vision, an evangelical Christian development agency. Previously, Pastor Roy had been a church planter in Australia, where he had forged his ministry career amid close association with leaders in the Australian Christian Churches (ACC), AoG's Australian wing. It may be assumed that the extent of Pastor Roy's connections with affiliates of the ACC were not fully realised by Journeyers' registered trustees, who had interviewed him for the post. Specifically that is, his relations with the leaders of the Hillsong Church: the largest and most controversial institutional in Australian Pentecostal Christianity, and the fountainhead for Pastor Roy's own ecclesial ideology. This was to be instituted at Journeyers over the next decade.³¹

Making a statement

Pastor Roy would not hide his inspiration for the church he intended for Folkfield, any more than he would underestimate the charismatic prophecy that foretold it – in his mind of course, but thereafter also in the minds of the lieutenants he would seek out locally in his first year in the city. They were intended to supplant, in his words, the “control freaks” and “lovers of their power” at John Crane's site, on whose “flawed model” Journeyers had been run after Dr. George's death:

I realised quickly on my return from the mission field [in Thailand] that things in the Church had changed. What an understatement! Church wasn't being done the way I did church some thirteen years previously ... a lot had changed and I owe a lot to a few friends who stood with

³¹ Hillsong Church was founded in 1983 as Hills Christian Life Centre in Sydney. The church's founder, Brian Houston, was the son of a prominent New Zealand Assemblies of God pastor, Frank Houston (who was recently the subject of great media interest Australia, having been confirmed by his son as a prolific sex offender in the years prior to the church's founding; the *Guardian*, 8th October 2014). Hillsong has recently advanced its church operations to the U.S. for the first time, confirming its status as a “global megachurch.” It is additionally well-known in the Christian world for its annual conferences in Sydney, New York and London, which have been addressed by many of the world's most prominent megachurch and post-denominational Christian church leaders. In 2011, the London conference was addressed by Nicky Gumbel, one of the Church of England's most prominent Charismatic evangelicals, and the director of the Charismatic Alpha Course.

me during the dark days of transition. One was G–, Pastor of Hillsong London. I've known G– for nearly twenty-five years and I was pleased he was now in London leading this exciting church.

In the first year of being in Folkfield I made about 20 trips to London to check out what was happening there. I was awe struck. I saw the kind of church I wanted to pastor. During my brief visits I re-established my friendship with G– and was soon catching the DNA of the Hillsong church. I saw the culture and how it was being built.

This quote is taken not from my interviews, but from Pastor Roy's own book, advancing a "renaissance theology for the 21st century," published in 2011 by the U.K.-based division of Integrity Media, a Christian publishing firm originally based out of Alabama. Integrity was also the U.K. distributor for Hillsong United, the worship music band and international record label that gave Brian Houston's church its name (see note 9 above). As a neocharismatic leader, Pastor Roy's foray into Christian publishing was far from unusual. In fact, literature of this kind has been a significant enabler of neocharismatic church culture's development in Britain. There were, it seemed, two main aspects to this. There was the materials' ostensible pedagogical function: its desired practical influence on "church planters" and pastors in their organisation of local congregations; strategy manuals for church growth, in effect. But then a secondary consequence. Authored materials further established the public entity of the lead pastor himself – as contemporary "theologian" perhaps, but somewhat more effectually as a quotable figure in the global industry of Christian "leadership," a field of potential socio-economic significance wherever evangelical megachurches operated.

Sure enough, in Pastor Roy's case, the Christian monograph served a dual purpose. One, signified by the book's subtitle, was as an exposition of his own "theology" for the contemporary church. What emerged was in large part a theory of congregational management. Secondly, and not unrelatedly, his book was a selective memoir for his first few years' experience in Folkfield as he attempted to take stewardship of Journeyers. Written six years after Pastor Roy's and the church's acrimonious departure from John Crane's north city premises, and having since replenished the membership to a professed "500 weekly attendees" from the makeshift environment of a rented hotel suite, the book could boast a *verifiable* testimony to the revivalist local church "paradigm."

And so equally, the book was intended to express a testimony to Pastor Roy's model for Christian church leadership, and the psychic trials suffered at its head. Repeated emphasis

was laid in its early sections on the errant refusal of Journeyers' trustees to submit to a "God-anointed, God-appointed" leader in Pastor Roy, a self-proclaimed "Ephesians 4 gift" whose role was to "lead the church and dictate vision and direction." Note, that is, that the pastor did not publically articulate his authority over his new church *as "authority"* by name, despite unavoidable allusions to it via a self-claimed "dictation of vision"; but rather as a plea for the sovereign acceptance of his "leadership" – a concept in common language, central both to contemporary church growth and organisational management theory, that denoted something to be worked out by its holder and (thusly) "allowed for" by others who are agreed upon the organisation's "goals."

This was to be no blunt instrument for coercing members' behaviour. On the contrary, on the ideal neocharismatic perspective, the flow of power is reversed: the "followers" *let* the leader *lead*; a principle repeated at length by Pastor Roy here and elsewhere. The "leadership" discourse as spoken by neocharismatic pastors was a self-fulfilling one in the clearest sense. Like traditional clergy, of course neocharismatic pastors spoke of being "called" to ministry; but they were not thereafter "employees" of any ecclesial institution. This fact did not simply leave their power over a congregation unchecked, though to assert this might not be unreasonable, depending on one's view of the "accountability" structures claimed by neocharismatic leaders to prevent impropriety. Equally compelling for followers though was the pre-reserved logic by which a neocharismatic leadership extinguished the smell of human self-interest: Recognition of the neocharismatic leader could not, in their eyes, be recognition of human power or their lust for it, but of the supernatural quality anointed upon them, by which they are to be recognised capable of planting churches and leading congregations.

For Pastor Roy, his "ordination" for Christian leadership in the late 1970s, at the age of 24, was "a holy moment" when

the leading figures of my denomination [AoG] placed their hands on me and confirmed before a conference that I was called of God and separated for ministry. They used words like "ministry gift" to describe me... Since that day I have seen the gracious hand of God placed upon my ventures and have experienced incredible fruitfulness over the years – a direct confirmation of His unique call on my life.

From these accounts, Pastor Roy's was divinely qualified to not just lead a congregation, but to, in his words, "impact and touch a city somewhere, maybe even a nation, maybe even the world."

Leaving Asia for Folkfield to take over the running of Journeyers, the congregation had by then fallen to only a hundred. It had, in other words, long since ceased to be the Journeyers Church of Dr. George, and had held together for some six years without him. The "dark and trying times" that passed were impressed to me – by Pastor Roy – as having been effectively an incubation period for his arrival: he believed before he even arrived in Folkfield that he was "about to embark upon the most significant thing [he] had ever done."

It seems then that it was not his expectation to take up a failing church as much to establish a new one. Pastor Roy was quite prepared to retain the good graces – and the fulsome resources – of John Crane and the board of trustees; but his "vision" of a Hillsong-style church for Folkfield was met with fierce resistance. After a year Pastor Roy left, taking half the congregation (and the church's name) with him, to a weekly rented suite in a Folkfield hotel. Several people concurred with the account of a "clash of personalities" – Pastor Roy's and Mr. Crane's – being at the core of Journeyers' split. Most would not be drawn on details. One of Journeyers' current assistant pastors remarked to me that there was still "a lot of pain there"; another refused outright to discuss John Crane at all, once later referring to him quietly and resentfully by his initials only, as if loathe to speak his name.

Several other local neoharismatics – including a couple of Journeyers' present core members – said that they had left church behind altogether for a time. One of these (who is today Pastor Roy's lead Youth Pastor) decided to the effect that "if that's what Christianity is, you can have it" – commenting, it was clear enough, on the behaviour of Mr. Crane and his associates and their destructive "agenda."

It was ultimately the spectacle of old men jostling for power, however, that actually enabled Pastor Roy to fulfil his own plan for the church: as an institution of different character, of a different structure, and thus a revised promise of its "impact" upon the city: indeed, Folkfield *itself* was hereby "reimagined" in the Australian pastor's exciting new ecclesial discourse. Equally significantly though, Journeyers' proceeding dishevelment by the interests of senior local figures allied to the church was the spectacle that its younger members were particularly alienated from, to judge from their recollections of that time.³²

³² One recalled the instance in which John Crane sought leadership assistance for Journeyers from a friend who was not even a member of the church; an especially distasteful gesture to some.

Their instinctual alienation from these affairs was a repulsion from human politics. This though is specifically interesting in the context of this church type. It is the exercise of human politics – who will lead, who will administer, who will not – that obviously does constitute the core of “church” organisation. But Journeyers’ young adult charismatics – those who would, one day, inherit the church – seem to have been disaffected by it in a manner that must recall something of their generational cultural identity and being: Surely not incidentally, it was this identity that Pastor Roy actively appealed to in his proposals for Journeyers’ new future.

Several confessed to being “swept up” by Pastor Roy’s “vision for the church.” It must be understood that even at this earliest stage, the organisation that Pastor Roy was imagining was not simply Journeyers the local church of Folkfield, but Journeyers the cosmic entity, pitched to its prospective young investors in the language of his later published monograph. This language heavily invoked secular notions of “fame” and “success” alongside the hyperbole of “universal significance” as metaphors for the “church life” that awaited them under his leadership. As spoken declarations they appeared to have communicated little about Journeyers’ prospective public engagement as a local church outside the most speculative terms. His was a vision for strong institutional identity and corresponding membership growth, with Dr. George’s remaining youth cohort to be at the front and centre of its execution. It was an irresistible discourse to the young Christians present, who had no instinctual retort to make to the highly old-fashioned turmoil then engulfing their church at its senior levels. But they found plenty of a *cultural* instinctual response to Pastor Roy.³³

These young members, it must be understood here, had never *seen* a local church of the kind Journeyers embodies today. Their association with Dr. George’s church was lived through their parents’ membership. As it has been reiterated to me several times by neocharismatics acquainted with the abundant Church Growth literature, the ages between 16 and 24 are those in which separation from church and Christianity is most likely to take

³³ Infighting among older neocharismatics is not the only source of disaffection for contemporary young believers. The denominational landscape itself has an “image problem” forged repeatedly within the instinctively rebellious cultural domain that characterises each new youth generation. One locally active young Charismatic recalls her boyfriend (now her husband) leaving their previous neocharismatic church – Pastor Roy’s Journeyers – for a mission placement with a local Anglican organisation. He, finding himself relishing the “freedom” there away from what he described as the “cult-like” atmosphere of Journeyers, requested his girlfriend that she join him. “I’m not going to an Anglican church!” was her reply. I asked why this response. She said it was a joke – adding that “everybody made jokes about Anglican churches – that they’re boring.”

place. The reasons for this hardly need speculating. But for *Journeyers*' young adult members, during the leaderless period in which they were “just ticking along,” to quote one disaffected youth member (later recruited afresh by Pastor Roy), the affairs taking place above them were as if of another era. Pastor Roy’s arrival and his “pitch” to them for the church’s future resonated strongly in that climate, to those young people. As a current associate pastor said,

When you’re only like, 21 or 22, there’s a level of understanding that you just don’t get ... We were quite removed from everything that was going on. [But] if I’m honest, when I look back to that time, for *us* [her, and the other younger members now filling leadership roles under Pastor Roy], it was actually a really *exciting* time. Here was Roy talking about this amazing vision, showing us all these examples of other great churches from around the world that he had contacts with, like Hillsong – you know, “look at what all these other churches have achieved...”

This excitement was also, for some, a resonant antidote to their lives in the secular humdrum of Folkfield: Pastor Roy’s new church, an idea of many thousands of Christians together in *their* city, like they knew was possible given the right structures:

Folkfield is somewhat *isolated*, isn’t it. We’d grown up in church, and our youth leaders always used to take us to Soul Survivor [a popular Christian youth festival], and there would be six thousand teenagers ... you’d get used to seeing stuff like that, and then you’d come home and church was very different.

And so the “vision,” while plainly of a physically large congregation in any case, was always knowingly idealised by the foreigner Pastor Roy to be of significance and benefit to these young Christians’ experience of their local town life, as well:

[Pastor Roy’s] *Journeyers* was the church that I had always dreamed about: not an inward church, but one that believed we should be doing things for the city.

On this account, Pastor Roy’s “vision” for the local church was a thing of idiosyncratic socioreligious philosophy. But idiosyncracy was precisely the point of the paradigm-busting “entrepreneurial” figure central to this brand of neocharismatic church-building. “Building” indeed was a favourite word among the young associate pastors,

incidentally – though *what* was being “built,” whenever I pressed for explication, swiftly overreached the referent of “church” in its common sense, to other things that I would come to observe only as further artifacts of the “cultural” discourse that Journeyers fostered of itself.

The man that emerges in Pastor Roy’s writings is an “uncompromising risk-taker” for Jesus Christ; but the discourse that ensues within its pages evidences as much of a veritable lexicon for post-denominationalism as could be found anywhere. The monograph supposed to present “not a theory [for church growth], but a true challenge for the future, learned by a true church planter with strong, relentless, apostolic drive and passion.” That is to quote not the book itself, but one of the twenty-four personal endorsements that covers its early pages, and is typical of their language. These tributes to the “vision” and its author were solicited from all the prominent Australian church leaders of Pastor Roy’s former days, evidencing the relatively small band of co-ideologues with whom he travelled still. At the head of the section, though, is an American: Craig Groeschel, the founder of Life Covenant Church, one of the largest churches in the U.S. claiming thirty thousand worshippers over nineteen “campuses” across the country. The wisdom in placing *his* endorsement foremost, and again on the book’s rear cover, is thus self-evident.³⁴

Quite how well-read these books are is difficult to know, of course. The neocharismatic church typically displays several copies of its own pastor’s work(s) alongside those of colleagues from other churches, for sale to worshippers as they arrive and leave. At Journeyers, Pastor Roy did not promote his own book from the stage. But then it appears to be written principally for a pastoral audience. It is no Christian self-help volume, but an exposition of what Pastor Roy sees as “the nature of the Church now arising here in Europe ... unyielding, adamant, steady and persistent,” a “new brand” of church,

rising with a spiritual aggression which stands in the face of every power of darkness, every principality and demonic stronghold ... 500 years ago Europe was a hotbed of revival. Today Europe is one of the spiritually darkest places on earth, regarded by many as the greatest mission field on the planet. Europe, once home to such reformers as Luther, Calvin and Wycliffe, has become decadent and soulless ... [she has] turned her back upon her great Christian heritage and has become apostate and backslidden.

³⁴ See www.lifechurch.tv.

Some specificity emerges in Pastor Roy's characterisation of what he christens the "renaissance church" - of which Journeyers, naturally, is one:

[e]ffective, passionate and intentional churches ... sleek, stripped down, influential and vitally connected with today ... strong, inspired leaders are emerging from these churches ... Even though many are still small, compared to the world's mega-churches, they are gathering momentum ... Such "new breed" churches will pave the way towards renaissance thinking about the Church and how she engages with society; they will serve to impact the thinking and methodology of churches the world over. Watch and behold as they rise with influence and significance.

Included also in this new category were a small number of British and Scandinavian neocharismatic groups, all pastored by long-time associates of Pastor Roy.

The astonishing magniloquence of the prose – not unique of the “Christian life” literary genre, but plenty embellished by Pastor Roy’s blusterful personality; to read passages is to hear him preaching them, as any service observer could attest – secured the attention of at least one local audience. Of twenty-three reviews on the Amazon booksellers’ website, twenty-one – nearly all signed by Journeyers members, all within a year of its release, and none since – are effusive in their praise of,

A riveting, engaging read ... Essential reading for anyone wishing for a fresh understanding of what God intends the church to be like ... A blueprint for the 21st Century Church ... The world doesn’t need another para-church organisation, it needs the local church to be the true body the Bible tells us we are ... [Pastor Roy’s] passion for the church is palpable ... He takes us back to the foundational theology of the church ... We seem to have lost a Biblical perspective on what church is for and who she is in Christ’s eyes ... [Pastor Roy] helps bring back a true perspective ... Not for the faint hearted ... Lazy Christians who just want a church to “play it safe” may not like this book ... Ignites a passion for the church but also a practical way to be able to fight for and display the church in all its beauty ... I am so thankful that I am part of [Pastor Roy’s] church and reading *Unstoppable* reiterated all that we are doing and seeking to become as a church – and it is working! ... I truly love my church and thank God that I am part of a church that is really making a difference...

It was reasonably clear then that by this time, which was around the time of my own first excursions to the church in 2011, Pastor Roy had succeeded in nurturing a very close

local cohort into his own image and vision. This cohort was loyal to the pastor – recall, not as explicit *authority*, but as *visionary* – and loyal to the local mission of Journeyers; though it was still unclear what the “mission” was beyond maximising conversions and growing a “massive church.” More significantly, most of these close members, involved with Journeyers since its early days under Pastor Roy’s leadership, were plainly conversant in the relevant dialect: whose function at times seemed as if only to refine such rhetoric, and communicate just this kind of fantastical imagery.

Commentators on American evangelical culture have discussed (and others disparaged) the phenomenon of contemporary “Christianese”: not of the arcane sense discussed by sociologist David Martin as “a lens for concentrating a particular angle of vision” – though that clearly makes some sense in the present context too – but as defining a strategic issue in popular charismatic movements in the present. The young generation of evangelicals are quite aware of the lexicons that have emerged for communicating to God and to each other, their character of cliché, and their effects on conversionist mission today. Praise and testimony – the private and the public declarations of God’s reality – seem audibly to blur together when expressed through the shortened vocabularies of middle-class Western youth. To myself, having grown up in the 1990s, the words themselves are all native; as the quotes above indicate, though, it is the many *idioms* passing into popular use that come to constitute merely an updated “Christian language,” one that is as unfamiliar to the modern non-believer as high-flown “bible-speak” presumably was to our equivalents in previous eras.

In addition, I do not have any mainstream church upbringing with which to reflect on its general inappropriateness to the solemnities of high church ritual: which is clearly of concern, even confusion, to non-charismatics. Consider the Episcopalian historian David Harrington Watt. In his cross-comparative ethnography of conservative Christians in the U.S., as recently as 2002 Watt was stunned by the youth vernacular employed in one of his studied churches:

I was struck by the upbeat tone of the [service] and how often the men who ran it used the word “awesome.” It felt a little like a pep rally. People on the stage complimented one another on how well they had performed: for example, “Joe, that was awesome.” The slide show with which the meeting concluded – a very professional show, complete with a soundtrack and a good deal of sly humor – was received with much applause and with a lot of laughter (Watt 2002: 90).

This passage really could be applied to any Journeyers meeting with no alteration. But it took a particular effort for me, with no Christian faith experience, to appreciate how startling this superficial manner of speech and communication is within the Christian faith tradition. That is to say that without further comparative knowledge or experience of the kind possessed by the religious observer – as is Watt, for example – I was left to reflect only upon the general irrationality of Pastor Roy’s declaratives to appreciate their idiosyncracy as artifacts of Christian ritualism, or indeed as a departures from tradition at all.

Set-up and service

Grace Davie has noted two of the “irreversible effects” of the Christian tradition on “time and space” in this part of the world: the Christian calendar, and the parish system, the latter featuring the abundance of Christian public buildings – houses and former houses of worship – streaking every local landscape. The experience of a Journeyers service confirms the persistence of the first of Davie’s effects, but evidences an abandonment of the second.

Sunday is the first day of the week, still a day of rest and reflection for most, but Journeyers would kick it off early, and with no small amount of exertion. The church’s congregation meets every Sunday morning not in a church, nor any other public building, but in a large warehouse called “The Place,” on an industrial trading estate at the north edge of the city’s outer ring-road. The worship service begins at ten o’clock, but several dozen of the church’s members arrive throughout the morning – the first few at seven a.m. – in order to perform “Set-up.” This prepares the building and its rooms for two services that are to take place – one in the morning, another at six in the evening.

The early start is inherent to the extensive demands of the tightly-staged and scheduled performance that constitutes Journeyers’ worship service. But it is also an outcome of the leadership’s choice of physical premises. The choice of remote industrial warehouse is not, as I might have assumed, based only upon the pastors’ expectation of a “church of many thousands.” (This is to indulge their own rhetoric here: the unit they acquired would hold hundreds, certainly, but not the “many thousands” Pastor Roy is so fond of referencing to the idealised “Corinthian church”). Rather, in 2010 the building was acquired, leaving behind the congregation’s rented hotel suite, as the initial action for Journeyers’ local presence as a corporate institution. This time, “corporate” obtains in the secular commercial sense, as from the beginning the leadership intended to rent the new premises to local businesses in order to

generate income for the church. This linking of The Place as a “conference centre” to Journeyers the local church will be discussed further in the next section.

So at this early hour on a Sunday morning, young members of the congregation pull up dutifully before a coldly imposing brick warehouse and begin unloading equipment. These arrivals – most are present by nine – comprise the church’s in-house “Teams.” Journeyers’ Teams are quickly recognised as the church’s core membership. In the political economy of the institution, this segment of the congregation constitutes the human labour force without which the church’s public operations would not only cease as they are, but would never have evolved over the last ten years. While the Teams come together with greatest visibility on a Sunday for the main service event, some component of their presence undergirds all such operations at The Place, throughout the week, all the year around: At “training” sessions; at church fundraisers; and at social events with no substantive objective but a provision for “unchurched” friends and other kin, whom members were appealed to bring along for the “supernatural experience” Journeyers provided. For each of the events that requires some kind of physical arrayal within the The Place – technological setup, catering, and whatever else – some element of Journeyers’ teams are on hand, as much a necessity of physical strength : The building is vast, its furnishings largely unfixed, and preparation for events can be extensive. With the exception of the senior pastorate, there are no paid employees for the running of church events. The congregation *is* the workforce, and the workforce is necessary to everything that goes on, both in preparation for events and during them.

“Set-up” is not just for the morning, but for the day long. There is a second service in the evening for which much of the same preparation, by many of the same individuals, has to be repeated during the afternoon. Most of these volunteers attest that Sunday is the longest and most exhaustive day of their week. But they might quickly add that it is the day to which they most look forward to again come Monday. The labour itself, and the enthusiasm with which it is undertaken is remarkable, quite beyond the spectacle of several dozen young adults apparently so unperturbed by such an early rise, not to mention the journey to the church’s remote outer-city location: Journeyers was a “local church” to no one in the distal sense, as almost everyone who attended had to travel by car.

The very first people to pull up at the well-swept potholed concrete forecourt of The Place are the morning service’s scheduled musicians. The schedule is set each month like a work rota. The worship band usually number a drummer, a keyboardist, three guitarists, a bass player, and a chorus of four or five singers; the worship leader, along with the senior pastors, maintain a healthy cohort of performers, and band members find out each month

which services they are to play at and which they are not. The worship leader – styled as “Department Leader” of “Singers and Musicians” – enjoys arriving rather later, by which time the band’s instruments are not only tuned and ready for warm-up and final rehearsals, but fixed into the electronic interface that occupies the attentions of the “Production Team.” By eight o’clock they, too, had arrived and set to work, arraying many thousands of pounds’ worth of audio-visual equipment that adorns the floor and ceiling of the Main Event Hall. Sound levels are adjusted and re-adjusted, lighting effects are programmed, cameras are unpacked and levelled towards stage centre. Production’s headphoned volunteers, clad in black t-shirts, gather upon a darkened raised platform at the rear of the hall, consulting in twos and threes around laptop computers and mixing desks.

At ground level there is otherwise only the stage at the far opposite end of the Hall. The warehouse, on account of its original purpose, has no windows. The walls of the room are concealed by immense black curtains; already one has a feeling of purposefully engineered physical disconnection from the city outside. It is much like one might experience in a vast drama studio: its furnishings intentionally sparse and neutral, calculated to constrain the audience member’s senses to the single purpose of some performance art. The stage itself has been recently restructured, now with its front edge extended out to a centralised triangular point, so that later, with chairs laid out, it intrudes into the audience, giving worshippers in the front rows – overwhelmingly the teenage and young adult members – an enlarged front-and-sideways perspective on the stage act. The musicians, for now, merely stand idly waiting for the technicians’ cues, at which point they began to run through that morning’s songs.

On a given morning there may be a new Team member here and there being apprenticed through the system. Outside of Singers and Musicians, Journeyers’ volunteers are not appointed according to the existing skills of the individual, but the needs of the ongoing tasks. Even then, the Team structure’s centrality to “congregational life” here requires that over-subscription is willfully met with over-appointment. “We could probably do without half the teams we have,” confides one of the senior pastors, spelling out the clear dilemma of a “membership” status predicated on productive participation.

Testimonies abound throughout the Teams that prior to joining the church and getting “plugged in” they had nothing of the “skills” or “knowledge” they now employ each Sunday morning. Skills gained are a source of personal success, which is then owed to the church, and in turn invoked by leaders as a key theme and demonstration of the church’s public Charitable contribution, as well. For the pastors, a most commonly cited result is the rise in “confidence” among young people who previously had little. This on-the-job enhancement of

“skills” – from music performance to computer programming, from visitor greeting to coffee-making – is the labour tailored to the practical organisation of what Journeyers presents as the “culturally relevant” worship service. Moreover, it is through this intentionally and highly visible process that the worship service and other public church events are experienced as referents of a true (and truly relevant) “Christian life”: something less communicable to the public without the assiduous translation as “culture.”

Most of the technical team are male, but amidst their low-key toil, a young woman – their own department leader – strides back and forth between the platform and the stage clutching a check-list, streaming French-accented commands into a remote headset. She is seemingly rather beset by the task, but as she later explains, is simply “passionate” for the role. On one occasion I ask the nearest person, part of another small gang of twenty-somethings – I have been watching them struggle to remove several wheeled storage trunks from behind a thick black curtain that shields the stage entrance – what I might do to help (or perhaps justify my presence). After some thought, I am directed to a small storage room at the side of the hall. It is adjacent to an enormous structure of heating units, which later on warm the assembled worshippers. I can’t help noting several times during the Set-up that it has not been turned on for these pre-service preparations, leaving the cavernous hall unpleasantly cold. But I hear no complaints at all.

With a small luggage trolley I begin removing stacks of plastic chairs. Together with the others – the rank-and-file of that morning’s “Home Team”, charged with the “Set up, Pack down” of the Main Event Hall for Sunday worship – I lay them out in rows across the hall, fashioning three outlays of seating separated by two wide aisles at third intervals, each one roughly in line with one of the two sets of double doors opening at the rear of the hall to the designated “Atrium” next door: where from about nine-thirty people arriving for the service began to gather. Most of the arrivals are the demographic equivalent of the Team members that have been preparing for their arrival all morning: casual but well-dressed, smiling, and supremely at ease with the unbound interaction that then ensues in the expanse of this vast open-plan chamber. Here appear some older attendees, very few without partners, some the parents of core team members; but a bare smattering of elderly faces – none appearing the least unfamiliar with the venue, the people, nor the regular schedule of events that unfolds. Within about half an hour, before the pop music amplifying the room is turned down and a youthful voice requests everyone’s movement to the Main Event Hall for “this morning’s service,” between one and two hundred people have gathered.

Upon arriving, most have swiftly inclined towards a row of collapsable tables at the opposite side of the Atrium, where three or four members of the “Hosting and Catering” team poured coffees, teas and fruit juices, all *gratuit*. Even from the pre-filled vaccuum flasks there is always a choice of different blends. I find myself rather easily settling in at this point, easily distracted by the trivial comfort of pondering which coffee I might prefer, while muttering inanely at the patient smiling servers. Suddenly then, one is in familiar surrounds, as if at any regular non-religious public gathering for which the catering profession was designed. Or perhaps – to stretch the analogy somewhat – as if one has stopped by a high street coffee shop in the midst of some other consumerist errands. For this is more than the complimentary instant brew laid on at the parish church service, but something to be pondered over and *served*, to *you*, the treasured clientele. There is yet further evidence of overindulged “consumer choice” thinking here. Presumably for those accustomed to more extravagant tastes, a mobile barista bar stands at the adjecent wall, where microfoamed and flavoured coffees can be acquired, this time for a £2.50 charge. There is nothing like the queue here that graces the main tables, and the young “barista” Team member looks on expectantly.

Whilst I loiter in the dark of the Main Event Hall – admiring the gathering musical cohesion of the rehearsing worship band, and the dazzle of electric instruments beneath the illuminations that warm upon the stage – another few dozen volunteers organise throughout the rest of the venue. The final, smaller third of the warehouse unit (after the Main Event Hall and the Atrium) is divided into five rooms, named by a primary colour scheme: the “Red Place,” the “Green Place,” the “Yellow Place,” and so on. In the Blue Place, the largest of the five, a small group of “Kids Team” members plan and rehearse the morning’s entertainment for Journeymen’s youngest attendees. The two Team leaders here are a very young husband and wife partnership, as are many of the leaderships overseeing departments of direct congregational contact. They run through song and dance moves from a moveable stage, a small replica of the Main Event Hall’s, complete with several raised structures. It becomes apparent watching this, and hearing the lyrics as they rehearsed, that a programme of beginners’ charismatic worship is in store. Meanwhile, other members sit cheerfully arranging the teaching aids for the morning, most of them the members’ own designs: for example, small notes cut out and stacked bearing words from biblical passages, which the children would later be challenged to put together. In the room behind, yet more musicians rehearse, preparing for the evening service’s performance.

Back in the Atrium and the two or three smaller rooms leading off it, members of the “First Impressions Team,” or “FIT” – identifiable by the Journeyers-branded yellow t-shirts they all wear – consult on their own plan of action for the morning. The First Impressions Team is designed to be the friendly face, arms and hands of Journeyers on a Sunday, before, during and after each service. These arms reach well beyond the physical building. FIT’s members first appear to approaching visitors a couple of hundred yards beyond the warehouse’s entrance, ushering motorists to a parking space from the street. They are visible by the retroreflective glow of high-viz jackets (supplemented with hand-held fluorescent torches in the darker winter months). The need for this component of the FIT team seemed clear enough. The church’s property extends only so far as the forecourt. Well before the start of service this soon fills with vehicles, and FIT’s outdoors attendants have been directing arrivals to one of two overflow parking areas to which the church has been granted use by neighbouring businesses: one nearly opposite the church’s unit, the other a couple of minute’s walk further down the cul-de-sac street. The end of this second off-site car park has only recently been hailed to the congregation with some jubilence by the lead pastor. On Journeyer’s busiest events, such as the Christmas Service, and occasionally in larger Sunday service turnouts, visitors have been directed to the estate’s sidestreets, at even further distance from the church entrance.

There is something significant to be said for the curious procedure experienced here. To be ushered by teenagers robed in officialising insignia more redolent of festival stewards than junior churchwardens is to forget that one has arrived for “church” at all. As one walks from parked car to church entrance, this feeling is reinforced by the harsh landscape of its industrial location; brightened only by the enthused “Helloes” of the young stewards, who gambol distractedly in the open air as the flow of approaching cars begins to slow at the approach of ten o’clock.

This is the real significance of the Car Park Team, and the others inside: as part of a “service culture” design to permeated the experience not of the existing member, but of the *new visitor* and *potential convert*. It appears clear that these young people have been in no way resigned to the role of all-weather parking steward, but affect a relish for it: visible as an occasionally nervous, often stridently confident, but always distinctly *anticipative* presence before someone they do not yet know – but who is preparing to enter their “community of Christ’s design”; this fleeting interaction, the opening shot of the church’s grand challenge, which is to make sure a recipient comes back the Sunday after. The stewards’ engineered responsiveness soon commingles with the similar treatment one receives at the main

entrance, then beyond it, in the Atrium, then entering the Main Hall for the service, and leaving it afterwards. At each point, fleeting gestures of assistance – a door opened, a chair pulled out, a “welcome” beckoned – constitute the lived experience of the “culture” that the church’s members have, throughout, been insisting to me constitute Journeyers the “brand.” The responsibility of showing visitors where to park may thus have seemed insignificant, but it differs only in degree, not in kind, from the task required of FIT’s indoor members, who approach and engage with arrivals immediately through the door, paying special attention to those on their own or possible first-timers. The latter indeed is my personal experience every week: the attention beginning to reduce only when I am recognised by enough members.

The resonant effect of all this is that before reaching the congregational throng inside, one has likely been looked at, welcomed, and personalised by up to seven or eight different people. This experience does not go unnoticed by the non-convert “seeker” any more than it does to the Christian free agent, brought here by the possibility or promise of an “experience with God” that is new, more vibrant, and more “genuine” than that provided by other churches they might have been involved with.

The worship service itself takes place in the Main Hall between 10 and 11:30 am and again between 6 and 7:30 pm. It is an audio-visual bombast: A blackened hall, a piercingly-lit stage, a big screen, an eight to twelve-strong band of handsome young performers, and beginning each time with about thirty minutes of very loud electrified music. The only thing here not unique among Folkfield’s other neocharismatic services are the musical numbers themselves. These are drawn from a global catalogue of “Contemporary Worship Music” – the most widely played material produced and licensed by Hillsong Church’s own global label – that has become extremely popular among contemporary Christians; not to say lucrative. The Christian music genre has been furnished its own category at America’s yearly Grammy Awards ceremony.

Journeyers’ worship service, not unlike the bookending periods of socialisation that precede and follow on, is itself a tightly-scheduled sequence of events, repeated week on week. Each section of the service is accorded its own duration of time, monitored by the Production Team from their computerised stations at the rear of the hall, and streamed to inconspicuous digital display timers at the side of the stage, in view of preachers and performers, but obscured from the sight of the audience (though not overcarefully³⁵). It

³⁵ One twenty-something member, who joined the church upon moving from Yorkshire in the late 2000s, cited these digital timers to me as an object of perturbation to him when he first joined the church. Still, as he explained it, an understanding of their *function* in the broader objectives of

begins with half an hour of devotional music, slow and fast numbers, but all performed to a near-professional standard by a Singers and Musicians Team with all the stylistic appearance and much of the self-conscious stage presence of any secular popular music troupe. Indeed, even as I became accustomed to the spectacle, all that really distinguishes them were the inexhaustible, sky-gazing smiles of the singers; the practically unceasing raised extension of a free arm and hand to the upper reaches of the stadium (the other hand clutching a wireless microphone to the mouth); and the trademark arms-above wrist clapping that follows every song, primed for the audience's imitation. As a collective ascription of behavioural roles to individual worshippers – as per those members who honour their obligation to "perform" in the way expected – the instrumental mode for Journeyers' worship was not interiorized contemplation, but exteriorized effervescence. It is intended most importantly to sheerly *evince* – that is, without complication, intellectual or otherwise – the sensory impression of an atmosphere qualitatively greater than likely any other: a "naturally supernatural, and supernaturally natural" one, to furnish the rhetoric of the church's leadership. The impression it leaves is of a flash mob for furnishing what they call "the presence of God in the House."

At the conclusion of the opening worship section, before the main "preach" or "message," comes the offering: in which an associate pastor – often the individual employed full time as Journeyers' business manager – would make an extended appeal for donations from the audience; never without stating that "If you're visiting us today, just switch off for this bit – you are not obliged to give!" That regular members *are* so obliged is a proposition not constrained to this weekly five minute address, but flourished as a persistent narrative of its own in "the life of our church." The ten per cent tithe traditionally made in Bible-believing congregations is explicitly rejected by Journeyers' leaders. Instead, they favour a discourse that encourages giving as much money as one can *over* this traditional amount: for "going beyond expectations," another rhetoricallyised pledge for members to bear and internalise.

This is articulated as a narrative of open-ended need on behalf of *this* church, *this* organisation. This serves the rather ambiguous teleology of the self-described "renaissance church" – that is, not recognisably premillenarian at all, but conventionally short-termist as a company pursuing *growth*. Financial contributions are relentlessly solicited, but Journeyers' leaders maintain an account that promotes the church itself as the central beneficiary; less

Journeyers Church – that is, as a necessary ingredient to the growth-focussed church and its events – quelled his concerns. The result was that the sensibility – indeed the *rationality* – by which he had cause to question their use in a religious service before has been appropriately restructured. He has since become a committed core member of the church, and married there.

they as individuals as the beneficiaries of God's blessing in direct exchange for cash (though this idea was of course far from absent; just complicated in practice³⁶). Simultaneously of course, "the church" is ensconced in discourse *as* the generous believers themselves, collectively: so in essence, it is more urgent that the members first of all invest their trust and belief in the institutional vision, not in their own fortunes. This appears to work very effectively indeed on the intellects of the core members.

Turning to the actual realities of financing, the organisation was not a low-priced affair. The annual expenditure for the charity "Journeymen," according to the church's most recent available accounts,³⁷ totals over £469,000. Almost 96 per cent of this is internal costs; only some four per cent of the charity's outgoings comprise grants and donations to other organisations. These yearly internal costs include some £101,648 in lease and renovation costs for The Place; £138,055 in salaries, wages and pensions among an average five employees – over £58,000 of which is paid as salary to Pastor Roy and his wife; and up to £33,185 in mortgage and other costs for Pastor Roy's and his wife's home – "the Manse" – a couple of miles outside the city in one of Folkfield's quiet leafy environs. The house, itself valued at over £378,000, was "bought by the church in 2008 for the purpose of housing the Senior Ministers and for them to be able to host meetings and guest speakers for the church."

Year on year, income to the church roughly equals outgoings, both rising by a few thousand each year between 2008 and 2012; the later growth of The Place's conference business marks a more considerable increase on the church's revenues (see the next section for more on The Place's role). Generally speaking, however, over the four years for which financial records are available, the church's cash flows maintain a pretty consistent course: a small rise in some areas, a small fall in others, pretty much evening out. A few percentage figures are interesting, however. From 2008 to 2011, while the church's yearly incomings (almost entirely from members' tithes, donations and Gift Aid returns) remained the same (at about £370,000 a year – actually falling a little over this time), premises costs and outgoing donations and grants by the church both *decreased*, by three per cent on average, while wages

³⁶ Altogether more "measured," it might suffice to say. A discourse, generally sourced to stage pronouncements in pastoral monologues (and indeed the "offering preach" itself), was routinely invoked to address people's material and professional desires: job applications, university places, babies, for example; these profane wants were essentially "promised" to members, but in exchange for their "generosity" in a sense again modified by Journeymen's own *cultural* program – a program necessarily separated from any straightforward religious one, to be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

³⁷ All figures were taken from the church's annual financial reports, as prepared for the Charity Commission.

and salaries *rose* by over eleven per cent. Staff numbers remained the same. Over the same period, the percentage of incomings put towards internal costs rose from 92 to 96 per cent, against a total expenditure increase of 7 per cent. This included a salary increase for Pastor Roy of 18 per cent over four years to 2011; his salary increasing again the year after, the last for which records were publically available at the time of the study.

As several members remarked – separately and (again) in strikingly similar locutions – “money is important because the more money you *have*, the more stuff you can *do*”: referring here to the doings of the organisation, a perfectly fine logic of course. The objection occurs to the outsider that what the organisation does actually “do” is not clearly explicated by its hosts. As it was communicated to me, all one needed to do was look around “the church” – not the physical building, but the people that comprised it – to see “how many lives are changing” for the better. The “change” hypothesized to be taking place among individual members was understood by this point to constitute the defining purpose of Journeyers. This was hardly a revelation for an institution of charismatic fellowship, I would agree; and furthermore, it is not for any outside observer to question the sincerity of countless respondent members who *all* second that claim, and doing so at least implicitly reference the “spiritual” explanation that purports to lay at its heart. But the implicit reference is not enough to disguise the evident “cultural,” i.e., learned, prosaic, human power-brokered aspects that secure a socio-institutional “impact” on individuals. I will turn to this in the last section.

It is important to appreciate that the worship service itself is intended to be a continuation of the experience that begins with the parking of one’s car. It is part of the same performance package; the central event in a linear sequence of events engineered by these Christian labourers as a whole with which to secure the wonder – and subsequent return – of unchecked visitors. Of course, this is not to suggest at all that existing, conversant worshippers at Journeyers – presumed to be all the Team participants, plus other fairweather members who were not fully “plugged in” – were in any way not catered for, or that their “experience of God” was anything less than they claimed it to be.

That is to say, of course, I presumed the “spiritual” experiences at a Journeyers service to be as bona fide as they were in any other Christian meeting. One former member of the church, who had been present in Dr. George’s time and saw through its transition under Pastor Roy before deciding to leave, did, however, feel obliged to address this rather sensitive issue. He left Pastor Roy’s ministry somewhat acrimoniously. He was not shy of confronting

in our interview numerous dubieties that he perceived in the young executive and associate pastors' early "leadership" forays under Pastor Roy's guidance, after leaving John Crane's premises. (The young leadership's first mission, in fact, was to create Journeymen's first evening services, which were to be explicitly targeted at Folkfield's youth.) He commented thoughtfully on the internal conflict he experienced there, disapproving of the organisational aspects of the neocharismatic institution, while still obliging its claim to be "church" as he'd always known it as a charismatic believer:

How did it *change*? It was interesting, because from God's point of view, I felt that he (God) was really in the same sort of place... in a *certain* place, and it would be—you would go to *church*, and you would go to God separately in a way—how do I explain it... Like, I still felt and experienced God *at church*, which is why I was thinking, 'Well, he must be endorsing this, so I must be wrong'; and so, I thought, that's interesting, but... I, thank God, I didn't make the association that [Pastor Roy] and co were in any way *speaking for God*...

"This," he explained, was what clearly *did* happen to a friend who also left Pastor Roy's church:

When she left Journeymen she also left her relationship with God, and associated all the bad things [that had happened] at Journeymen, and thought well, God's just bundled in with all that.

This seems to be his attempt to rationalise a bad experience of (perhaps even a bad *model for*) church – leadership, congregation, and whatever else of a human nature within it – without throwing the broader enterprise into doubt. It seemed understandable that to these Christians, "God's reality" preceded and exceeded all human offices – came to one "separately," as he tried to articulate it.

In any case this actually alights upon a potentially tricky issue for those local mainline Christians and leaders who are given to criticising the overblown revelry of the Hillsong-style church – *or* indeed the personal qualities of the self-directed neocharismatic leader, who – as Pastor Roy may well have demonstrated – has every necessary legal avenue open with which to establish a church, grow a loyal congregation, and institutionalise a "theological" agenda all from nothing, constrained only by the laws of the land. Are traditionalists and other critics, in admonishing the "shallow" style of such services or the *ad hominem* deficiencies of "apostolic" leaders, advancing a claim that the "Holy Spirit" does not make itself present at

the latter's events – that the congregation's endeavours are a sham, in other words? Not at all, perhaps; so if not, how then would they warrant their position to criticise such churches at all? On esoteric “theological” grounds of course, for one.³⁸ But clearly these tensions and objections take to a new level of significance – real, practical issue – when they are pitched at a local church level with local church concerns: that is, facing off a shrinking constituency of practising Christians, a state of affairs nowhere as viscerally witnessed as it is in one's own home city.

“Culture Points”

The culture of our church, the way in which we do things, is no accident but flows from our passion for God and His kingdom. It is our desire to intentionally and deliberately create a culture that reflects the Kingdom of God.

– “Our Culture,” Journeyers website.

1: The Place

Naturally, Journeyers’ pastors are clear about their wishes for the church to be recognised in the local sphere firmly within the terms of the culture which they advance of themselves:

I wouldn't want to look at goals, I wouldn't want to put too much on it, but you know I'm part of a church which I believe is going to grow and grow. That's the *desire*. Because growth means reaching people. So I want to be part of a church which continues to stretch the boundaries of church culture, if you like: just reaching into the culture of our city, really. So I want to be a part of *that*, that conversation in the city I want to be part of. It's good for the church to build a name for itself as a place of love and acceptance.

The impassioned vagueness with which this pastor articulates his ambitions for the church is highly typical of leaders’ accounts. But so too is the curious confusion of the traditional goal of conversionism with a kind of secular corporate ambition – which often idealises Journeyers as some kind of public service enterprise:

³⁸ See examples in the literature, see Percy (1996); MacArthur (1993).

[We want to have an impact on mass culture], but not just in Folkfield, beyond that as well. In the city is where we go and decide to specifically do things; but Hillsong is phenomenal in a sense because it's got a kind of worldwide church renown, if you like. But in the cities that we're a part of, in Folkfield, I'd like to see the profile of what we do raised so that people go, "Yeah, we know those guys at Journeyers," whether they go to Journeyers or not, "We know those guys, they're the good guys up there, if you need anything you should go there" ... [so that] when the city is looking to do things they think "Well actually, we should speak to someone at Journeyers about this, they'll have a good perspective, they'll have an understanding."

I understand that the references to "Journeyers" in remarks like these is a reference to a company of people: that is, a people of exteriorised character, knowledge, and ability, but necessarily "standardised" in a commercial sense – as if one could say, with a consumer's confidence, *You know what you'll get with a Journeyers member*. Then of course, this narrative stipulates some imagined recipients. Core members, when automatically refuting the charge of self-absorption amid Team participation, are fond of saying "It's not about what you can do for *you*, but for *other* people"; similarly of the Sunday service, "It's not what *you* take away from it, but what you can give to other people." They would typically be speaking as individuals seeking out other individuals in church: *these* accounts are microsocial narratives, evidencing (interior) conversionistic motives clothed in (exterior) altruistic behaviour. The longer quotes above, however – pitched as they were at the corporate level; spoken from the pastors' eye-view – invoke quite clearly "the city" itself, and seem to allude, apparently very approachingly, to the affairs of "Folkfield City" as something to which Journeyers could offer some answer.

Again, examples of specific action are seldom forthcoming; these utterances typically segue effortlessly to the familiar phrases. "In this way, we will be a church of influence, a large church, the church where people are connecting with God all the time" – which in any case *are* the objectives to which the leaders refer, both specifically *and* generally – encapsulating the futility of obtaining any easy insight here.

The executive pastor, however, does pronounce a narrative of personal ambition for the church. He wants to be

right at the centre of that... I'm not saying at the top of the pile, but I want to be right at the heart of everything, I want to be part of making that happen, I want to see *my* friends and family here in church, and a place where other people can bring theirs in. I just want – you

know, it's about building the Kingdom you know, and seeing people *added* to the Kingdom of God.

The sense of this ambition became more pronounced in our conversations as time went on. He says that Pastor Roy had explicated his plans for a leadership succession when he retired, perhaps within ten years. The executive pastor has been tipped to take over, and he is clearly advancing his own thinking for the church moving into the future. And a considerable portion of this thinking communicates something of the “local business model” inferred above.

Remarks like “reaching into the culture of the city” speak of some general need among the leadership to substantiate for the *organisation* the “relevance” that is routinely invoked for the *religion* they advance. (Recall though that neocharismatic members, perhaps especially in Journeyers, never used the *word* “religion” in reference to their own activities.) One could speculate at will what precisely is the sense of “culture” implied here of “the city” that the church wants to connect with, or be known to; but in any case, that would mean going beyond what is understood by “relevance” in this context: and this I did not have cause to complicate beyond the actions observed of Journeyers’ corporate planners as they set up shop at The Place. I will move then to an account of this.

A church seeking growth among the mainstream of Western society – as Journeyers does – would be expected to construct an ideology that conforms to the doctrines of the dominant economic paradigm. Any socialistic impulses in the church’s institutional programmes, for example, would reckon with their broader public profile to some extent. Both the description already given of Journeyers’ congregational programme, and the popular theological critiques that follow neocharismatic and megachurch movements assert this more or less explicitly. At its most forceful this assertion begets judgement about institutionalised attitudes to money, commonly voiced by those suspicious of any church of the growth-focussed variety: especially of Journeyers and Hillsong, then, which practically open the worship service with a direct appeal for cash. When it comes to obtaining revenue from members, Journeyers’ pastoral discourses attempt to consolidate a central theme: How to “manage one’s finances” in the context of a life lived in and for the church. Journeyers’ acquisition of The Place in 2010, however, enabled an additional, secular source of revenue: from “conference room” hire.

This is an income that obviously does not demand any biblical justification before its clients. Hire of The Place to local organisations for their own purposes is a form of “non-primary purpose” trading for Journeyers Church under charity and tax law; at the time of my

visitations with the group, income from the business had grown to about £50,000 a year. This is not enough revenue for The Place to require incorporation as a separate trading subsidiary, and thus all the revenue from the The Place – free from any corporation tax – is money for the church. Legal requirements being satisfied, though, promotion of The Place as a local business requires some strategic moral decision-making by the church leadership. “The Place” is *not* “Journeymen Church,” leaders are keen to emphasise, but it does exist to advance it financially. The leadership is morally bound to make known this purpose for The Place. But at the same time, the church recognises that its operation of a successful local business – one whose “product,” moreover, serves the business of other organisations – is an opportunity to promote Journeymen in the secular local realm. Journeymen, in this way, can be a participant in the local economy, not just another religious organisation.

The pastors – particularly the young executive pastor, who was to be the primary “public face” for The Place in its local promotion – understands that the secular business and non-profit sectors share expectations for what a local institutional service body should provide the social socio-economic realm. Responding to this, the acquisition and development of The Place as a business was, it seems, pre-formulated as itself an expression of the leaders’ re-conceptualising of “the local church.” To them, warehouse and multi-roomed premises could be made more than a circumstance of contemporary large church organisation, which of course does not possess the buildings erected for the purpose in former times. The Place connects the church to the real conditions of the local domain on terms they – Journeymen – are comfortable with. In their efforts with The Place, both as a local business and as a headquarters for neocharismatic activity, the church was to acknowledge the secular local economy and its expectations for what any modern, socially-conscious private organisation should provide, “Christian” or not.

Before the building’s procurement The Place was envisaged as an asset for revenue generation for the church. This was not a novel organisation in Folkfield. City Life Church, to be discussed in the next chapter, has been marketing its city centre premises to local companies for several years already as “conference facilities” for hire. I myself, during an unsatisfying year-long stint working for a local insurance company, attended a staff training event in CLC’s worship hall several years ago; I had come and gone that day with no idea that the premises was the headquarters to one of Folkfield’s largest evangelical Christian groups, such was the professionalism of their operation, not to mention the pastel neutrality of the building and its interiors. Journeymen, then, is merely following a very modern, but already well-tested economic organisational model for the large local church.

Any newly-founded Christian congregation, not old enough to have inherited a premises from congregational forbears, desires its own “home.” Realising this ambition is not dependent upon establishing a subsequent “working” premises, though – it is the income from congregational tithing that determines the point at which a church can move from its rented Sunday accommodation (for example a school hall, or a hotel suite, or even a cinema as in one case I came across) to a building over which it has its own control.

The size and type of the building procured, however, is a pretty reliable indicator of the leadership’s expectations or pretensions. A premises acquired that can host many more people than the congregation currently numbers suggests something about the degree of “prophetic insight” at work among its leaders and core membership. From this reason alone then it can be adduced that contemporary church leaders’ common public refrain upon moving – “We’ve outgrown our old premises!” – is not to be taken at face value. There is, naturally, an indispensable prophetic edge to such a significant event in the life of a charismatic church which pretends to an “early church” pattern of congregational growth – from house, to hall, to “All the nations.” Money is identified with God’s “blessing” for *this* church and its aims, which is thence inferred as a sign of imminent growth and advancement.

Of course, the intensity of this prophetic interpretation is not the same across churches, but depends upon many factors, all specific to a given church, its history, and its imagined future. For example, a Charismatic group in Essex whose members number several of my own family itself recently moved to its own fully-leased premises, a former church building. This congregation, still no more than forty strong, had been renting its worship space for *thirty years*; its recent move was thence narrated, in the local press, as a well-earned and well-suffered reward for local Christian service: Witness this long-established, respected local church that has “finally found” its own home after thirty years serving a city and a loyal congregation. But theirs was never envisaged as a narrative of “growth” in the exponential sense. Journeymen, by contrast, planned from the start for “massive growth” and “awesome” spectacle. Subsequently, the institutional “vision” here had to be incommensurable with reliance on external providers, for premises as for anything else.

The “prophetic” discourse in any case then, is merely an underlying rationality: the taken-for-granted possession of supernatural blessing and divine encouragement for one’s church, regardless of any other details – for local programs, for example. But this in turn satisfies the logic by which a church and its leadership *can* embark upon whatever institutional strategies it sees fit to embark upon, including those driven by the most profane economic logics, and developing the core discourse of the church accordingly. This discourse

may then be critiqued as “bad theology,” “not biblical” or otherwise “worrisome” by its (local) religious peers, always “traditionalists” by definition on this account. But as far as the “awesome,” “innovative” church is concerned, its divine mandate was self-evident before it even launched, and on precisely the same prophetic rationality that sustains New Testament churches of far more modest ambition.

The “official opening” of The Place, in 2011, was circulated in local press releases by the lead and executive pastors, as notice of this Folkfield church’s “new venue,” done to publicise a new facilities for business conferencing. This comprised some interesting public communications as the pastors naturally were seeking to market Journeyers Church alongside their commercial product. Accordingly, the “open day” at The Place was not a business-only affair, but included “a host of fun activities for all the family, from The Place Giant Scalextric Challenge and an F1 Simulator to a pamper room with free massage for all” (Folkfield Evening News). I was not present at the event, so cannot comment from observation. However, conversations with the The Place’s subsequently appointed “Centre Manager”, Claire, indicate that the leaders have no particular policy on promoting the church through The Place. She claims that she and other the managers on site never *offer* to reveal The Place’s erstwhile identity to paying clients; but that there is no need to do so – for the topic routinely arises without prompting. Clients and companies – “guests,” as they are called by Church members in their Centre Manager guises – were mostly brought to The Place by word of mouth in these earlier days (the business was being run by Christian church leaders, not professional marketeers). Secular clients’ curiosity on arrival, over the building, its unadorned facilities and its sparse and personal staff, easily induce conversations about its origins, says Claire. Friendly and softly-spoken, and employed several days a week as manager, receptionist, website editor, greeter and coffee-maker all in one for The Place’s slowly-accumulating client base, she gladly reveals “It’s actually a church on Sunday” to the surprise and, she likes to say, the positive intrigue of guests.

Claire is no evangelist, but a hard-working clerk who resigned her old job when the pastors offered her a paid role at The Place. She took the job for no reason other than that she felt she would be advancing the church and the gospel by doing so, on much the same terms I had become familiar with from the lead pastors themselves. Providing “service” to people who needed it, politely, graciously, non-judgementally (that is to say, there were no

publicised conditions on the kind of “guests” accepted³⁹⁾ is, for Claire, to demonstrate without reproach the kind of Christians they are, and the kind of church they advance to the world. For her, every opportunity to serve them is to demonstrate Christ’s love, and every chance to share The Place’s full story with them is evidence of God’s favour over the enterprise.

The leaders are keenly aware of the institutional social capital to be earned by promoting The Place locally. The church’s leaders are careful to emphasise the provision that The Place’s facilities offers to all “groups” in Folkfield – not just those of the private sector. The local Christian press had earlier reported that:

Folkfield church Journeyers is opening the doors of a former retail warehouse which it has transformed into a church facility and conference centre – for use by local businesses and organisations.

With several bookings already under its belt, The Place, on R— Road, promises to become a key conference and meeting venue for the region and prospective hirers can look around at an open day with a difference on April 14.

The Place was officially opened in January and is now available for hire. Thursday April 14 has been named as an open day where business and community leaders, people involved in charity and voluntary sectors and anyone else interested in taking a look, can visit The Place to see the facilities and spaces available for hire.

“Senior Minister” Pastor Roy spoke up then their creation of “flexible space that we believe will become a real asset to our city,” and that they were “looking forward to hosting a huge variety of events” there. The mainstream local press, too, received notice from the church of its launch, reporting its account similarly – but with noticeably less of an outright endorsement:

People have had their first look around a former warehouse which has been developed for use by community groups and business in Folkfield by members of a church.

The Journeyers Church used to hold its services in the R— hotel, but has renovated the former F— Warehouse, on R— Road [...] to create a new venue known as The Place which can hold up to 500 people.

³⁹⁾ This was her intimation only, of course. One could only wonder what would be their reaction if, say, Norwich Gay Pride sought to book a conference room at The Place.

The Place, which was developed by the church as somewhere large to host its Sunday services, is made up of a series of flexible spaces and can be used as a venue for other groups and businesses [...]

P— B—, centre manager, said in addition to making something that worked for the members of the church they also wanted to create somewhere that would work for most businesses, charities and community organisations.

The spokesman identified as “centre manager” was actually Journeyers’ executive pastor, who commented that “We feel we’re offering something a little bit different and appreciate how people have responded. It was a good day.” The *quality* of public response was evidently of significant concern to The Place’s designers; even though for them there was in principle no religious rationalisation to explicitly declare upon the church’s “business” enterprise. Had there been of course – and, in fact, to the extent that there was in conversations, because I pressed it – it would, I assumed, have arisen from the fact of there being a profit-making enterprise “attached” to a church. Cash revenue for Journeyers the church (in law, the “charitable company”) is The Place’s *raison d’être*, of course, even though the pastors express a willingness to lease facilities to local charities free of charge, and I believe do so on occasion.

In respect of that, I had wondered about the guard that the church may find it necessary to erect *against* pro bono use of the premises, by prospective clients who perhaps would recognise in Journeyers the local Christian church as physical “shelter,” for whatever purpose. This, to my knowledge, has not been a problem. Aside from the fact of the premises’ obscure outer city location, I might assume this to be due to the existing nature of Journeyers’ status as a Christian group – as existed prior to its acquisition of a permanent physical premises, at which point, of course, a weekly-meeting apostolic congregation would be transformed into something for which the appellation “local church” was greatly substantiated.

As it turned out, the executive pastor is quite clear that Journeyers’ organisational identity is not even to be misconstrued as denoting some kind of welfare provider in the usual sense:

We’re not about to become a local charity instead of a local church. There’s a difference, you know. We’re a community of people, engaged, and we want to help and support, but we are

not, you know, a homeless shelter. We might *operate* a homeless shelter, but we are not a homeless shelter.

This comment angered a local Anglican vicar to whom I later spoke – no traditionalist herself, but a Fresh Expressions “pioneer priest”⁴⁰ – who retorted to me of Journeyers, “Yes, well, the thing is, they *are* a charity, aren’t they?” The point is well taken. But I believe it ultimately only to re-emphasise the conflict in public understanding running through “charity,” through to “Christian charity,” through to “the local church,” that inevitably *will* arise as neocharismatic groups – legally incorporated on the same “charitable” definitional basis as has stood for religion in Britain for several centuries – institute the kinds of social and economic practices that are seen and defended here.

Journeyers’ executive pastor’s pointed distinction between “operating” a homeless shelter and “becoming” a homeless shelter is interesting. It is further evidence, along with The Place itself, that a concept of atomistic “service” is in the process of being publicly engaged in Journeyers’ conceptualising of the neocharismatic church body. “Public service,” as “charitable” service, becomes private service – transcribed to the neoliberal language of “enterprise.” Financial profit from a “business arm” like The Place is approved because the profits’ destination *is* the church (Journeyers). Logically all that *could* ever need defending, then, is the church itself and its societal benefits. But the entity is divine in its participants’ eyes; more than that, its leaders solemnly imply it to be a more legitimate expression of God’s vision for the human world than anything (say) the Church of England has ever constructed. The church-as-cultural-entity more than justifies its own existence in the eyes of its leaders and members: anything beyond *that* is beyond the point.

Nonetheless, a conceptual frame of reference among the church’s leadership for its activities outside of religious worship, teaching, and conversion – in short all those things that came not under “Journeyers” but under “The Place” – cannot be pretermitted, because, after all, there is a secular local public to present to, and communicate with. It is worth noting here, as well, that most of what follows really is the discursive concern of the leadership only. Time and again, I have asked regular members what they know of The Place; time and again, they recognise the concept as something beyond the building in which we were stood, but can offer up only the bare outlines of the pastors’ “full” account. Frequently they profess “not to know much about it,” or to not really being “involved in that” – the understanding here,

⁴⁰ See www.freshexpressions.org.uk.

however, being that there is so much *to* be involved in in “the life of the church,” and it was all to the same cause. Several have commented, only slightly more informedly, that “I know it’s a social enterprise.” This lack of connect with The Place beyond the physical church event space is not surprising, however. The Place and its business is tied up with Journeyers’ legal status as a charitable company: in short – and while much of the building’s internal renovation in preparation for its business trading is accomplished with the voluntary labour of the congregation – there is simply no particular reason for members of the church to possess knowledge about it. For they are not enfranchised of decision-making power on any matters concerning the institution they serve and finance: all that is “agreed upon” is the grand vision, articulated among members on the vaguest but most satisfactory religious terms.

Further warrant is laid bare in the pastors’ exposition of the business. The Place’s website indeed describes it as a “Social Enterprise Project”; a

facility that provides space to businesses, community groups and organisations for training, conferences, seminars workshops [*sic*], presentations, launches, exhibitions and more. Our clients include local councils, local business from SMEs to large national and multi-national corporations, local and national charities and third sector organisations etc.

Social Enterprise U.K. states that the use of the term “social enterprise” by charities to designate their commercial trading interests is “common as increasing numbers of charities are moving away from traditional models of fundraising and becoming more businesslike in order to ensure their sustainability.”⁴¹ The government has recognised this too, of course, and in recent years has altered the legislation in order to allow charities to operate trading subsidiaries on the condition that the revenues are reinvested accordingly, i.e. into the pursuit of the groups’ charitable aims and objectives; those objectives have been already clarified upon their incorporation as charities in the first place.

To deduce then that conversionist evangelical churches too are “becoming more businesslike in order to ensure their sustainability” ought logically to prompt some inquiry into the actual nature of their “charitable” works. As mentioned, these are beyond any legal dispute as charity definitions stand. The only test of public legitimacy facing the Christian church – *any* Christian church basically recognised as one – is a test for “public benefit,”

⁴¹ <http://socialenterprise.org.uk/about/about-social-enterprise/FAQs#legal>.

which actually resolves to the issue of the availability of public access to its (long pre-defined) “charitable” services.

For Journeyers, of course, this is satisfied by its open services and events, “advancing religion” and “relieving hardship”: the standard “primary objectives” of the religion-based charity. To effect any change in the latter, then, would be to review the State’s own fundamental definition and sanction for “religion” and its “advancement,” unchanged in common law for several centuries; these are not intended for state review any time soon either, as their unchanged enshrinement in the Charities Act 2006 most recently confirmed. It is the intended the role of legislation covering organised charity to *regulate* institutions – in their financial accounting, centrally; not, that is, to question underlying definitions of “public charity.”

The characterisation of The Place as a “social enterprise” was first offered to me by the executive pastor. The extensive explanation of the “social enterprise” label and its employment that I expected to follow, however, did not. Instead, he and the other pastors have offered what I have come to understand is simply the minimum account *required* of a charitable organisation seeking to maximise its income through non-primary trade. This account is minimal indeed: the legal sanction for such trading by a charity stands regardless, and Journeyers satisfies its requirements without issue. What really arises here, then, is the church leadership’s self-authored rationale for employing the discourse of “social enterprise” at all, given that there in fact exists *no formal requirement for it*. The Charity Commission’s published guidelines on charity trading, for example, do not mention the words “social” or “enterprise” once;⁴² clearly, there has been no obligation to self-describe and *publicise* The Place on these terms.

When pressing the executive pastor on the issue, his responses are more generous than perhaps I would have expected. He is clear enough on the “moral” case:

For *us*, in the simplest sense this [The Place] is a social enterprise because first and foremost it’s going to generate income for our church. Which is not *really* to be considered as a profit because we’re a charitable company, do you know what I mean, so anything that it generates is going to be instantly reinvested in what *we* do in the community: so that *makes* it a social enterprise – *instantly...*

⁴² See *Trustees trading and tax: How charities may lawfully trade*, published 1st April 2007.

These sentiments, again, merely illustrate the deeply ingrained public understanding of “church” as “charity,” just as readily present to conversionist neocharismatics. Of course though, this does not explain their choice of such a discourse. Definitions alone again refer ultimately to more advanced discussion about whether Journeyers’ activities – “what *we* do in the community,” as I would take it from the pastor here – *should* stand up, on a normative moral-philosophical argument, as “publically beneficial” actions – and of course justified of their legal recognition and public subsidy.

However, he does not gloss over the subject of “choice of discourse” as political strategy; in fact, openly supplementing the moral case *with it*:

But then also, choosing to operate in—to use the *nomenclature* of a Social Enterprise, it gives you a point of engagement to other people, if that makes sense. Like, if I just said, “Oh, this is our church” and just let [rent] it [The Place] out, that’s a different thing to me saying, you know, we operate a Social Enterprise. So in terms of our community engagement, it makes a lot more sense.

Here then is a more explicit acknowledgement of their strategy, but not for disguising anything about the kind of church Journeyers was, much less the “religion” it seeks to advance. Reflecting my own prejudices, I initially assumed here to have revealed certain manoeuvres by the leadership. That is not an accurate interpretation of their intentions, in fact.

The concern of the leadership is maintaining the commercial appeal of the building as a highly modern, technological facility despite it being owned and operated by “a church”: which to them, under such conditions, has been rendered a vexatious term by denominational history, and potentially damaging to what are commercial objectives. And because, at the same time, they *are* a church: as far as they are concerned, a most “relevant” one, not an improvement on the historic institution, not a modern “updating” of it, but the revolutionary entity from the New Testament that has never *been* realised until now. They have no desire to underplay Journeyers Church in their advancement of The Place; they are “not ashamed,” as Eric said. The Place (the business) has a specific function, but its function is a legitimate expression of “the thing that it is we’re trying to build here” – to quote one of the pastors from quite another context of discussion, but evidencing the very same ideological point: That the whole of their endeavours is far greater – and more meaningful – than any of its parts.

This is to be publically communicated *somehow*, then. Speaking as Journeyers, they write that “The Place is our brand that helps our clients realise that when they hire a room her [sic] it is nothing like hiring a traditional church hall.” This claim is an expression of the kind seen in the quote above: the leaders ruefully tackling the outdated connotations of “church,” while believing themselves to be advancing to public knowledge the “true” institution, one perfectly adept at contributing to the modern business economy as much as the social one.

More interesting, then, is the discourse enjoined to this, one introduced by the church’s leadership to articulate Journeyers’ *own* interest in the facilities afforded by The Place. This constitutes the *positive* characterisation of “the church” – and “the local church” – on their part, reimagined as a place of creative industry and professional skill among members of an “organisation”: not explicitly a “church” here, then, but a company of local socio-economic provision.

On the one hand, in their public guise as managers of a conference premises the pastors explain that “[w]hen developing a place for us to use for our Sunday events, we wanted to make sure that the spaces were fully utilised during the week as well.” Consequently then, goes this account, they designed the “flexible spaces” that could be hired out: The warehouse was acquired for worship services (“Sunday events” as they preferred it, not so inaccurately) and “The Place” was developed as a subsidiary for the benefit of the local commercial realm.

On the other hand, though, the managers (pastors) have stated that,

[w]e use the facility as an opportunity to help people gain and develop skills for work and gain experience in a professional environment. We are passionate about doing our bit to help tackle youth unemployment.

Included in this statement, in fact, is a direct reference to the church service (and church events) – or more precisely, to everything I have witnessed taking place before the service, during it, and after that was *not* worship ritual: young people, preparing the physical premises, directing traffic, chaperoning visitors, operating machinery, performing a live music show, educating children, preparing food and drinks. In short, everything that constitutes the running of the church event is considered “skills for work,” and the environment of the church event itself is claimed a “professional” one by virtue of these activities. It is also, of course, a reflection of the “professionalism” directly requested of Team members by their leaders when fulfilling their service roles. This is evidently very

effective. On one occasion I have been present in the gents' toilets pre-service as three Team members arrive to clean them, going about the role with a sense of purpose (and humour) not commonly observed of such a task. What is understood by them, when questioned, are the *reasons* for ensuring clean and well-sanitised facilities: They explain that it is something people expected, and *should* expect (i.e. of a serious public organisation); but it also *communicates* to anyone using these toilets the foundational "qualities" of *Journeymen*. On any conventional reading these "qualities" have nothing to do with the religious identity of the church. And in fact they are almost never invoked in talk as specifically "Christian" qualities besides. In short, they are expressly non-specific of any belief system: they are "our principles," the outcomes of our "culture points," "the things that define us." These objects are associated with "being motivated by the cause of Christ," "being like Christ" and so on; the basic ease of such association reveals nothing so much as a strategy in language.

The reference to "tackling youth unemployment" is an extension of this; another rhetorical refrain for raising the institutional social capital they covet. During my time with the group there has been one young member actually employed, part-time, through a youth training scheme in partnership with the local council; but this post was created as temporary, and not immediately to be renewed with another. It appears, in fact, to be an arrangement borne of compassion from the leaders over the personal circumstances of the young man in question. This emerged during the period of "phase two" construction at The Place, when the church began to erect the internal partitions that would create the smaller rooms at the rear end of the unit, to be rented out as smaller meeting and conference rooms. I would arrive at The Place during the week to find the young man – whom I take to have minor learning difficulties – engaged in all manner of general caretakers' tasks, from sweeping the forecourt, to painting the walls, to clearing mounds of gravel outside the entrance that had accumulated prior to their moving in. He would proudly report to me his daily seven a.m. arrival at The Place; upon my reaction to this, he would follow up with more detail of his commitment: revealing that he lived some two miles away, and would walk it every morning, and that he usually worked through until nightfall doing whatever the managers asked. His efforts were his own contribution to the building works, and he clearly felt tremendous pride in them. As a member of the church, he could articulate well enough the "Vision," occasionally delivering the rote-learned statements about "Jesus's church" and "the kingdom of god" that had become so familiar.

Privately, I have found myself quite uncomfortable with these conditions, though the young man's enthusiasm for his role in "building the church" cannot be damped. It turned

out that he has been travelling to the church and working on the building and grounds voluntarily for some time, and the pastors arranged the partial hours training scheme as a result of his commitment. He has also explained to me that he, his mother and sibling were expelled from their previous church, for unsure reasons, but evidently relating to a poor social regard held for the family by the church's pastors. His inexhaustable regard for his new church home – Journeyers – on account of the welcome extended to him and his mother is a strong response to that experience.

The conceptualisation here of “church” as an institution for personal development is, then, often quite overtly phrased in terms of its *economic* value to individuals and to society. These are ultimately matters of terminology to an important degree – strategically for the church, that is. The promotion of The Place as “an opportunity to help people gain and develop skills” is a commercial promotion of the church but was obviously a subtle one, too; a basically experimental one from the perspective of its leaders – not only in regard to the “ecclesial” model being fashioned here, but also on account of the sheer inexperience of the young associate pastors, launching their own careers in contemporary “Christian leadership” with an institutional model of largely their own design. They are plainly unsure of what exactly is to come of it down the line. One form of insurance in this regard is their acknowledgement of *other* churches of similar natures – the same profession pursued in a different “firm.”

The nature of their inexperience is interesting to observe in other regards – in particular, how the young leaders understand their *worldly* roles as pioneers of what is, to my eyes, a most unusual enterprise altogether. The pastors’ understanding of the church’s legal identity and structures, and the application of these in the daily running of The Place is generally understated, and substantive only to the extent that the practicalities of managing a company require such knowledge. They are, in other words, all “learning on the job.” “We’re not as professional as we might look,” remarked one of the pastors; “but we’re getting more and more *strategic* all the time.”

This altogether communicates a subtle but pervasive resistance to forcing a New Testament “ministry model” into the *discursive* domain of any public (i.e. secular) rationality, regardless of the concrete activities going on that are quite obviously not religiously-sourced. Anything taking place that cannot be claimed to be God-approved and God-led – *on the terms explicated in Pastor Roy’s “vision”* – is naturally problematic, and perhaps this suffices to explain the overall sparseness of activity to be observed at The Place most of the days I have spent there; but it also explains the general disinclination of the church’s leaders to extend

their congregational resources to external domains: wary, as the executive pastor has intimated, to submit to the conditions of external actors whose “goals” are not *Journeyers*’ “goals.” Constrained to the environment of The Place, at least, this could never be of issue, could never threaten their ideological well-being. A volunteer from the church preparing the catering for a conference client, for example, would always be an example of *Journeyers* doing what it did, to “our own design and of our own intention,” as they liked to put it.

Culture 2: from “Structures” to “LoveFolkfield”

[As an institution], there’s those three things I told you on Sunday that came rattling off my tongue. ‘Create culture’—no, um, ‘influence culture,’ ‘build future,’ and there’s a third one... I can’t... I’ll probably have to have a look on my phone. But these things are an outward expression of, I guess, what happens and what you see in a service. Because if you’re looking at a service and you’re going, ‘How are we reaching a community?’, that would be one of the expressions, but it’s far broader than that.

How do you ‘influence culture,’ how do you ‘build future,’ how do you *do* all that? Language. If you look at biology, a *culture*, in a crucible or something like that, depending on what the temperature is, the kind of atmosphere, that culture will grow or it will die off. And what we see about creating that atmosphere, is the kinds of things we do in the service. So that atmosphere, you’ll see it in the lights, you’ll see it in the videos, you’ll see it in the guys with the yellow t-shirts. We’re very specific about what we do, very *intentional*...

This statement of Archie’s – a (voluntary) senior “assistant pastor,” originally from South Africa, who has been with *Journeyers* since its time under Dr. George – is highly representative of the accounts offered by leaders and long-term members alike. This included, as seen here, the quite frequent fudging of rhetorical devices that are elsewhere enshrined in the church’s official communications and literature: later in the conversation, Archie remarked that he was “gonna get shot” for forgetting *Journeyers*’ five “Culture Points” in our interview.⁴³

What is more generally interesting about such reports is the apparent *breadth* of objects that such remarks and phrases as these are intended to cover – to explain, to warrant, to rationalise. The primary lexical object “*Journeyers* Church” is referentially diffused in

⁴³ These were listed in official communications as “Motivated by the cause of Christ,” “Servanthood,” “Generosity,” “Learning to Flow Together,” and “The Pursuit of Excellence.”

senior members' talk to prescribe any number of practical, moral, social, even economic imperatives: from "community service," to ordering one's private life, to evolving the social ethic of an organised Culture, to entrepreneurial business modelling: all these are warranted as real artifacts of Journeyers' unique industry and organisation.

In other words, they are enthusiastically presented as *factual* testimonies of the church's ongoing achievements. It is hardly to come as a surprise if the self-notified empirical achievements of a church organisation turn out to be largely ethereal by objective standards, given their "internal" nature – that is, in the heads of their members. This would seem especially true, then, of nondenominational charismatic domains, given their distinctive emphasis on "human-divine" relations – and a postulated notion of human amelioration that is, in an important respect, impossible to verify. The case account so far, though, has presented evidence of Journeyers' intention to contradict such a presumption – a presumption that, as mentioned earlier, draws upon knowledge of charismatic Christian cohorts sourced almost exclusively in "religious" histories. Journeyers' witnessable social and economic industry through the first decade of Pastor Roy's "renaissance church" vision is indeed striking. This combines in ethnographic observation with the heavily pronounced Culture narrative. What makes their institutional discourse curious, then, after one has spent enough time looking over the group's actual, recordable activities, *is* the very empirical nature of the evidence obtainable for its support. I must confess that I was, for some time, so intrigued by the wholly unexpected dynamic spectacle of the church's internal operations – so much of which was basically rhetorically constituted – that I too have often neglected this aspect.

At a general level, of course, the implicit function of such talk as Archie's above is the normative moral incorporation of Journeyers as a social institution. After all, everyone I have spoken with on these terms is by definition a sufficiently indoctrinated core member of the group. In turn, such accounts typically function also as stories about a respondent's own membership, and (in effect) a justification of it; this further defines a concerted and seemingly well-orchestrated effort to conceptualise "Journeyers Church" in terms plainly unfamiliar to the non-Christian outsider. It is far from incidental, that is, that members are so apt at narrating the events of their own induction into the church, as well as the details of their spiritual conversion experience (when the latter coincides with the former). For most neochristianic members, those *are* the principal empirical referents for everything here discussed; and thus are the most real to them, and the most profound, and for many also the most orienting of a social outlook more generally – conditioned in turn, of course, by the ideas absorbed in church.

As a result, the moral warrant for Journeyers as a “public actor” cannot really be articulated with reference to non-members – the local population – in anything but the most superficial terms: not just negatively in the sense that empirical accounts of the church’s “impact in the city” are sparse, but because members, for the most part, warrant of themselves – self-consciously *as* “the church” – little more than a prospective claim as a structured agency for deeply personal transformation.

The nature or the “content” of this transformation is so much more than an experience of internal conversion, but is constituted far more “securely” in one’s organised, structured, continuous and *observable* participation in Journeyers Church – specifically in its “servant” Teams, as discussed. If the post-denominational local church – as a *community of believers* – is “God’s plan for mankind,” the community of Journeyers must be held to be “God’s plan for Folkfield.” It follows logically from this that members theorise the church in the most encompassing terms, as indeed they do. It follows also that the delineation of members’ identities as *Journeyers* Christians is something that could not be left to chance, but requires socially directive procedures to ensure its durability.

In members’ talk, this mean articulating Journeyers as an institutional agency (an “ecclesiological” one, but *more* than that as it suited) for whatsoever common human pursuits and services – “public” or “private” – happen to be rhetorically identified for attention in and to the life of this community – in and to “the life of our church,” idiomatically speaking. As empirical objects, meanwhile, these human pursuits and services number whatever could be understood as observable practical outcomes, as things gained and “differences made” to local people. But their identity depends on the rhetorical account in the first instance. The fact is that for Journeyers, local people – the local polity – feature very little in its discourse beyond superficial allusions to “reaching communities”; in turn, they feature little in the church’s practical strategies.

Any such “outcomes” are selected for rhetorical emphasis, in church discourse, with much the same “pragmatic” imperative as has been articulated earlier in regard to the group’s selected legal identity – serving, that is, not the needs of any group or population, but the personal aims of the church’s architects. Pastor Roy has of course made this clear enough with his willingness to disband the existing congregation of Dr. George’s church and “grow” his own. Just like the privileging of particular biblical doctrines, then, the identity of real human outcomes is determined by the church’s leaders and senior members – quite inextricably indeed, for everything I am discussing here has taken place within the social institution that is lived out in the physical building on a Sunday, in mid-week small groups, in

other social gatherings. What identifies each of these physical domains is their being co-extensive with “the life of our church.” That is now revealed in this analysis as the indexical name for any conceivable social situation in which the authoritative discourse of the church leadership is to preside over actions and conversation.

This depends on certain members – or at least certain kinds of member – being actually present in any such situation. The leadership refers to these procedures under the generally term of “accountability.” This is judged so important to the institution of Journeyers that it is codified via one of the church’s five “Culture Points,” as “Learning to Flow Together.” This is the only one of the church’s five Points (see note 21) to clearly explicate a *social* norm. It prescribes “submission to one another,” “learning to flow together rhythmically and easily,” “flowing together in the fear of God... and making a conscious effort to ‘get on with others’ and build a dynamic team that is so strong that nothing will pull it down.” It is effectively, then, “Shepherding” in a horizontal form. Except unlike the (vertical) “Shepherding” practices instituted in the earliest British neocharismatic churches, for Journeyers procedures of “accountability” are inevitably embedded in any number of social situations that are pre-ordained with little overt “religious” or “spiritualistic” character: *including*, crucially, in the physical environment of the Place – where, as described, so many regularly occurring activities are anything but ritualistic in the traditional religious sense.

For a case-based investigation of Journeyers as a “public institution” this merely re-confirms a necessary emphasis on the role of internal social controls *over* that of external group opportunities: not because opportunities for the institutional public advancement of the church are not forthcoming from external sources, but rather because any social situation in which (by definition) the conversionistic aims of the church are to be served or advanced have to be accessible to the leadership through necessarily more concrete channels, plainly manifesting a prosaic account of social power. On the occasions, for example, when Pastor Roy has proclaimed – typically from the stage – that “We don’t want *this...* in the life of our church,” it is usually an explicitly corrective action, an obligated response to some empirical transgression picked up (perhaps only during the previous week) by himself or by another leader. For instance, one monologue concerned core members’ comments on social media. Pastor Roy was compelled to instruct the congregation that *any* “negative tone” in personal “status updates” on Facebook was damaging to (“Christ’s”) church. A members’ recent early morning status update that they “can’t be bothered today...” was seized upon by the lead pastor as an example of the kind of “communication” in the world outside the church that

real Christians had to avoid. Another concerned casual disparagement of some celebrity figure; again, this was declared poisonous both to the public image of individual Christian character⁴⁴ and to its private self-understanding by the member. The “teaching point” here (this discussion, as all others, was the content of a regular Sunday sermon) was not biblically referential in any respect. The *message*, rather – explicated only towards the end of the address – was a directive to, at all costs, keep such negative thoughts to oneself. It was an exclusively social dictum: as easily apprehended as any spoken order could be, and understood by its receivers there with no detectable objection.

The mere fact that such directives resonate so strongly among those members that have been sufficiently embedded in the social body of the church naturally calls up more questions about the social structures consciously instituted by leaders for individual-level “development.” The social fact of an individual’s “membership” of Journeyers is disputed by some leaders at the same time that it is, often with some enthusiasm, explained by others. Ultimately this dependd on the line of questioning being advanced: and the accounts received have, in any case, been demonstrative of the rhetorical discourse favoured by the respondent. The executive pastor frustratedly called out my use of the term “member” at one point, correcting that “We don’t want *members*, we want followers of Jesus.” Meanwhile, another assistant pastor explains that “we have structures” in place for encouraging the right “growth” among newcomers. He begins his account, indeed, with the functionality of the worship service event:

If you’ve got somebody that comes in from another church, they’ve got another kind— they’ve got a different culture, a different kind of *dialect*, if you like, a [different kind of] *expression* of what a day-to-day Christian life might be, and there might be a lot of *religious stuff* happening in there. We won’t have particular things in our service, because we’re wanting to reach out to people. [For example,] we won’t have a microphone up front allowing just anyone to talk, because number one, what are they gonna say, and number two, where are they coming from: can we trust them? We’ve a very focussed expression.

In the connect groups there’s a lot more freedom there to chat, make one on one connections, just chat with the people, there’s freedom there to express a faith in those contexts. But when you’re saying ‘reach people,’ we do that in the service. But we don’t *only* do that in the service. We’ve got various charities – LoveFolkfield, out of that we reach out to

⁴⁴ It was understood by Pastor Roy that Facebook profiles easily expressed the Christian identity of the profile-holder; this itself, of course, revealed the extent of cultural-technological knowledge acquired by the neocharismatic pastor.

old age people, homeless, prisoners. We've got a business arm in the Place. What is the Place? It's excellence. It's generosity...

Archie's resort at the end of this passage to a repetition of the church's "Culture Points" is significant as to its position in the statement, which mirrors the situation that obtained in general discourse. Journeyers' external interests and organisations – its social provisions outside the explicitly religious realm – are typically invoked as the explanans, where the church's institutional self – articulated in the prominently-placed series of "Culture Points" – stands as the explanandum. It *could*, of course, be turned the other way round: That is to say, the church could employ the concepts of "generosity," "excellence" and "servanthood" to explain its more empirically-attestable public activities; rather than – as it does – invoking the latter's (concrete) existence to explicate the abstract categories with which it leads its own public profile.

To do it the former *alternative* way, however, would necessitate a significantly alternate position to be taken by Journeyers as a corporate commercial entity. Now it will be recalled from the previous section that an inspection of the church's commercial profile as (so to speak) its own profit-making subsidiary – as "The Place, a Social Enterprise for Folkfield" – reveals, through interviews with leaders, that much practical and rhetorical strategising there has concerned ways in which they should disguise "Journeyers Church" from public account. Pretty rational "pragmatic" reasons have been offered for this by the church's leaders: overtly commercial ones, but, I suggested, deeper ones too, evidencing interesting shifts in (corporate) Christian self-identification, as conversionist religious actors expand an economic portfolio in the local realm.

This narrative reveals a process of "compartmentalisation" upon the church (upon the charity, formally speaking) by which its "fundraising subsidiary" is separated from the self-consciously religious institution on the assumption of the pastors that potential clients would recoil from an association with "church" or "Christian" actors. From this view it is an interesting consequence that the church's leadership *nonetheless* integrates the Place and its Social Enterprise into the normative discourse for Journeyers Church. Interesting but not surprising, of course, given the fact that the "Journeyers" the object in discourse is pre-prepared for potentially any superficial association. Archie's comment above is an explicit reminder that the church's corporate discourse is in principle capacious enough to recruit any of Journeyers' institutional offspring – formally incorporated or not – to the task of advancing

its rhetorical account of the church as “reaching people,” “influencing culture” and so on; naturally indeed, for the rhetorical account is designed for this very purpose.

Archie cites “various charities” that Journeyers “has” alongside the worship service with which to “reach a community.” Restricting our gaze to the local realm,⁴⁵ the church has only one, going by the name “LoveFolkfield.” “LoveFolkfield” is not a charitable organisation, so not a “subsidiary” of Journeyers Church in any formal sense. It has a website, and a “Project Manager” in one of the Associate Pastors, but the “charity” actually exists only as a name, under which several local programmes and “initiatives,” run by church volunteers, are *publically* designated and promoted. These local initiatives comprise the total (so far) of Journeyers’ secularly social provision in Folkfield.

There are three distinct local schemes under the rhetorical aegis of “LoveFolkfield.” One is an approximately bi-monthly visitation to HMP Folkfield by five to ten of the church’s worship and music team for a charismatic service in the prison’s chapel. A dozen or so mostly older inmates regularly attend. There is certainly no evidence that Journeyers’ distinct cultural properties have made any advance on the spiritual-seekers of the prison population, whose access to Christian experience remains under the mediation of denominational chaplains, with a traditionalist Anglican at the helm. The prison also employs a Pentecostal chaplain, whose son is a member of Journeyers. I made efforts to interview him, alas to no avail.

HMP Folkfield houses about 760 category B and C prisoners, and is noted for its Elderly Prisoners unit – the only one in the country – which houses old men serving mostly life sentences. However, the prison also has two Local Discharge Units, which have been many times referred to by Journeyers’ associate pastors during exchanges on the subject of local “social outreach” by the church.⁴⁶ Sure enough, the executive pastor claims of the

⁴⁵ The church “affiliates” itself with other international missionary charities and organisations as it wishes. These efforts comprise of regular promotion of organisations – leaflets and other literature on display in The Place on Sundays – and annual grants (which seldom ran into more than the hundreds of pounds; compare for example an £1,800 grant total in 2012 to a small anti-poverty and Christian mission charity for Riga, Latvia, founded by one of Journeyers’ own members, with £9,600 given to Sunday “visiting speakers”). A more substantial result has been recently achieved through the church’s association with Compassion, an international Christian mission agency that seeks to “release [children] from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty and enable them to become responsible and fulfilled Christian adults” (see www.compassionuk.org): The pastors have told me that “about 80” individual child sponsorships had been solicited following their Sunday promotion of the charity.

⁴⁶ A subject which I have come to apprehend in leaders’ discourse as an acknowledgement of the church’s public “expectations” – as understood by Journeyers’ entrepreneurial pastors. This took

church – or at least intimates – to have received into pastoral care a number of outgoing inmates, amidst habitual references to the church’s “work with the prison.” According to LoveFolkfield’s communications, the church has provided “mentors” for inmates approaching release, their agents receiving training for this from Caring For Ex-Offenders, a small but nationally-active charity that partners with local Christian churches in order to encourage contact between outgoing offenders and “the local church community.” I have not been able to empirically verify LoveFolkfield’s claims, and in fact neither does the church. LoveFolkfield merely requests through its website that anyone who “knows someone returning to Folkfield on their release and [who] would benefit from this support” contact them to discuss the service – “them,” of course, was really Journeyers’ associate pastor, “project manager” of LoveFolkfield, as identified by the email contact provided.

There is, however, a third more recent element to Journeyers’ involvement with the prison. One of the church’s senior members has volunteered himself for work with the Shannon Trust, a secular national charity that trains volunteers in one-on-one literacy coaching with prison inmates. This development has been recent and small enough that it is not yet listed by LoveFolkfield under its “project” cohort. I suspect, however, that it may not necessarily be so in any case. The Shannon Trust activity seems to confirm something, that has not been explicitly articulated by the associate pastors (specifically the executive pastor, who compared to his colleagues, appears considerably more informed of, and personally invested in, matters concerning Journeyers’ social provision). It is that the actually substantive efforts in local social outreach – difficult, involved, time-consuming, bureaucratically-laden affairs – are in fact carried out by a very small coterie of core and senior members working of their own accord – *not* with the institutional backing of Journeyers the church or charity.

This appears to be the case specifically with Journeyers’ prison “mentoring” schemes – the exception, then, being the mobile worship service. Even here, though, the evident *necessity* of a delegatory contact between these two public institutions – the independent church and the State prison – reveals subtle complexities not only around physical access but also normative legitimacy. That is, access by the former to the latter, but legitimacy *of* the former once it moves beyond its explicitly “religious” remit of public action.

some time, ethnographically speaking, and I have sensed throughout that the leaders’ understandings, also, are in a state of continual evolution on such matters.

The organiser of the church's prison worship services is not any member of the regular worship team or the associate pastorate, but a long-time member who has long been involved with prisoner outreach in a personal capacity.⁴⁷ He, in fact, is the liaison, who has worked on behalf of his church Journeyers to secure their access to HMP Folkfield for charismatic outreach (i.e., services of worship). Obviously this programme, once underway, has been properly the work of the *church*. The other emerging social provisions (end-of-term and post-release “mentoring” and literacy coaching), however, are not so clearly the church’s work. Or rather: they could not legitimately be *described* as such until a sufficient number of Journeyers’ members could be volunteered to join those efforts. At such a time, the church itself could publically “claim” them within its own portfolio of social action.

But this then raises the question, *Why “LoveFolkfield”?* Why this institutional creation with which to collectively designate the social welfare outreach of Journeyers Church? In leaders’ accounts, there is no query to be had. LoveFolkfield is “our charity” for “serving the people of Folkfield.” As such, then, it is proffered as a separate entity. Its official profile – its website, comprised of a blog, a list of “projects,” a list of external sponsors, and an email contact – confirms this presentation. There is no mention here at all of Journeyers Church. “LoveFolkfield” has been commercially incorporated in these communications as a local volunteer army. Its website is a place for publically indexing the social provision activities of Journeyers’ young members under an alternative public guise: one indeed created for this task, exactly as it has been with The Place. Except, where the latter serves to generate finance for the formal charitable entity, LoveFolkfield is an engine for *cultural* capital.

Just as they are in their Sunday morning service roles, the agents for this capital are visually “branded”: here, in purple t-shirts bearing the “LoveFolkfield” logo; a single image on the site’s main page capturing an industrious cohort of uniformed teenage volunteers, shifting mounds of earth as part of the renovation of a local park. This image was actually

⁴⁷ This gentleman was employed as General Manager of a local Tesco supermarket. By some coincidence, the branch he managed was my local supermarket at the time I began this study. It was not until a year later, when I began regular ethnographic visits with Journeyers Church – two miles across the city – that I recognised several employees of that Tesco branch to be members of the church; including one of the well-respected voluntary assistant pastors (who had moved to Folkfield from Northern Ireland in the mid-1990s to attend Dr. George’s Bible College, around the time Journeyers Church was founded).

It was to my regret that I was not able to ascertain whether the General Manager had evangelised his existing employees *in addition* to employing his existing church friends (evidently the case with the assistant pastor just mentioned). Perhaps so, perhaps not. It is worth noting also that the branch in question was situated within Folkfield’s student district, and inevitably some of the shop’s casual employees – and Journeyers’ attenders – were students: the church’s specialist demographic, of course.

taken during a “project” summoned by a local council association, which has employed LoveFolkfield’s physical labours on several occasions since its “launch” by the church in 2011. This, then, is Journeyers’ strategy for dual gain: contracting its members for conspicuous acts of public service, whilst further enculturing the social youth body of the congregation. Of course it must be noted that any such events are more or less frequent depending only on the availability of a volunteer cohort; thus identifying the conversionist religious “body” (voluntaristically-constituted itself) with its secular social counterpart.

The two specified LoveFolkfield “projects” just discussed – summarised by the church as “Caring for ex-offenders” and “Servolution,”⁴⁸ respectively – have been empirically accounted for in my fieldwork rather arbitrarily, through inconsistent events that are entirely dependent, again, on the organisational capacities of the leadership and their core member cohorts. The church – in its “LoveFolkfield” guise – does have a few pre-scheduled engagements each year. For instance, a “Servolution” outreach is held each Easter weekend, in preparation for which the church contacts local (including council) agencies to see where they might make use of a mass of young arms and hands; similarly, during the summer, Journeyers provides a team for stewardship duties at an annual local fete held in the deprived ward of Metre Crow (the following chapter will discuss Metre Crow some more, incidentally, in respect to City Life Church’s own more advanced “presence” there). The point here, however, was that these two general “projects” do not inhere in any core operation or programme.

The third of LoveFolkfield’s “projects,” however, is a little different. This project involves the running of *Shine*, an educational programme for teenage girls developed by a group of counsellors and psychologists from Hillsong Church in Australia. *Shine* – together with a male-targeted counterpart called *Strength*⁴⁹ – is not a programme of explicit Christian proselytism, but is designed as a “group mentoring tool” for use by churches in secular

⁴⁸ The etymology of this word, like countless others in the “Christianese” lexicon, is quite impossible to trace; however, the *concept* it professed to delineate for Journeyers appears to be most closely associated with Healing Place Church, a 6,000-strong megachurch in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. “Servolution” was the name of a book written by the church’s founders. By way of an abstract:

“A Servolution is not an event; it is a culture. Infusing this culture into the DNA of your church will change the view of the world and your perspective of the needs of those around you. This movement is rumbling throughout the body of Christ – a revolutionary army of people ready to take up this mandate. We are actively pursuing the lost, the forgotten, and the poor to show them a God who is passionately in love with them. We stand ready with one heart, saying, “I will serve others and show them the hope they can have in Jesus.”

⁴⁹ The church intends to launch “Strength” locally too, but this is proving difficult to get off the ground; females volunteers, it seemed at least, are considerably more numerous than male ones.

educational environments, specifically schools and youth charities. Its authors describe them as:

unique personal development and group mentoring tools that use an inspirational practical and experiential approach to learning... founded on the premise that every life counts and has intrinsic value and fosters an awareness of this belief.⁵⁰

“As a result,” they continue, “individuals are equipped to become effective global citizens for the future.” Both the written and performative content of the course – its literary materials and group activities – are Biblically creationistic in their tone, as seen in the excerpt above. The “ultimate goal” of the programme is the inculcation of “a greater level of understanding about [one’s] personal identity, purpose and direction for [one’s] life,” by developing “holistic personal problem solving skills... improved confidence... enhanced social support networks... increased self-awareness... [and] understanding of intrinsic value.” The persistent Christian reference to “intrinsic value” and “the uniqueness of one’s design” notwithstanding, the programme is marketed to church-based social providers as if a structured course of psychotherapy: Indeed, the programme’s authors cited Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in their own presentation – carefully but confusingly noting that CBT was to be understood as “an approach employed,” not one “adapted” by the programme.

Journeymen’s involvement with the *Shine* programme has, like “LoveFolkfield” itself, begun relatively recently: but in the space of a couple of years, the programme has become relatively prominent in the “social action” portfolio of the church. Using the facilitators’ handbook (purchasable from the online Hillsong Church Store for £120⁵¹), the church has “trained” enough of its volunteers to run two or three lunchtime courses a year in Folkfield, and further afield in the county, at at least three different school venues. A course has recently been completed for the first time at The B—, a youth charity centre on the grounds of a local Folkfield high school. The B— had formerly been a Barnardo’s project for local migrants; three years previously the funding had been ended, and the decision was made to turn the centre into a dedicated local youth charity. It was, in fact, sorely needed: Folkfield is the only city council in the country to have removed its Children and Youth Services in their entirety as a result of the Coalition government’s economic austerity policies. The B— is managed by “Marie,” a youth worker with fifteen years’ professional experience in the city.

⁵⁰ From “Shine and Strength Promotional Portfolio,” Hillsong CityCare (2001).

⁵¹ Alternatively, a church provider could sign an online “user licence” for £50 per month.

The high school that hosts the charity on its grounds is not its formal affiliate, and the charity depends upon its own fundraising to operate. But it supplies The B—with a continual stream of problematic youngsters for the attentions of Marie and her support staff. Many of the teenagers referred there have been suspended from lessons for aggressive behaviour; a possible majority of them are girls.

Journeymers ran a six-week *Shine* programme at The B—, for which Marie selected a dozen girls, most of whom had been censured by the school’s administrators for bullying, and whom she felt were especially afflicted by “self-worth issues.” Marie observed all the *Shine* sessions that took place, and has declared them very successful: three-quarters of the girls selected for the programme have completed all the sessions, she says, and some of those have been recorded as displaying marked improvement in their behaviour; one has even begun volunteering herself at The B—. Maybe, Marie says, *Shine* has had a lot to do with that, maybe it has not; but in any case, the youth worker has been most impressed with programme’s content, and its execution by Journeymers’ volunteers.

The programme has a specifically unique emphasis that distinguishes it from other similar “wellbeing” counselling courses, she says:

It’s all about self-esteem and self-confidence with these [kinds of] course... but with *Shine*, there’s an emphasis on self-value, which is not something you tend to get [with other courses].

Marie gives the example of one participant, a noted “bully” of other girls at the school. Marie tells of how she nominated the girl for *Shine* after judging her behaviour to be indicative not of low self-confidence, but an absence of “self-value.” “She’d put value on *others*,” the youth worker suggests, “on her friends, on what *they* were doing,” but not on herself and her own interests; the *Shine* course, however, “enabled her to do that” – testifying rather well, I noted, to the aims articulated by the programme’s charismatic authors.

This all speaks very highly both of Hillsong’s programme and Journeymers’ volunteer deliverers. Marie – who is not a Christian herself, and speaks frankly of her displeasure at *overt* Christian provision in secular youth care – knew of the programme’s Christian authorship when we spoke. She was not blind, either, to the course literatures’ theological-moral devices: on the contrary, its talk of “intrinsic value” and so on was, for Marie, exactly what certain girls needed to hear, and be taught, and had been the very impetus for her taking the programme on at The B—. In fact, Marie’s general attitude to the presence of “faith”

materials in youth charity was a clear and reasonable product of the reality of her profession. A significant amount of her time was spent at “community network meetings,” at which, she claimed, a majority of institutional representatives present would be from the churches – at any given council-convened meeting, “we must get five or six vicars, … Youth for Christ, other church workers… the most in attendance are the church groups.”

It became clear in the course of our conversations, however, that Marie was completely unfamiliar with any distinction to be made between denominational and nondenominational Christian groups: more so, indeed, *any* distinctions of the kind upon which the present study – and my inquiries – have rested. Marie spoke at length about her local experiences with Christian actors in youth charity provision – including occasions upon which she had been “prayed over” by Christian youth workers, much to her professional disquiet – but there was no apprehension of any general distinction at the theological or religious organisational level, the kinds of distinctions that identify the conversionist from the non-conversionist believer and *in turn* the institutions which have developed in recent decades. This was no surprise in the broader context of our exchange, in which Marie spoke only of “faith,” never “religion” or “Christianity.” Hers was a normative view only upon the generalised subject of (Christian) “faith sharing”: not “conversion,” and therefore upon nothing of the institutional account presently explored – of the “neocharismatic,” the “post-denominational” and so on.

Here is where the account becomes interesting: for Marie had never heard of Journeymen Church. She explained that a young woman – “Carla” – had gotten in contact with The B—, and with her, to introduce the *Shine* programme and to ask if they would be interested in running it there. Carla, Marie said, is a mental health nurse from Folkfield’s H— Hospital, where *Shine* was then “being run two or three times a week.” Her subsequent contact with Carla – who had promptly supplied Marie with the course materials to look over – was supplemented with visits from two of Carla’s colleagues, who arrived also from the hospital to liaise with the youth workers in preparation for the programme’s introduction. To this point, Marie believed *Shine* to be a programme that was endorsed by mental health agencies. After all, its promoters to her were mental health professionals, and its aims, so communicated in the materials from which I have quoted, reinforced such an “officialising” insignia:

Carla came and spoke to me face to face, and told me all about her work as a mental health worker, but *never* mentioned [Journeymen Church]… I just assumed that she [was associated

with the programme] as a mental health worker, and that *Shine* was about creating good mental health among young people. So I took it as that value... [and] that she was just doing it from her professional background [alone]..

Carla was indeed a mental health nurse. She happened also to be the wife of Journeyers' lead Youth Pastor. Marie's response to this knowledge, as I revealed it to her, was magnanimous. "It's nice, then," she said, "because that's the first one I've met in a long time who's come from that background, and never mentioned it." For Marie, Carla's disregard in mentioning her own Christian identity – in the context of promoting this Christian-based youth programme to her – bears its own magnanimity. But this response does not address the fact of Carla's complete quiet on the identity – indeed the existence – of her church, Journeyers, which was the actual institutional backer of the *Shine* programme. My own perspective was somewhat differently positioned in this exchange with Marie, as she was quickly aware. She conceded that *had* she been made aware of the source institution for *Shine* in Folkfield, and of its facilitators – not H— Hospital, she now understood, but Journeyers Church – she "would have looked into it for myself" before signing up. What, then, *did* she know of the programme's local origins, beyond its endorsement by a trio of mental health nurses? I asked Marie if she had ever heard of Journeyers Church; she had not. I asked then if she had ever heard of LoveFolkfield. "Oh yes," she replied, "that's their funders."

This confirms the formal instrumentalisation of "LoveFolkfield," and its evident effectiveness before an audience of welfare professionals. Incidentally, Marie has had no contact with LoveFolkfield's "project manager" – she, the church's associate pastorate. This surely reflects nothing so much as the structural informality of a charitable sponsor that is neither "charity" nor "sponsor" in any factual sense. It is no insignificant detail, to be sure, but evidently a strategy well enough advanced by Journeyers' leaders for the purposes of advancing the *Shine* programme to the local community – to quote the church's associate pastor, to "significantly expand our capacity to run... courses and reach more high schools within the city to deliver this important message."

Interestingly, had Marie looked into "LoveFolkfield" itself, she may have uncovered an article in the local mainstream press that – exactly as had been advanced in regard to The Place's new "conference facility" two years earlier – revealed the church's enthusiasm for public attention whenever secular economic patronage was received. An April 2012 article on the Folkfield Daily News website reported that LoveFolkfield, a "charity" and "community

initiative” run by “Folkfield-based church, Journeyers” – accompanied by a photograph of Pastor Roy addressing the congregation – had received a £10,000 donation from the Santander Foundation “to fund a part-time project manager for its self-esteem course.” As with the promotional pieces for The Place, this article is essentially a press release by the church: one that also serves the public account of their (perhaps slightly unwitting) corporate grant-givers. In this case a multinational bank, whose PR management, on awarding the grant, honoured the Foundation’s support for “disadvantaged people” through “education and training projects,” adding that they were “delighted to have been able to support this project and hope that it has a positive impact on many people’s lives.”

Beneath the online version of the article are posted seven comments: Six of these – all who I know to be Journeyers members, all posted the day of publication, five credited with their posters’ full names – commend “LoveFolkfield” for its introduction of the “great scheme” to “the women and girls of Folkfield... many [of whom] are so critical of [themselves] and lack self-esteem,” a problem that “modern society often only adds to.” The first-posted entry expresses concern that “extremely vulnerable women are being targeted by the bible bashers, who let’s face it, find it almost impossible to resist spouting their nonsense.” It is, of these seven, the only one credited to a pseudonymous author. The neocharismatic online commenters, by contrast, are unconcerned with anonymity.

Reflection: some emerging difficulties

In chapter 3, I considered a broad finding from the proposed ethnographic case study of local neocharismatic groups. This concerned the possibility that a fully situated, methodologically “open” approach to their socio-economic activities – new to the academic literature, I maintain – cannot presuppose the empirical substance to be attached their leaders’ and core members’ increasingly cohesive *claims* of public action and involvement. Recall that the theoretical approach outlined in chapter 1 proposed to describe and explain neocharismatic organisations “advancing a social and theological culture to the wider public,” but that this culture was to be examined in a context of concrete transmission: namely through the emerging institutions of an evolving British voluntary/third sector, a distinctive empirical domain as identified in recent scholarship.

In the literature review of chapter 2 it was seen not merely that the activities internal to contemporary neocharismatic churches are likely to constitute a distinctive culture in

theoretical regard, but that this culture has indeed been the focus in (American) investigations thus far. As I suggested there, it has been characterised by a degree of analytic superficiality, often troubled by an implicit religious analysis, and overall inconsistency following Ellingson's recent review (2010). The churches' spheres of *external* activity, however – in a dual mode of “public engagement” institutions cohering in local political-religious ecologies – has remained unexplained even there.

Nevertheless I advanced the general hypothesis that Britain's own (and still less qualitatively surveyed) neocharismatic constituencies are seeking to advance themselves through equivalent state-supported channels. In addition to this, though, I proposed a comparative case study design with which to explore it. This design actually presupposed a minimal level of conformance in the descriptive-theoretical natures of the sub-units selected for detailed analysis (in this study between the two, “Journeyers” and “City Life Church”). The presupposition present here, in short, was of these two church companies working locally in pursuit of a broadly comparable repertoire of public engagement programmes; in something *more* than ideal form, that is.

The investigation into Journeyers would, at this point, evidence a generous discrepancy between the *suggestive* properties of substantive public engagement by that church and its actual results. The account of City Life Church which will follow these remarks demonstrates that the Newfrontiers network's local offices are proving significantly more profitable in the areas for which this study was designed to investigate. But even before presenting the second case, the Journeyers findings raise some issues for the ensuing case study overall, particularly its comparative element (and, I suspect, not restricted to it). I shall briefly address what appear the important points here; understanding, of course, that a more conclusive discussion must follow after the City Life case study, and contribute to a concluding summary chapter.

The important points mainly follow from another reflection on the criteria by which I selected Journeyers Church (and CLC) as cases in the first place. My discussion in chapter 3 underplayed the presence back then of objective “criteria” employed, emphasising by contrast the subjective field-based process through which I had selected groups for sustained investigation. These, then, were decisions made through rather impressionistic analyses; “situated judgements” though, as per the wider case study design. I was looking for what would appear in my estimations to be the “significant congregations” of Folkfield at that time. But this involved some potentially misleading vectors, some of which were

demonstrably inappropriate, or at least tenuously connectable to the research questions that were also being (and continued to be) developed.

For example, a significant share of the data informing my choice of best cases could appear to reduce to the personal temperamental appeal – the sheer *enthusiasm*, perhaps – of individual members; namely Journeyers', as of course it turned out. More precisely, then, case decisions rested partially on the (necessarily brief and fleeting) testimonials I received from neocharismatic participants or their peers. These reports, as discussed in chapter 3, were often as not unsolicited in these early days – occasions buttressed by my own knowledge shortfalls, as noted; concerning not just religious but methodological functions, too, and perhaps more seriously still. Clearly, one thing my calculations could have been based more explicitly on was a greater preliminary exploration of the empirical institutional properties of the emerging church companies, on the lines introduced in chapter 1. This was not possible to a significant extent though, again, because the research problems were an object of development *in situ*, and poorly formulated themselves at that time.

Yet it must also be reconsidered here that one rigid criterion for the case selections *was* in force: as regards the churches' fundamental *type*. They were to be "neocharismatic," emphasising here the *charismatic*; and denominationally independent, signalled here in the Grecian prefix. On a single-case perspective, Journeyers' description appears to reinforce the church type as drawn (under varying monikers) from the American research record – approximating the description, reviewed at length earlier, of the independent, growth-focussed "megachurch" institution. So in selecting Journeyers I was selecting, primarily, a descriptive church type, an object of abstracted categorisation. But the stated objective of the broader study is to investigate a sociopolitical "general class of things" to be empirically and theoretically specifiable to a local political and economic contextuality; an additional and rather different affair. This all should serve merely to reconfirm the danger of pre-selecting a case sample on the advice of preconceived ideal-typical characteristics. In this sociological-religious case, though, it is of particular note that those characteristics refer almost entirely to *internal* cultural factors (congregational habits, hierarchies, "consumerist logics" and so on), and neither advance nor require anything of the other side: their external public institutionalisms. The early sections of the literature review made that much quite clear.

It may be feared, at this point, that the conclusion to which I am headed in these remarks is that possible alternative candidates for the local cross-case sample – alternative to Journeyers, that is – had been wrongfully excluded on prioristic descriptive-theoretical grounds; more seriously, that their exclusion was determined as a result of some notable

contrariety in their internal cultural structure, compared to that pre-ordained by a “neocharismatic” subject specification as articulated in chapters 1 and 2 (and drawn most substantially from the U.S. record, thus presenting further issues). If that were so, the objection is self-evident: Then this thesis is not a study of “neocharismatic” constituencies, but some other unexplicated Christian sector; one that is advancing a mandate of public engagement – of renewed “social significance” – in the manners that were originally hypothesised, but whose members do not *necessarily* possess all the cultural-theological specifications of the nondenominational/megachurch entity.

This is a conclusion too far, of course, for the City Life case is yet to be presented. But as hinted already, the next chapter will contribute a good deal more to the *local* account so far, and enable a more coherent summary to follow: on which I shall conclude with more confidence the clearer directions for future research.

The speculations just made, however, are not without precedent in the British literature, and in fact have been expressed in a recent publication by the Catholic Friar and British expatriate, Peter Hocken (2009). At the end of a chapter reviewing recent accounts of “New Churches” and networks (covering broadly the same material put forth in chapter 2’s review), Hocken makes some intriguing remarks. He notes that “the last 15 years have seen a blurring of the boundaries of the charismatic movement”; that for example, the “clear adhesion to a definable” Spiritual baptism, and the “singling out” of tongue-speaking have “weakened” (Hocken 2009: 52). These trends are quite well-regarded in other work, as discussed, in fact. But Hocken’s conclusions and foresight here are more interesting. For he observes that at the same time, “many elements of the charismatic experience, such as exuberant and demonstrative worship, healing and deliverance ministry, have spread beyond explicitly charismatic circles”:

As a result the distinction between charismatic and non-charismatic congregations has become less clear. So of the three ‘new Paradigm churches’ studied by Donald Miller [1997] only Vineyard would be called ‘charismatic’. But all three have been influenced by the same *Zeitgeist*. (Hocken 2009: 52.)

In his references to the “*Zeitgeist*,” Hocken is addressing the “spirit of the age” – the modern, secular age – as something with which “God (and the Holy Spirit)” and their followers are seriously challenged; the “significance of the new charismatic churches is not easy to evaluate,” he remarks, articulating a strictly theological concern (p. 50). However,

and perhaps ever more appropriately given the issues raised in the presently, Hocken's brief analysis cannot but reflect the implications of a (still) changing institutional landscape. "The primary points of fellowship for the new charismatics today," he suggests,

remain their fellows in the new churches, *augmented by their more recent bonds with those Evangelical-charismatics in the Protestant churches who are the most open to the new church emphases.* (Hocken 2009: 52; my emphasis.)

One might thus append a further speculation: concerning the significance of other Protestant churches with the potential to advance perhaps *variably* "charismatic" but similarly orthodox Christian programmes locally. Such churches, thinking most obviously here of charismatic-evangelical Anglican groups, may be less handsomely equipped for the task on the more brutally economicistic measures that I emphasised in chapter 1 of neocharismatic companies. But equally so, they may be more significant in respect to their potentially long-existent social anchorages *within local communities* – standing as more familiar parish-based entities, of course. In turn, they may be differently, as well, or even better prepared to encourage forms of externalising evangelical "fellowship" for longer-term cultivation.

Chapter 6. “City Life Church”

People often really struggle to understand the dynamic of a church being interested in evangelism as well as being interested in doing good in society... People tend to assume that you're either wanting to just help people, and you're not interested in any of those people becoming Christians, or that you're just really interested in people becoming Christians and all the other stuff isn't really true.

That's why we say, we're imitating a God who loves people with no strings attached. *But*, part of that is—there's a desire in doing that that people would of their own free will by seeing how much they've been loved, will *respond* – in free will – and [will want] relationship with God. So, we do genuinely want to help them even if, you know, we don't get anything out of it, but equally we'd love to see them come to know Jesus. And of course, if they come to Jesus as well it's not *really* a benefit to us because it creates more work. You know, because you've got to support them, and, you know, love them *more*...

Dom and Sarah smiled and nodded in magnanimous assent these last remarks of Phil, the appointed manager of “community engagement” at Folkfield’s City Life Church (CLC), a local “plant” of Newfrontiers, one of the original British Restorationist movements formed in the 1970s. I had arranged to meet with Dom and Sarah at the Life Venue, a “community project” that CLC began in a Folkfield council estate in 2011.

Life Venue is the name given to the building – a single-storey complex of rooms, at the front centre of which is a large recreation hall – in which we sat. It is the base for CLC’s operations in the estate, though the physical institution of the Life Venue presented as yet little of any actual *activities* through which the church is planning – in their phrasing – to “engage with” and “improve the lives of” the local residents. I travelled to the Life Venue anticipating some significant live order of organised social affairs to be in progress: a reasonable expectation, I thought, given CLC’s four-year “presence” on the estate; the last two in the physical space of the Life Venue itself. These empirical expectations were not immediately met, as there seemed not to be a great deal actually happening, at least on a daily basis; though from the outside, the residency of CLC here has been well sign-posted from the off.

I have eventually learned this state of affairs, however, to be somewhat beside the point of my inquiry. CLC’s “progress” among residents here – its “performance,” in the language ascribed to the church’s social charity by its state regulators – is to be understood

more complexly: not from the empirical description of social activities alone, but by tracing the narrative for “local impact” that is being developed and preserved within broader church discourse, among its leaders and core members. As might have been expected from their structure and worship style, this has pointed up fundamental differences in CLC’s approach to local evangelism and “growth” when compared to Journeyers, despite the two churches pursuing the same religious ends, and “serving” the same city and people, amid the same local political constraints.

City Life Church was established in Folkfield in the early 1990s. In 1997 the group acquired a large building on Folkfield’s K— Street, in the town centre of the city. Historically well-known as a busy industrial thoroughfare, K— Street has been gentrified in recent years: some flats in the street’s new residential courtyards reportedly approached seven-figure valuations at the height of the last property boom. The property that CLC’s trustees secured there for the church was previously the home of Folkfield’s “Lads’ Club,” a recreational association established in 1918 for the city’s errant young males. The former club is well-known in the region for producing several generations of amateur boxing champions, and had moved to the K—Street premises in the 1960s; it subsequently became a popular entertainments venue as well. Pink Floyd had famously played there in 1971.

Known since 1997 as the Life Centre under CLC’s ownership, this is the premises I mentioned in the previous chapter: at which CLC became the first neocharismatic-evangelical group in Folkfield to establish a subsidiary trade in “conferencing” facilities to supplement its congregational income. This makes CLC the earliest significant example of neocharismatic organisation developed on the commercial allowances of the Charitable Company model. This commercial undertaking – as with Journeyers – was envisaged through the purchase by the church of a very large local premises, one far more extensive than the needs of the existing congregation would have suggested to a non-Christian Growth observer: indicative of a “prophetic” expectation of substantial future growth for the church, but also, as with Journeyers, the primary material symbol of the church’s tithers and other donors. The Life Centre has advertised itself as “a quality conference venue in the centre of Folkfield, offering 14 different rooms available to hire to suit your event; from 6 people to 650.” Sure enough, CLC’s secular commercial trading has continued to grow over those fifteen years, now accounting for at some 32 per cent of the church’s annual £1 million-plus revenues – in fact exactly matching the proportion of income raised by members’ tithes (not including Gift Aid and “special offering” receipts, which rais an additional £180,000 between them).

Like at Journeyers' The Place, the Life Centre's main auditorium – the 650-seat space featured on CLC's own conference venue homepage – hosts the church's Sunday worship services. Between 200 and 400 people gather at K— Street on a Sunday morning, a greater if similarly inconsistent number⁵² than is witnessed at The Place. At the Life Centre, however, charismatic believers indulge their ritual amidst a strikingly more subdued performance environment. With no blackened surrounds, and no theatrical and musical stage effects, CLC provides none of the blunt-force sensory trauma of Pastor Roy and co.'s stage show. With no sense of captive enclosure – no service teams positioned in wait at the room's edges, and no dogmatic appeals for cash – CLC's effervescent collective embodies a more free and serene approach to charismatic experience. Most noticeably – after the near minute-by-minute orchestration one observes at Journeyers – musical sections in the service here are interrupted with a series of short "Words" (Christian addresses) at the microphone from members of the congregation, something Pastor Roy and his deputies had proscribed (Pastor Roy had even described such a feature as seeming to him like an "interruption" to his services – as a detracting practice). For all that, however, the sequential predetermination and orchestration of services by CLC's leaders is as plainly evident here as it is at The Place. For example, the contributing Words just mentioned – members' short public addresses, given over the lowered rhythmic pulse of the band, timed to feed the prayerful atmosphere – are obviously sanctioned in advance. Pastor Roy's subtley aspersive remark about Newfrontiers' supposed preservation of unpredictable "tongues interpretations" in their services – "they probably still do that down there, don't they?," he said – is quite mistaken, in fact. There are to be no surprises of the Pentecostal kind at CLC's public gatherings. The worship services may have been very different in their aesthetic, but many of the same basic regulative structures are in force throughout "the life of our church" here.

The building's foyer – recalling Journeyers' constructed Atrium on a Sunday – has been converted by the church into a café, where, as at The Place, arrivals to the weekly service socialise over coffee and cake before and after the event. While "seekers" and other solo attendees will be chaperoned by core members – again, I have personally attested to this, repeatedly – this is done with little in the way of organised rigour. There are no sartorially-

⁵² Like at Journeyers, the summer months see the more sparsely-attended services. Journeyers, for their part, put this down to the absence of local Christian students, who go back to their own homes (and own home churches) during the holidays. CLC would tell me, rather, that "people were on holiday" during August – when worshipper numbers drop enough that the church does not even open its coffee bar for breakfast on a Sunday morning.

designated “Teams” at work, for instance. Core members here are instead recognised by CLC brand-stamped I.D. badges around the neck: more “conference delegate” than “summer camp rep” next to Journeyers’ T-shirted Sunday staffers. The socio-ideological distinctives of Newfrontiers’ worship service approach (so, including its policies for “first contact” with potential recruits) are evident, then, in these observations. But the human demographic at CLC makes it plain that it is, after all else, conditions of practical feasibility – contained in the human membership “grown” over the years within CLC’s cultural programme – that determine the socialisation procedures here. Their congregational demographic is markedly different: no youthful majority, more families, and more retired people. It is, in short, far more “local church” in the prosaic sense.

This does not constitute a problem for the evangelical growth mandate of CLC, not least because, unlike Journeyers, instances of public contact do not so much depend on the Sunday worship event alone. Alongside its provision to the “business community,” CLC’s central city location on K— Street has enabled the church to operate a regular hospitality business under the commercial name “K—’s Coffee” (after the street). This means that CLC, accessible on foot to anyone within the city centre bounds, is open to the public every day. Its secular business notwithstanding, K—’s Coffee at the Life Centre comprises a well-established “shopfront” for City Life Church itself (something Journeyers’ conference centre is not at liberty to engineer, of course, specifying its services to the “business community”).

The café at K— Street employs several church members, and several more volunteers. Nathan, the church’s lead Elder, keenly pointed out a non-Christian server among the café’s staff as we had sat and talked there: testament, on his account, to the café’s own non-religious, workaday commission. K—’s Coffee is, unsurprisingly, the primary setting for meetings (and it had turned out, research interviews) with senior CLC leaders. Looking around the tables and soft chairs on a given weekday, Elders and senior core members will often be present discussing church business, between hosting visitors and conference clients. There are no interior fixtures here or anywhere else in the publically-accessed halls of the Life Centre for communicating the its hosts’ religious professions: except for, that is, the familiar glossy leaflets, laid here and there on wall shavings, and by a large sofa opposite the centre’s reception desk: some notifying of upcoming extracurricular church events, some promoting CLC community initiatives, even others advertising local charitable agencies with some shared (e.g., welfare) interest.

The café itself is to initial appearances a further subsidiary trading business for CLC, and indeed it is legally speaking: it appears on company reports as a subsidiary revenue

source alongside the conferencing business, “leadership training” (church leadership, internal to Newfrontiers), and CLC’s book sales.⁵³ However, it is more significant than that in the abstractive institutional complex of the growth-focussed religious entity. Financial reports show that K—’s Coffee operated at an annual financial loss. So while functioning as CLC the charity ostensibly declared it to, as a source of funds “in furtherance of church objectives” – charismatic religious growth – it generates no monetary surplus for the church. Of course, modern legislation for trading activities in which charities can engage has in its essence sought to “get away from the concept of profit as a measure of success or failure,” as the concept of financial profit is “not appropriate” given that the State requires *all* a charity’s funds to be directed to achieving its “charitable objectives”; notwithstanding, of course, the nebulousness of centuries-old “advancement of religion” concept in British law that is unspecific of neocharismatic conversion and its praxes.

There are financially-prevalent definitions at work within the subsidiary trading area at CLC: the conference business at the Life Centre – recorded in the charity’s accounts as “hire of premises,” under the same subsidiary trade section as K—’s Coffee – generates almost a quarter of a million pounds a year for the church, against a mere £16,000 costs for its running. K—’s Coffee, on the other hand, cost the church up to £20,000 more than it actually made. The outcome of all this for the inquiry here, of course, is that the café has to be conceptualised differently as an object in the strategic discourse of CLC’s leaders: Not as a subsidiary “business,” if one presumes of that notion a minimum of economic viability, but instead as itself a social provision of City Life Church.

For the interests of charity regulators, the café is a formal subsidiary fundraiser. But for its neocharismatic owners, it constitutes an object – and environment – for cultural exposition of the church and its people. That is to say it exists as an agency of greatest value within the *normative* organisational nexus of CLC. It employs socially and intellectually disadvantaged members, and provides a public physical space for senior “apostolic” leaders to inhabit in the regular working day; one that is naturally attuned with their “dressed-down”

⁵³ The rear of the auditorium on Sunday mornings at CLC hosts an extensive display of books, not restricted to Newfrontiers’ own but from across the spectrum of Christian publishing, from Focus On The Family’s fundamentalist James Dobson to the former Archbishop Rowan Williams. Newfrontiers’ own senior leaders naturally have their own publications available here, from church growth manuals to Terry Virgo’s autobiography. Denominational breadth aside, the most interesting theme here is the “life spectrum” catered for: CLC’s “bookstore” offers Christian manuals on everything from childrearing to teenagers, education, marriage, masculinity, womanhood... everything directed to living a “Christian life” defined entirely by one’s *personal relationships*: noticeably excluding politics and public life, subjects which are absent in this library.

style and approachability. Most significantly, however, it provides to the local population a demonstration of professional “excellence” in consumer-oriented service. This indeed is something that CLC’s leaders, like Journeymen, invoke so very naturally as a core custom to the contemporary local church. In reality, this constantly fuzzes the line which separates the neocharismatic institution’s sectarian religious orthopraxy from the State-defined objectives of the public charitable economy, the latter of which they were formerly a part (and without which, on paper K-s Coffee could not have existed in the form that it did, of course).

In the physical space of the Life Centre and K-s Coffee, the interior motivations of charismatic evangelists are perfectly unencumbered by assuming a business-hours guise as coffee-shop managers. Here they can embody either of those roles, directing the secular hospitalities of the business premises whilst engaging their religious occupations as well. They can do so with their colleagues on-site, and their aproned Christian employees; but also with new CLC attenders from the previous Sunday: potential inductees returning to the church for second look, a “follow-up” chat on a Tuesday morning, to be introduced to the structure and values of CLC by an Elder or approved core member, often over a café lunch.

It might be suggested that all these industrial efforts are in vain should the Life Centre, and K-s Coffee, not be recognised day-by-day as a “Christian church” by the passing public; that is, should CLC itself not somehow receive a flow of external credibility that it surely covets with the institution of these public utilities. But firstly, institutional initiatives like K-s Coffee (as indeed the conferencing business, here and at Journeymen) are really the “experimental industries” of the British neocharismatic realm, in any case. When one of CLC’s senior members remarks of the Life Venue’s evangelism that the task of social engagement for the church is simply a process of “feeling one’s way,” he might well be speaking as much about K-s Coffee. Once again, the forms of “entrepreneurial” action particular to neocharismatic institution-building are never far from empirical account.

Secondly, it is important to the institution of the church that its more profane industries (i.e., the Life Centre and its trades) be not publically aligned with the transcendent religious ontology that it is the true business of the Centre’s managers – CLC’s neocharismatic leaders – to institute and enlarge. This ontology – to them, the supernaturally real “local church” – was a constitution of charismatic faith membership alone: it was not to be confused with the building or its businesses.

Dom and Sarah are core volunteers to CLC’s recent off-site suburban project, each giving a couple of mornings a week at the Life Venue. Two years on from the Venue’s launch, Sarah

has recently helped to set up an arts and crafts club in one of its rooms, while Dom has been attempting to start a computer club and Internet café for residents of the council estate where it is based. Sarah speaks very positively of the success so far of her enterprising venture: the weekly club is “packed,” she says, with four women from the estate and their children regularly taking part. Dom’s computer project has proved difficult to get off the ground, however. He has recently remarked – some months after my introduction to the site, by now conceding the project’s imminent abandonment – that its failure is because, he figures, kids didn’t need computers for such a purpose now, as they all had internet access on their mobile phones.

Like a substantial majority of the young married couples I have met across Folkfield’s neocharismatic constituency, the pair had met at the church, and married soon after. The three of us found some commonality in our Further Education experiences. Sarah began (though did not finish) a PhD in social work; while Dom has acquired a doctorate in mathematics – an empirical investigation of the velocity of viscous liquids upon surfaces. Sarah jokes that despite his best efforts, she cannot understand even the abstract to his thesis.

I did request the presence of Phil, and he was evidently sent to attend our interview at the request of the church’s Elders. Phil is in his late twenties. I have seen him preaching at CLC once or twice, but understood him not to be an Elder. Although not having met him, he had struck me as one of the church’s most ebullient core members. His enthusiasm for the worship, for the preach, and for his own recently-acquired role in the senior ranks of the church – like many of the young neocharismatic leaders of my generation in Folkfield, he has been “grown” from part-time volunteer to full-time church employee over several years of his early twenties – was notable on a Sunday morning even in that environment. It seems when facing him during conversation that he is permanently effecting a smile, and his hands and limbs jerk and shift in short movements as he speaks: a live animation of his overflowing excitement for anything that comes up church, Jesus, or CLC-related.

He was not present that day for mere contribution to the discussion. He was there also to monitor proceedings. My request to Dom and Sarah for an interview about their roles at the Life Venue had been immediately referred – by them – to one of the church’s leaders for permission. The formality arose not due to my inquiring into *them* and their lives as Christians; CLC members with whom I have spoken about such matters are clearly generally unencumbered in talking, and are every bit as generous and graceful as Journeyers’ respondents. It was because I expressed an explicit interest in the Life Venue itself, as an emerging programme of local “outreach” by City Life Church.

Hi Bradley,

I spoke to Phil this morning who, as I think I told you, oversees the Life Venue activities at CLC. He would like to also be part of the interview you wish to carry out so could we possibly move the interview to next Thursday morning at 11 as he can't do this week?

Also, could you please send me some information about the interview? Do you have an information sheet re consent, the questions asked, what you'll do with the information, confidentiality etc?

Best wishes
Sarah

I supplied what they asked for and the interview was granted without any further issue. These initial responses – speaking both of Dom and Sarah's inclination to check with their supervisor before speaking about the Venue with an outsider, and Phil's subsequent formal requests – seem not to be unusual of CLC, to judge by what I had experienced a couple of times already in the company of church's leaders. CLC, it seems, are cautious of secular inquiries. The lead Elder, for example, though very friendly, refused my request to tape record our interview; and although other leaders in the church have not, there seems present a certain effort to control arrangements in other ways. Another Elder, very slow to respond to my asking, eventually requests that we meet not at the church but in a branch of McDonalds, one evening, and at tea time – on that occasion, inevitably turning my research interview into a somewhat interruptive chat over milkshakes and hamburgers; pretty much his intention, it subsequently feels. (Incidentally, an identical offer of McDonalds as a suitable place for an interview about local Christianity was made by another local neocharismatic figure, John Crane, mentioned in Chapter 4; he eventually declined even his own offer, alas). On another occasion, in the field, one of the church's youth leaders – one of the most generous and intelligent contributors I encountered, as it happened – retained awareness of my voice recorder running during an exchange between us, and promptly enjoined me without qualm to turn it off as he turned to talk to one of his young converts. "Can you turn it off now, this isn't relevant," he matter-of-factly commanded. I was surprised by the interjection: other neocharismatics elsewhere have in fact never paid such attention, or at least are not so minded to keep aware of an inquisitive non-Christian presence around them.

I do not suggest that these are unreasonable requests in themselves – it is always participants' prerogative, of course – but their occurrence at CLC particularly seems

interesting. I have received some notice, in the course of other interactions with local Christians, of a history among Newfrontiers of a distrust towards secular scrutiny. These incidents are a reminder too of anecdotal reports that exist about the founder and leader of the movement, Terry Virgo. A few Christian journalists have for some years advanced of Virgo a reputation for imperiousness when requested interviews. It has been alleged, for example, that he insists – like Phil did of me – advance notice of questions; and even (by an allegation arising in *Christianity Today* magazine) demanding editorial privilege over pieces before they are published: something usually to be noted only of the most controversial public institutionalists (and overly self-protective celebrity figures). In any case, my non-believer's trepidation at pursuing inquiries within Folkfield's NcE constituency, unqualified to begin with, has abated only to a limited extent when it has come to CLC.

For the irony of this account is that City Life Church is unquestionably the most publically-active post-denominational Charismatic church in Folkfield. It claims what is the largest congregation of Sunday service attenders. In addition, it raises from tithers and other donors the greatest funds for its “Mission” in Folkfield – most of it, like at Journeyers, needed to cover the church’s extensive material operating costs. It has the widest geographical range of activity across the city outside the denominational churches, and possesses the highest total financial procurement from local and national secular charities. Not least, it claims the most fertile relations with Folkfield’s local council. CLC leaders, on a number of occasions – in the very same terms with which Journeyers’ executive pastor has proclaimed it for *his* church – have emphasised what “good standing” the church enjoys with Folkfield City Council, and how much they “like what we do.” Perhaps, then, the caution practised by CLC’s leaders over inquiries about its business is not really a source of irony, but rather a positive reflection of the church’s internal constitution. Evidence, that is, of an impressive robustness in this constitution against ideological change within Newfrontiers: something that would seem to have characterised the movement in its growth into by far the biggest of the British New Church networks.

Indeed, the network has gained sufficient traction in local church life in Britain that it is commonly alluded to as a “denomination” itself. On 27th May 2012, Newfrontiers’ founding church in Brighton hosted the BBC’s special “Pentecost” episode of *Songs of Praise*: The hour-long programme featured music from the church’s own worship band, and preaching from its lead pastor, Joel Virgo, son of the movement’s founder.

Metre Crow: first fruits of a “five church vision” for Folkfield

The Life Venue, where I met Dom and Sarah, is not a building all its own, but a separate complex of rooms attached to an older building called the Reginald Centre. The Reginald Centre is located in Metre Crow, a well-known council estate two miles north-west of CLC's primary residence in the city centre. The medium-sized building, which retains the character of its 1970s construction, is owned by Folkfield City Council (FCC), and functions as a “leisure centre” for Metre Crow's residents. In reality the Centre has been an outlet for more than leisure provision. Alongside recreational activities at discounted rates, the Centre has been used to host both state and private charity-based health services, employment agencies, and educational courses. As testimony to the Reginald Centre's need among the residents of Metre Crow, it has attracted up to 120,000 total visits from local residents per year.

The local council itself, however, has very little direct involvement in the Reginald Centre's services. The premises' general manager, a characterful Liverpudlian who has worked there for eight years after leaving a job as a department manager at Folkfield University's sports centre, describes “us” – he, and his local council employers – as “landlords,” renting and leasing sections of the building to whomever can pay – and of course, can offer the residents of Metre Crow something that FCC considers beneficial. The Centre has hosted a range of regular sports and hobby clubs and associations. The council is keen to promote the Centre's capacity for local business meetings as well – constituting an additional income stream for its local state owners from the sale of “conference facilities”; private clients like these did not receive the community discount rates, of course. The manager says that the Reginald Centre itself makes no profit – it “never would” anyway, he says, and indeed most of the days I have turned up during the week, the Centre is quiet; though he refers quite frequently to the financial interest to the council of any regular agencies operating there. He says that the FCC's organisation in respect of the site and its provision to the local estate had “improved no end” in his time. Nonetheless, one's general impression is of a community centre that could never be entirely secure in its future given its purpose and location: speaking not just of the charitable social ends it was intended to serve but, relatedly, the generally low socio-economic condition of the estate it was built for, a situation that has seen little improvement in several decades.

A local community sports and fitness charity that earlier occupied a structure adjacent to the Reginald Centre – the structure that would become CLC's Life Venue – had run out of money, and been forced to pack up and leave. Others elsewhere in the Centre have met a

similar fate in recent years. At the present there are half a dozen “tenants” – agencies – in residence at the Reginald Centre. These include a 64-place nursery for local families; an Adult Education IT service (this provided by the county council); a Job Centre outreach service (originally open all week, but now reduced to a weekly drop-in); a snacks and refreshments bar, open six mornings a week; a small gym and fitness club; and, as of 2009, City Life Church: who in four years have advanced from renting the Centre’s main hall for two hours’ worship service each Sunday, to now paying an annual £9,500 lease for an entire section of the Reginald Centre, which they have christened the Life Venue – retaining the keys, and even installing their own security alarm system.

CLC, in its charity reports, professes to be “focussing” its “local projects” in “two of the highest areas of need” in Folkfield: the city centre, and Metre Crow. This is accurate enough; these are indeed the two locations in the city in which CLC hold formal residences. But this is not a reflective account of the church’s religious growth processes nor, more pointedly, the wider prospective ambitions of City Life Church. “Community projects” like the Life Venue are not created as *organised* deployments of social welfare to the (poorer) districts of Folkfield. They are, rather, auxillary efforts to the central task of congregational expansion.

In respect of CLC’s presence on the Metre Crow estate, the Life Venue has been preceded for two years by a weekly congregation for charismatic worship which CLC’s leaders had called Life Church Metre Crow. This was the first institution (after the main city centre church) of a “vision of five sites” intended to be developed across the boroughs of Folkfield. As the subject of a “prophetic announcement” by the church’s Eldership a few years ago, this constitutes the long-term institutional plan for CLC in Folkfield. By 2009, the “prophecy” was declared to be on course as the leaders established the first of their additional “sites,” at Metre Crow: to them, the first of God’s deliveries of CLC’s imminent expansion within the city.

This “multi-site” plan for Folkfield has been dictated by the Elders within a narrative of quite imperturbable supernatural assurance. The “revelation” of CLC’s five-site expansion was initially revealed within the high-level environs of a consultation between several regional “apostolic” actors from Newfrontiers’ national (all-male) leadership body, something that the movement has practised since its founding: a highly officialised environment of “supra-social” interaction (Woodhead 2012), in which God’s intention has in *this* movement’s case, of course, been “revealed” for the establishment of a post-denominational landscape. The Elderships of Newfrontiers churches from across the country

meet annually for week-long charismatic prayer meetings, at which leaders receive spiritual inspirations and “prophesy” to one another of what God wanted them to do in their respective localities. It was within the context of these events that one of CLC’s Elders had expository a “vision” of five churches for Folkfield, another four to follow the city centre congregation: this foresight naturally framing the more broadly announced expectation of an eventual “church of thousands” across the region.

The revelation of the five does *not* prescribe five “church plants,” it has been stressed to me, but five “sites” of CLC Folkfield, to be overseen by the same six-man Eldership, and – as per neocharismatic practice – to “raise leaders” within them. The “prophecy” itself has not been delivered in an instant, either. God’s communication of his “intentions,” it is said, are not so straightforward, but often cohere within a narrative of skillful decipherment, in turn reflecting the true “apostolic” status of the receiver. The Elder in the case of this particular “prophecy,” it is claimed, had had a dream; and then some other day (now whilst awake) he had happened upon a map, along with some symbol of the number 5; connecting the signs, he prayed to God as to the clues’ veracity, before sharing the revelation with his fellow leaders. I cannot be sure of the precise details of this narrative, the story being relayed anecdotally by several of the more embedded members at different times. But in any case, it is clear that the five church “vision” is a regulative core of the organisational discourse at CLC. That is merely to say it would be according to this “prophecy” that the major institutional advances of the church are to be rationalised: judged God-ordained and correct, or incorrect and undetermined by God.

Such rulings – typically (and conveniently) retrospective in their evaluation – are a phenomena of some general course among neocharismatic leaders at any level of institution-building, it appears.. Divine mandates aside, congregational plants are thus paramount to CLC’s local church approach. At the level of institutional leaderships, what distinguishes CLC from Journeyers is not the leaderships’ given expectations of congregational expansion, but their respective methodologies while pursuing it. These methodologies further refined the apparently fundamentally contrasting policies for instituting the post-denominational church. They revealed not just practical divergences – legal, geographical, and so on – but considerable differences in normative intent as well: detectable at the leadership-controlled organisational level of course, but also among rank-and-file members, upon whose voluntary laborsome efforts (physical and financial) every one of a leadership’s previsions depend for its actual realisation.

CLC is a growth-focussed church, and, as per emerging neocharismatic standards, its leaders seek to operationalise and effect religious recruitment partly through the provision of “social welfare” to the local sphere. (As mentioned previously, this fact engenders no comment on the sincerity of neocharismatic Christians’ social outreach efforts, but simply readies an explanatory account of NcE social outreach as one laden – by their own admission – with *religious* Christian ambition). At CLC, “social welfare” is identified by name as an active pursuit of the church in its local ministrations. The question follows, then, what are the implications of such a pursuit – assuming “social welfare” is to be used by church leaders in the usual public sense – within the religious growth-focussed organisation? This is preliminarily answered in the present case by the basic facts of a multi-site expansion programme. At CLC, locally-targeted community engagement appropriating forms of welfare is idealised in consistency with charismatic Christian provision: incurring the extension to local recipients of opportunities to “experience God” directly for themselves – perhaps beginning with the spontaneous offering of prayer amidst some other social activity, but following with the integration into a local congregation. Accordingly, weekly access to a worship environment (and to the care of CLC’s Eldership) is of fundamentally greater importance at CLC than could be met, as in Journeyers’ case, with a free bus service to their warehouse on the edge of town. CLC, honouring the broader practices of Newfrontiers, desires for itself an *embedded* presence in the city and its boroughs, not a fleeting or occasional one, and this means furnishing local people with a *locally-accessible* congregation: each congregation fully “City Life Church,” but ostensibly determined in the details of its organisation by the generalisable social conditions of the community location it is marketed to “serve.” Metre Crow is the first of these additional sites.

Nathan, the recently-installed lead Elder Of CLC Folkfield, has confirmed to me – his arms flung wide – that CLC “absolutely” is concerned above all else to make new Christians and grow the church. Like Journeyers, CLC’s (and Newfrontiers’) emphasis on an “apostolic” model for church life imagines a worldwide “family of churches,” faithful to the New Testament model and forged at each location point by “spiritually gifted leaders.” CLC is particularly advocative – more so than Journeyers – of “spiritual gifts” among its regular membership, presenting (for example, in its small group teaching) systematic approaches for “discovering” each member’s supernaturally-sanctioned special skill – “distinguished... from natural talents,” they are clear. Altogether this is an Acts-based “biblical” constitution every bit as seriously-minded as that advanced by Pastor Roy and his senior associates.

Under CLC's leadership, however, it is calibrated very differently. The most substantial reflection of this is precisely in the interpersonal practices advanced by leaders and core members among local non-believers that are very practically determined by the church's embedded "multi-site" model for local evangelism: encompassing "whole" neighbourhoods and estates, and extending the demands of regulative oversight across several local church groups. This is made practically feasible by CLC's six-man Eldership, in a way not possible for any other local neocharismatic organisation, moreover.

But the much longer-term local expansion "vision" being pursued here is pre-warranted by Newfrontiers' routinised pastoral style, too, rendering of CLC an agency for church growth that is – in neocharismatic language – more focussed on Christian "depth" than numerical advance, as compared with Journeyers, that is. The point here is that CLC's "multi-site" approach causally determines an interpersonal pastoral engagement among non-religious populations (informing the church's institutional evangelical mission at every subsequent level, in turn) that necessarily departs, in each interactional instance, from an understanding of local (i.e. estate-based) concerns and issues. The depth of the understanding on the part of evangelical actors obviously may vary, but a generalisation of the area would was always a good first approximation, and perhaps sufficient. These local concerns and issues might be presumed always to manifest in situations of social suffering, especially given the charitable Christian context. CLC's first choice for secondary location – Metre Crow – is a pretty comprehensive demonstration of this.

The Metre Crow estate was built in the early 1920s, and was Folkfield's first development of social housing. The area was created along with many others in the country following the Housing Act of 1919, which legislated for local councils to provide affordable, government-subsidised housing for the first time in Britain: as of 2011, 42 per cent of Metre Crow's dwellings remained council-owned, against just 18 per cent nation-wide.⁵⁴

Metre Crow has long been the recipient of casual slighting from Folkfield's more affluent residents. I had learned from my own experiences, long prior to this research, that the estate was locally cast as an area characterised by violence, drug-taking, poor life prospects and general "roughness." Much of this, inevitably, is not based on fact. The estate has some recorded rates of crime that are lower than the city average. I have my own anecdotal

⁵⁴ The figures that follow were obtained from the 2011 national census and other government-commissioned statistical sources, including an Electoral Division report from 2012, and a Health and Wellbeing study commission by the local council in 2013.

evidence – from before and during the present research – that Metre Crow is, for many residents, nothing like the city’s stereotypes; one local said that in twenty years she had never witnessed crime herself, and was immensely proud of the area’s community spirit. This last remark was well-attested elsewhere, and honours the estate’s historical course. The estate was designed almost a century ago by a team of local architects as a self-functioning community, with its own schools, neighbourhood centres, parks, a library, and – of course – its own church (built in 1933 and now a Grade II listed building; it still houses a small Anglican congregation). Metre Crow is rich with a much older history, too, compiled in recent years by local medievalists and history aficionados. The estate’s childhood education levels are about level with the city’s, even better in some areas, though noticeably poorer at university level – 27.7 per cent of Folkfield’s residents reach degree level or higher, but this figure is only 16.6 per cent for Metre Crow – a reflection of where, generationally, much of the estate population’s troubles lay.

The lack of publicly visible strife notwithstanding, the area is indeed deprived. According to the government’s Index of Deprivation, Metre Crow is the second poorest ward in the city, and in the bottom ten per cent nationwide. When compared with Folkfield overall, the estate has at least a 70 per cent higher proportion of working-age benefit and income support claims. Only 15 per cent of Metre Crow residents have been judged to be “healthy,” compared to 45 per cent for the county. Many older residents have long-term health problems, and the life expectancy for men and women alike is at least five years shorter than the city’s average. Although anti-social behaviour is decreasing, over half of Metre Crow residents report feeling “unsafe” walking the area at night. The population of the estate is markedly younger than the county average: 28.8 per cent of residents are young adults (aged 16 – 29), against just 16.8 per cent for the county. The estate has a significantly higher proportion of children, too: at least 22 per cent of residents are under 17, against 16 per cent for Folkfield. Inevitably, the most startling data for poverty referred to children: 41.7 per cent of Metre Crow’s youngsters are judged to be affected by income deprivation.

“Life Centre Community Initiative Folkfield”

CLC’s own summation of Metre Crow as a “target” community for charitable intervention is not inaccurate:

Metre Crow is a community built mostly around extended families. Most of the need is hidden behind closed doors, within these family units. As a rule, adults are disengaged from organised community activity; but children are not. So our work there focuses on families, often with children as our 1st point of connection.

In fact, these are not the recorded remarks of City Life Church *per se* – that is the charity for the “advancement of religion” – but of CLC’s “community work” subsidiary: incorporated by CLC’s leaders in 2008 as a separate charitable company called ‘Life Centre Community Initiative Folkfield’ (henceforth the “Initiative”).

In its official account, the LCC Initiative exists to “support people in & around Folkfield who find themselves trapped in poverty, to become everything they were made to be.” As the concluding words here suggest, the Initiative does not have to conceal a fundamental conversionist warrant. It is of course the very same church leaders directing the Initiative as lead CLC. The Initiative’s registered trustees are not the church’s leaders, and their roles appear to be functionary; my inquiries about CLC’s community projects (as mentioned earlier) are passed not to the Initiative’s trustees but to rising preacher Phil – listed as “project manager” in the Initiative’s financial reports. The Initiative’s legal constitution, however, compels the restraining of any explicitly-stated “church growth” objective. The language of the subsidiary’s official correspondences show that its directors’ underlying neocharismatic rationality is not going to be suppressed, and evidently neither is it compelled to be, despite The Initiative’s formally non-religious objectives. The Christian vocabulary remains, but the texts are only suggestive of different ends. These ends are articulated at the surface, at the level of official documentation. Accordingly, the organisation LCC Initiative professes in its charitable-legal identity what is required publically of an organisation created not to raise local Christians, but to fight local poverty:

[The Initiative exists] to advance in life and help young people through the provision of recreational and leisure time activities provided in the interest of social welfare, designed to improve their conditions of life and by providing support and activities which develop their skills, capacities and capabilities to enable them to participate in society as mature and responsible individuals. (Point 1 of the Initiative’s “Objectives and activities,” as codified by the charity’s trustees.)

A one-sentence preamble states that these aims are “to be pursued in accordance with Christian values” – a concept worthy of its own historical account, though not for here alas.

The charity has been created in order that CLC’s interests outside explicitly proselytic domains can be publically operationalised independently of the church. In the first instance this allows CLC to separate its financial accounts between affairs of “(evangelical) church” and affairs of “local outreach” – this, as expected, is the account given by the church’s leaders and by familiarised core members. (Members are generally better informed of such matters at CLC than they are at Journeyers; unsurprising I think, given the other contextualising factors – specifically the apparently greater “maturity” of the religious body here). But the creation of the LCC Initiative charity subsidiary clearly is intended, also, to lend a more capacious public legitimacy to City Life Church in Folkfield. The most substantial benefit in this regard is that by presenting itself in an alternate formal guise – as something other than a religion-advancing Christian group – the church can compete more openly and competitively for support and sponsorship from the widest range of charitable and grant-giving bodies.

This recalls evidence from the previous case study in which Journeyers’ executive pastor articulates his suspicions about the instrumentality of the noun “church” in commercial business; his reasons for suppressing reference to the church when marketing The Place alleged of the concept a probable disrepute among prospective business clients. In CLC’s case, the theory is basically the same, the *situation* different. Here, the church’s social services evidently warrant similar protection against the likely presuppositions of secular patrons; though quite clearly, implications are somewhat more pronounced in the latter case, CLC’s community work being directed at the “wellbeing” of individual people: in their own words, to “develop the capacity and skills” of “members of the socially and economically disadvantaged,” rendered so due to “their youth, age, infirmity or disability.” The church’s inclusion here of “youth” alongside “age” (presumably “old age”) as itself a cause for social and economic “disadvantage” is interesting. I suggest though that it is far from of inexplicable when one considers again the preoccupation with errant “youth culture” held in common among NcE churches generally.

Accordingly, the Charitable Objectives codified in CLC’s subsidiary company with the Charity Commission mention nothing about religion or Christianity, but advocate “the prevention or relief of poverty” and “economic/community development/employment” to “the general public and mankind,” by providing “human resources, buildings, facilities,

services, advocacy, advice and information.” In terms of its material resources CLC is well-equipped to provide all of the above.

At an initial summation, the corporate arrangement at CLC, presenting to public account a proselytic religious organisation with its own functionally non-conversionist (perhaps, “nominally Christian”) subsidiary for social provision, is but one collective manifestation of what Journeyers’ leaders have earlier described as a “pragmatic” approach to contemporary independent church incorporation. Leaders there, as we saw, have not been shy of articulating the need to consider strategically the appropriate legal identity and structure with which to publically incorporate one’s growth-focussed church, in order to maximise controls over congregational governance and finance, whilst earnestly enjoining any formal incorporative instruments to the vague but unimpeachable mission of “doing good” for “community and society.” The explicit task of recruiting Christian converts, when raised to secular inquiry, is warranted “off the back” of this superficial latter account – a matter of necessity, perhaps, for neocharismatic leaders faced with any measure of non-religious inquiry (which, in Britain, is potentially everywhere a presence outside the churches’ own social environments).

Empirically evidenced at Journeyers, this presents itself as a plausible hypothesis for the general structure of CLC; but the latter’s empirical record takes a different course, as the Metre Crow narrative alone indicates. In addition, no such explanation as I received at Journeyers has been articulated by CLC’s leaders or core members. Here, the existence of a legally-incorporated welfare subsidiary is rationalised – particularly by Phil, its designated “project manager” – as a natural subdivision of City Life Church, as redolent of no particular “strategy” at all: perhaps most significantly, as an expression of rational planning by an apostolic movement that *embodies* an ethos of local social welfare. In her own exposition of the Life Venue, Sarah articulates this in a very personal way:

I’ve [only] come to Metre Crow, never the city centre service except maybe once... so my heart is *here*. We very rarely go to [CLC] city centre because we don’t have a car, and even getting to meetings is very difficult for us... so my heart is very much here... I’m not really caught up in the higher-up [church institutional] thing, its more the day-to-day stuff for me... I think what drew me here was the heart for the community here.

For a long time I went to [a local evangelical Anglican church], which was very middle-class, which was great for me [then] because I made a lot of Christian friends around my age. But then there came a point when I realised that my heart was more for living and

going to a church where they were based more in the *community*... not one where everyone *drives* to it. Which actually happens more [at CLC] city centre, but my heart is for a church where people walk to it and people from the estate will come to it.

This is to be evidenced more directly when one stands back and observes the division of “projects” contained within the Initiative, and the historical order of their development *since* CLC’s (relatively recent) institution at the Life Centre. But also – in the final part of this chapter – as hinted above of Sarah, in respect of CLC core members who are themselves living in Metre Crow: some of whom are not there merely incidentally.

As a registered charity, the Life Centre Community Initiative evidences a procedure not undertaken by Journeyers, whose equivalent organisation of community outreach – LoveFolkfield – is only *referred* to as a “charity”: in fact being no more than an online identity – “a brand,” as they would otherwise describe it – used to incorporate that church’s greatly less-developed programme of community engagement. LoveFolkfield’s institutional ethereality reflects the apparent distrust of external funding streams that Journeyers’ executive pastor has intimated of his church: such organised engagement with outside agencies, he has averred, provoke “distraction” from a church’s core aims because you end up “working to someone else’s” aims instead of one’s own (one’s own, of course, being Journeyers’ institutional rationale, as established by the case study). He even – without my prompting – pointed up CLC and Newfrontiers as examples of what he meant (though without proffering any actual details, I noted). This attitude is contradicted somewhat by LoveFolkfield’s own recent acquisitions of external sponsorship.

In any case, in the light of an examination of CLC’s practices, the executive pastor’s remarks appear to have been not just an aspersion on external financial patronage – regardless of donors’ own intentions – but a virtual disparagement of CLC’s broader ecclesial model: That is, his comments carry a necessary reference to CLC’s social provisionist undertakings, these being (on this emerging account) a core element of CLC’s evangelical institutionalism generally.⁵⁵ As I would suspect it, the suggestion by Journeyers’ executive is that CLC –

⁵⁵ One is tempted to see the pastor’s comments about CLC as comments on the Newfrontiers movement, of course: which they probably are, but perhaps presumptively on his part. Journeyers’ executive pastor, for example, had only recently converted to the faith when Pastor Roy found him at FU’s Christian Union, and it was likely that his knowledge of other neocharismatic movements was not great, indeed so if conversations with his peers have been anything to go by also.

particularly under the lesser evangelical guise of the Initiative just discussed – undermined religious growth for religious growth's sake: this, of course, hints at just the kind of fundamental distinction in neocharismatic institutional thinking just mentioned, and referenced earlier in the essay as a discourse among post-denominational Christian leaders opposing “numerical” to “spiritual” growth within modern evangelical churches.

Examining recent records, some 87 per cent of the Initiative's income is in revenue grants, received from an impressive range of *secular* local and national trusts. These have ranged from charitable funds allocated by local legal firms, to nationally-regarded bodies like BBC Children in Need, Comic Relief and the Funding Network. A substantial amount of CLC's community work funding has come through the N—Community Foundation. This is a regional charity – now one of 46 similar bodies in Britain⁵⁶ – set up in 2007 with the aim of generating from corporate and philanthropic donors a sustainable long-term endowment fund for allocation to county-specific causes: many, that is, illustrative of entrenched socio-economic ills at local (sub)urban levels, such as the case of Metre Crow well supplies. Several of the Initiative's individual grant-givers have registered themselves with the N—Community Foundation, and it appears to be through this collective body that CLC has acquired much of its community funding. A significant portion of this funding, as articulated in CLC's applications for it, indeed focusses on “improving the lives of young people.” Again, the social profile of Metre Crow satisfies very well the kind of qualitative “poverty criteria” – especially for troublesome youth elements – that social grant-givers like the N—Community Foundation have been looking for.

This may explain something, too, about the sudden and extraordinary threefold increase in grant monies for community provision awarded to the Initiative between 2011 and 2012. In that single year, CLC's (that is, the Initiative's) year-end social work sponsorship leaps from £29,362 to £98,203. The Initiative's earliest available accounts show that incoming grants had stood at £24,574 for 2009 and reduced to £20,700 for 2010, so there was no incremental rise in progress. (For 2013, the leap continues, with £119,250 coming in.) As mentioned, 2010 was the church's first full year of Sunday residences in the Reginald Centre's main hall, and in September 2011 the church was offered the use of the rooms that

One of CLC's younger leaders has suggested that modern Christians “cannot recognise the distinctiveness of one's movement” without crossing over from one to another (as he had done from the Church of England to Newfrontiers, in his case). Journeymen's young assistant leaders were, in the main, Pastor Roy's protegees from the start of their serious Christian lives.

⁵⁶ The concept is an American one – see <http://ukcommunityfoundations.org/about/history>.

would become the Life Venue. It would appear, then, that the church's acquisition of premises in Metre Crow indeed has had an immediate impact on their eligibility for wider social sponsorship, something which the church has realised to tremendous financial effect.

To give a flavour of the project proposals fielded by CLC through the Initiative following the church's expansion to Metre Crow. The County Council press-released details of the N—Community Foundation's £150,000 "Youth Innovation Fund" in May 2012, £5,000 of which was awarded to "Life Centre Community Initiative ... to pilot a new post to increase engagement with young people in the Metre Crow area of Folkfield." Of course I did not (unfortunately) have access to the church's grant applications, but their typical content may be supposed as reflecting the "increase engagement" clause seen in the statement above. Throughout this period and continuing on at present, most of the church's pitches to external funders are of course necessarily prospective: proposals for "initiatives" that CLC had yet to launch, or field test anywhere; that is assuming that such proposals have been really substantive in their content. There is little evidence to suggest they have, or even could have been, given the church's inexperience in administering social provision in an estate like Metre Crow.

That is not necessarily to cast particular judgment on the church, but I think reflects just as much on contemporary emphases on "entrepreneurialism" as a catalyst to social action – and most importantly to its *funding*: at the institutional core of which is the "social enterprise" model itself – which of course can be viewed, at least through the agency of certain dispensers, to stimulate some kind of moral reconciliation of private capitalism with public social welfare. Evidence from the Journeyers case – namely the executive pastors' discourse – demonstrates the plasticity of the Social Enterprise concept and how it can be "claimed" and advanced with minimal substance, in fact: in that case, furnishing us with some knowledge about contemporary Christians who are far from unsettled by their (and their churches') place in the neoliberal paradigm, and positively embrace it. The neocharismatics of Newfrontiers appear to differ somewhat on this score – at the very least, CLC has little of Journeyers' spoken *attitude* for the topic. Perhaps interesting when one considers the former's proven aptitude for grant acquisition: perhaps, however, merely evidence of CLC's advanced strategic thinking over Journeyers as a Charitable Company.

The third sector's emerging "enterprise" rubric inspired an event in March 2011 that demonstrated CLC's increasing willingness to step very publically outside its religious identity zone and into the guise of a non-profit social provider in order to secure grants. The N—Community Foundation and the Funding Network co-hosted a "Dragon's Den-style

event” in the city centre – in a building just a few doors up from CLC’s city centre premises, incidentally – which concluded with a “final round” featuring five local “community groups” who had “[won] their way through to face the Folkfield public [the evening’s seated audience] as the ‘dragons’ to vote for the best fundraising cause.” The five “finalists” were a community sports foundation, a charity supporting local bereaved children, a carers’ trust, a local youth dance group, and the Life Centre Community Initiative, which was presented simply as a “community group” running “a range of activities in the heart of Metre Crow.” In the days previous, the Initiative’s appointed manager and trainee preacher Phil, and CLC’s lead Elder were alternately photographed by the Folkfield Daily News and presented as the “directors” of the Initiative – rather, that is, than the charity’s *actual* trustees, who as mentioned, are not among the senior leaders of the church. These official trustees were thus not candidates for advancing the public faces of the church’s community engagement. These were roles reserved for the church leaders: not, however, *as* named leaders of Folkfield’s principal evangelical church, but simply as local charity organisers alongside other secular competitors.

Between 2009 and 2013 the Initiative has solicited revenue grants of nearly £300,000⁵⁷ in furtherance of its poverty-relieving objectives (separate to the nearly £5 million received from religious donors by the church’s religious corporation, the City Life Centre, over the same period). About half this has covered the wages for the Initiative’s employees in this time (one person, rising to three people by 2013); the great majority of the rest has covered property leases, equipment maintenance and general consumables. Throughout this period, the church’s weekday residency at Metre Crow, and with it the local impact the leaders have envisioned achieving through the planned Life Venue (much of their deeper conviction riding, recall, upon the five-site expansion “prophecy”) largely stalled until September 2013, two years *after* the church had been offered the use of the Reginald Centre’s adjacent rooms by Folkfield City Council, and thus over two years after its leaders had begun securing revenue grants to fund their promised outreach. In fact, it took the better part of that first year for the Council owners to hand over the keys to the building: I have sensed, speaking with them on Sunday mornings, the frustration of the nascent Venue’s leaders and volunteers, as they waited many months for the local council to surrender the full access to the building they had been promised.

⁵⁷ This figure includes both restricted and unrestricted donations and grants.

The impression, of course, is that CLC was unwilling to expand its full time and resources to the Metre Crow venture until it had full control of the proposed space. The council was felt to be dragging its feet; that was perhaps not unrelated to the fact, though, that the church seemed to have no concrete plans to speak of with respect to their use of the site at that time. The longer one spends in the company of the church's teams, however, the less important it seems that could even be to them. The excitement of "starting things up" at the site has been everywhere expressed but little really *substantiated*; CLC has the money, and the will – theirs and of course God's – but no specific expertise, and no point of contact with the estate beyond the Reginald Centre. On this perspective, the institution of the Initiative was supposed to effect (alongside the corporate benefits mentioned already) some concretisation of the church's stored abilities in the area of social welfare. The official general statement of the charity's objectives – which is articulated largely in the promise simply to "provide activities" – is not capable of communicating many. But, on the other hand, there is scarcely *more* capability to be expressed here than is offered by *officially* religion-advancing charities: most of whom – especially churches, and including CLC – incorporate the very same "poverty-relieving" local aims, only prefaced them with an extra, primary objective of "advancing the Christian faith." Viewed this way, between the charity "x neocharismatic church" and the charity "community initiative (*of* x neocharismatic church)," CLC and the Initiative together demonstrate their differences only on paper.

It is important to understand then that this is not a reflection on the personal abilities of the community project's designated volunteers. It seems rather to be an indication of what really are the pre-defined limitations upon a post-denominational group – however "modern," "culturally-engaged" and "financially blessed" it is – in actually achieving significant "local impact" outside direct religious-evangelical activities (like street evangelism, say – something well off the menu of respectable options for the strategising neocharismatic church of today). In this respect, one thing that distinguishes Journeymen's leadership discourse from CLC's is that in the former, the leaders merely *speak* with more profane abandon about their church's wish to be an institution of "general influence" in the public sphere, as if not "just" a church with a worshipfully-committed congregation; but, ultimately, were none the wiser on *what* this is to manifest in. Whatever else, the rhetoric of the church leaderships certainly outstrip the church's observable achievements in both cases.

Nonetheless, once the council's delays had ended, no other agencies resident at the Reginald Centre have such ownership of space as does CLC, nor have any proceeded to "brand stamp" the Centre as CLC has done. The new "Life Venue" logo soon labelled

relevant exterior walls of the Centre, in the same font style as found at CLC city centre and in the church's in-house literature and website. CLC's residency at the Centre has been publicly formalised further with the council's erection of new exterior graphic signs, displaying to visitors the Centre's long-term lease "tenants" including "Life Venue, run by City Life Church."

Folkfield City Council's official public (online and leafleted) profiles of the Reginald Centre, between resumés for the Centre's daily coffee shop and a listing of some of the Centre's regular recreations (bowls, an after-school education club, junior martial arts, table tennis and others), feature brief summaries of "agencies based at the centre": the nursery, a regular NHS walk-in, the council's IT centre, and Job Centre Plus. With top billing, though, is the Life Venue, which the Council promotes as "hold[ing] various activities aiming to bring benefit to those living in the Metre Crow area." The council cannot publicise any specific services as the provision of the Life Venue. CLC, in securing the rolling lease of a whole section of the building, has been given free reign to use the space as it wishes. This is a unique situation at the Reginald Centre, of course. Every other social and commercial service can be specified in Council publicity materials; furthermore, their residency at the Centre could be easily associated with Metre Crow and its recognised social and economic needs. This could not be the case with a church tenant arriving from another part of the city.

The council's profile of the Centre does, however, feature publicity for City Life Church, which the Council notes "meets at The Reginald Centre every Sunday from 10.45am to 12.45pm. There's something for all ages and everyone is welcome": this is followed with an email address to contact someone from CLC's Metre Crow operation; a telephone number and Facebook address for CLC city centre; and a website link for "life-venue.com." At the time of writing, that website remains non-existent: perhaps giving a further clue as to the Venue's (and CLC's) slower-than-anticipated progress on the Metre Crow estate.

Community engagement at CLC: from the city to the estate

As addressed, CLC's secondary base at Metre Crow, the first of four to come in the suburban environs of Folkfield according to the Elders' vaunted prophecy, began as a new local congregation: a scaled-down replication of CLC's city centre services, organising charismatic worship for a locally-maligned residential estate. Because a thriving Life Centre congregation was the desired outcome of CLC's activities in Metre Crow, the church site obviously had to be secured as a first course of action. The leaders had approached the

Reginald Centre early on to inquire about using their main hall for a service of Sunday worship; they also asked the Metre Crow primary school if they could use theirs. Both said no; the Reginald Centre's objection, I was told, being on the grounds that there were no staff present on a Sunday to open the building and oversee its use. One of the Centre's regular receptionists – not a Christian herself – offered to work the extra shift: CLC was more than happy to pay her to do so, thereby extinguishing any practical objections from Folkfield City Council.

From the beginning then, the prospect of establishing a base for social provision to the estate outside the weekly congregational domain was really something allied to the larger intention of "sharing the good news" with the residents of a conscripted local area. An evangelical narrative preserves the belief among members that the church's presence in Metre Crow is providence from God. This is always sufficient as an agreement among charismatic friends, but the corporate institution of City Life Church was required to prepare, from this sectarian religious discourse, an account that would satisfy external audiences: not limited to State regulative ones, but construed in that image. Church leaders, through the guise of the Life Centre Community Initiative, said they were "convinced that the answer to poverty in our city is empowering those in need to overcome the things that are holding them back." A discourse of individual change – a change of *personhood* explicitly announced in one's conversion to a charismatic faith – grows very naturally upon these principles. Absenting the religious element however, this discourse satisfies quite easily the rhetorical expectations of philanthropists and welfare grant agencies looking to donate to "grassroots" causes. Evidently, then, it has allowed the growth-focussed neocharismatic church the room it needs to pursue its proselytic aims alongside ostensible "social change" initiatives. It seems also that agencies dispensing small grants are not in the habit of *following up* on the progress of their beneficiaries. CLC, like other local charities, has developed a practice of applying for many small grants, not few large ones. This is a situation that has been inevitably enhanced by the growth of third sector industries in the last two decades, and looks set to grow further into the future with the success of collective corporate funding – such as precisely that being pioneered by the N— Community Foundation, for example.

Newfrontiers, in its long experience, knows the procedures by which a church or congregation can be "parachuted" into a new area. At CLC, this has involved identifying and inveigling core members from the original congregation to comprise a small team of pioneers to the new site, whereupon they watch and wait as it grows; as it has done quite slowly at

Metre Crow, not exceeding forty regular attendees during my time there: many of whom, as mentioned, are pre-existing CLC members.

Of course, the revelators of CLC's five-church vision – none of whom are younger than their late thirties, some of whom are much older, and most of whom have been involved in Restorationist Christian leadership for many years – carry this stock of knowledge within them. In person, they conduct themselves much like one would expect of men so completely indoctrinated to such a well-travelled institution: always hopeful of their movement's progress, but closely alert to the corruption threatened by advancing public exposure (and not to say – of the movements' older stalwarts specifically – very well-exercised by the experience of forty years' British "New Church" growth, and the many churches and leaders that have crashed to the wayside in that time).

Pastor Roy's experience in church leadership and "growth" may outstrip all that of CLC's Elders in its sheer colour and geographical variety, but he is a leader unto himself, and has not learned his "apostolic" profession within anything like the tightly-guarded institutional structure of a quasi-denomination like Newfrontiers. The institution of senior leadership roles among a cabal of young rookie neocharismatics, as Pastor Roy has effected at Journeyers, is not so much unthinkable at a church like CLC as *unfeasible* in all respects. There is no provision for such a personality-driven human agency in the Newfrontiers church, and thus none of the entrepreneurially-suffused social and theo-political structures that (as witnessed at Journeyers) are prepared to flow from it. Although the two churches have followed a similar time scale as cases of "neocharismatic church in Folkfield" – both Journeyers and CLC establishing in the city in the early nineties – it was plain to see the great instability that was inherent to an "apostolic" group that lacked wider institutional support, guidance, and restraint, as Journeyers has done. Of course, as I have detailed, Journeyers' course has effected a complete transition following its founder's early death. (Dr. George died the same year that CLC upgraded to its permanent city centre premises, coincidentally.) Had Newfrontiers' charismatic founder Terry Virgo died a few years into his job leading the incipient Newfrontiers, there is reason not to believe that *his* movement would have continued the course it has, or that CLC would ever have existed.

Still it is clear at least from the example of CLC that Newfrontiers fully intends its local offices to be determined not just by the ideological predilections of their charismatic leaders, but also by external local circumstances. This general approach very likely matches a recent decision by an ageing Terry Virgo – only announced late during my time in the field – that is set to effect potentially seismic change to the movement itself, namely through the

demise of Newfrontiers the singular movement, to be replaced by a nation-wide spread of regionally-appointed “apostolic spheres” – new autonomous networks each led by an “apostolic leader” chosen by Virgo. The changes to the movement at its highest levels has not intended to effect the local churches themselves, and is thus not of particular relevance to the local study at this time; clearly in the future this situation could change.

CLC likes to warrant its headquartered presence in the city centre as an expression of the church’s wish to attend to the “needs of the city”; *alongside* state and secular human support services. The church’s choice of main premises testifies to its leaders’ original institutional expectations. On a map, the City Life Centre building stands right in the bullseye of Folkfield’s city centre environs: the only NcE church in Folkfield not to be based either in the suburban outlays or further afield (as was Journeyers at The Place, of course – at a distance from suburban neighbourhoods). In other words, CLC’s choice of location stands for its members as a message to the city of its willingness to engage with the conditions of the urban landscape (and Folkfield City at its commercial and economic core). The city centre is, they say, a “key point for vulnerable and isolated adults” – the main demographic to which CLC’s social change discourse is observably directed. This is a striking contrast to Journeyers, and not simply in respect of spoken institutional discourse: it appears that CLC has backed up a much more vocalised “serve the poor” rhetoric by physically basing itself in the urban centre of the city, where – the expensive environs of its K— Street residency notwithstanding – the indices for Folkfield’s social deprivation is more immediately visible, and accessible; with vagrancy and homelessness the most conspicuous of these, as might be expected.

This locational narrative indeed determined CLC’s first organised, separately-funded programme of “welfare provision.” In 2002, some five years after the church’s acquisition of its large city centre premises, the church launched “City Care,” a “drop-in service” for local rough-sleepers and other wayward city residents. The account as I received it was that back in 2000, the church’s members wished to be “doing their part” in serving the needs of Folkfield’s urban transient population, and launched City Care after finding that there were no feeding and clothing services open in Folkfield on a Sunday, presenting a suitable window for the church’s provisions.. This narrative, then, preserved a claim that the programme’s envisioning had followed the normative Christian motivations of CLC’s leaders, while its practical institution had its origins in some degree of consultation with secular social providers.

At the centre of the service, which ran for two hours every Sunday afternoon, was a hot two-course meal prepared by a team of half a dozen core members in the kitchen of CLC's building. The church had also purchased a number of washing machines, which recipients were encouraged to use for their clothes, and a shower was made available if they needed it. Recipients – “guests” and “clients” in the members’ talk (recall the same appellatives at Journeyers, too) – were also offered second-hand clothing. The church more recently has done its own small research on the people it hosts, confirming much of what is witnessable of City Care’s recipients on any given weekend. They are overwhelmingly male (up to 91 per cent), and a majority – nearly 70 per cent – are aged between 35 and 54. Only two in ten are young adults: confirming that most of those returning to CLC for the weekly drop-in are beset long-term (even life-long) by their social and economic problems. Many, inevitably, have mental health illnesses, learning impairments, or substance addictions. Most in fact are not actively homeless, but live in rented social housing; and in turn the church also receives some referrals from local social housing agencies, including the local YMCA, which is in the course of developing its own social housing complex nearby (and whose leadership, I have found, is also infused with a perhaps increasingly neocharismatic presence – this for a case study elsewhere, perhaps).

Each Sunday, while the CLC worship service takes place inside the main conference hall, men begin to arrive outside the wood-panelled side doors of the building. By two o’clock – by which time most of the morning’s worshippers have left – a small crowd gathers there: to be queued and let in not through the church’s well-kept foyer, but directly to its catering rooms where the meals are served. Before opening the doors, the City Care team gather around the main serving table and prayed aloud for God’s blessing on that afternoon’s Care service.

To that specific end – evangelism of the City Care users – the programme is rather restricted in its abilities. In my own bluster I had anticipated some kind of organised proselytism perhaps, but this has not been presented during meal time to my eyes; nor without the users’ consent. There is no kind of obligated praying, for example, and no impromptu preaching, as is sometimes reported of similar schemes in other churches. In-house literature – from CLC, from Newfrontiers, from the Bible – is displayed on nearby shelves, and a little on the tables themselves. But it appears well understood by the church members present that most of City Care’s regular recipients are not easily distracted by any of their evangelical overtures. It is very clearly the food they come for; I suspect not least because the food is very good, in fact. While assisting in the City Care kitchen myself –

stirring through an enormous pan of caramel for that day's dessert of sticky toffee pudding – and have been struck by the variety and the quality of CLC's offerings to clients, a considerable advance on what one might expect. Take for comparison, say, Folkfield's central United Reform Church, which permanently displays a sign on its forecourt advertising a "SIMPLE MEAL" to visitors every Sunday.

CLC, by contrast, does not advertise City Care. There is no expenditure laid out for promoting the service publically. And in fact, the absence of any public announcement for the programme reflects the officially non-religious functionality of the scheme, which is always advanced in members' discourse as a service of "practical" provision to the city's "homeless and vulnerably housed residents." The demand for these has, however, grown each year, evidently through word of mouth on the street: to the point where up to 60 individuals regularly arrive for a free meal each Sunday, and the City Care volunteers have to cater for them with several time-limited sittings. The City Care service has, in short, become strongly routinised within the bounds of its orginative purpose – the "practical" bounds it has professed to share with the city's weekday homeless providers.

This persistent growth in uptake has of course induced pressure not just on the catering itself, but upon the evangelistic efforts of the volunteers. City Care's method for "sharing Jesus" with these recipients has been developed through what they call a "befriending" approach. Volunteers are requested to *talk* with individual recipients (with those who were willing or able to welcome the advance). They are encouraged to engage over the long term, getting to know them personally, learning their stories; an example of the "relational" emphasis in "discipling" favoured in recent years by the Newfrontiers movement. Week on week, inevitably, certain individuals become well known to the team, and in doing so are configured as candidates for invitation into the church. In 2011, the CLC extended this programme by hosting mid-week events at the Life Centre at which selected City Care users would be "mentored" by church volunteers. As a result of some of these interactions, trust was fomented enough that some users received assistance in their travails outside the church; some City Care volunteers, for example, helping their contacts in housing or job application processes.

Alas few, it appears, have joined the church and "found Christ." But then, such examples of material assistance and "befriending" outside the church are relatively seldom themselves, because they depend entirely upon the voluntary contribution of motivated church members to the cause. The actual size of CLC's personal mentoring volunteer force is very small – a handful of volunteers, negligible as a proportion of the church's 470-strong

formal membership. The church leaders have preferred not to address the shortfall directly. Of course what *has* been achieved – the stories recorded of a City Care user finding a job after six months’ friendship with the team, or curtailing their drug use, or finding accommodation – are justly celebrated. But the evident struggle of leaders to engage more regular church members in the programme – for mentorship and mission – is a not unmentionable fact, and indeed underscores the latent disappointment of City Care’s “greater purpose” for CLC.

This greater purpose, importantly, has not been simply the making of more Christians. Project leaders are perfectly conscious of some of City Care users’ disruptive natures, and erratic behaviours, and this has provided that the programme was never to be a straightforward source of new converts; even less a source of new CLC members, given what could be clients’ unpredictable responses in the controlled social environments of the church’s worship services and small groups. (Indeed, every year the City Care managers have to ban certain individuals from the lunch service altogether; usually to be allowed readmittance after a stipulated period.)

The impulse to “change lives” in this social domain – the domain of the economically disenfranchised, the mentally unhealthy, the addicted, the unhomed –presents to a small team of church volunteers a largely insurmountable task, as they are quite aware; members of the team profess an understanding that the “differences” they make to individual lives are “often very small,” and this fact is attested by the team to the profoundly disadvantageous condition of many of their “guests.” But it is important here, again, to interpret this challenge on terms that are appropriate to the motivation and the behaviour of City Care’s neocharismatic operators – not, say, to their equivalents in the secular welfare sector. In many ways City Care presents its own case study of “poverty relief” as articulated within a neocharismatic religious realm, and the first requirement here is to acknowledge the conceptual limits to the notion of “poverty relief” that is particular to *this* organisation – not as a “welfare project,” but as *this church*. At the point of use, “City Care” is only a name; its operators always core members of CLC. Their rationalisation of the work done here each Sunday does not flow from any secular social work manual, but from the relevant normative discourses that sustain their moral membership of the church.

An idea of how CLC has operationalised City Care specifically, and indeed its “care of the poor and needy” more generally, could be drawn from its presentation of the programmes’ “achievements and performance” in the Life Church Community Initiative trustees’ report. Here, City Care’s project managers distinguish the service’s purposes

between “Meeting Needs”; “Being Friends”; the aforementioned “Opportunities to explore the Christian faith”; and lastly, “Becoming everything they were made to be.” Of these, only the first obviously concerns the practical services of feeding, washing and clothing – over which CLC professed to have consulted with Folkfield’s local social providers before City Care’s launch. The rest – and the devices to which the scheme’s managers and volunteers are evidently most committed as a charity, to judge from the far greater word space given to their explication – are the church’s own innovations, devised for the “emotional,” “psychological” and “spiritual” benefit of users, and promoting City Care’s achievements in “building relationships with guests,” “recognis[ing] that the greatest thing we can give them is friendship.” These published categories match those articulated in members’ spoken accounts to me, but also more significantly in their frequent reports to the wider congregation, in conversations and in-house publications – as reports, that is, to the wider religious body of what this “community of disciples” was been achieving: an evident source of pride to CLC’s regular members in conversation, regardless of whether they have personally contributed.

Wherever possible, reports detail the *evangelical* impact of members’ efforts: not numerically substantial but always expressive of great qualitative achievement; and in doing so, they communicate afresh an indigenously-advanced “complementarity” between pursuits of prosaic social improvement and activities pursuant to a Charismatic Christian life:

One guest who’d been sleeping rough for years went along to the Alpha course and was ‘pleasantly surprised’ by it. He continued for the rest of the course. We caught up with him later in the year to find that he’d been able to get a job and was looking at houses to rent.

We met another young man in September 2012 who was sleeping rough and sofa surfing. In September he took a Bible away with him. In October he went to the God Story [a short talk offered to City Care users after the lunch service]. In December he joined [the theatre group] and performed in their Christmas show. In January he attended church. In March we gave him the reference that enabled him to get into the Emmaus community in Bedfordshire. In May he had his first holiday, during which he came to visit us to thank us for our help and generally catch up. We would now genuinely describe him as a friend much more than a client. This is exactly what we’re trying to achieve.

These, then, are the actual outcomes of City Care; far more, of course, than a shower and a free meal. As reportable charitable welfare outcomes for the Initiative, they are subject to limited quantifiability: interestingly, though, this is emphasised only by the project

managers' efforts to do just that. The Initiative each year records the number of "different people" it serves, the hot meals it cooks, the loads of laundry it washes, the showers it provides, and the sets of clothes it has given out; the most recent reports claim an impressive 650 recipients in one year, and 2,500 hot meals.

But the charity offers one other quantification of an area of City Care – that is "opportunities to explore the Christian faith." Trustees here record "6 guests" taking away a Bible, "5 guests" attending an Alpha course, and "50 people" being prayed for. Now the relative paucity of these figures would appear to be more than enough to evidence the realities of CLC's flagship social welfare scheme as a programme for evangelical religious gain. The reality, then, would be that City Care is no such programme, regardless of its members' hopes. It is a practical service to feed the "poor and needy" of Folkfield on the one day of the week on which no other local agency is open; as to the proselytic activities provided by the church's team to City Care's users, these are to be expected as the inevitable ministrations of charismatic Christian individuals: the regular "God Story" presentation, for example, an exteriorised outcome of some men's internal motivations as conversion-seeking Christians, but not, after over a decade's running, believed to constitute particular strategic returns for the growing church.

But this ignores the institutional account that is also somewhere present. Notwithstanding the Initiative trustees' inclusion of annual figures for Bible hand-outs, the proselytic utility of City Care is not measured by the church in conversions gained. Nor for that matter, though, is City Care's "performance" as a public charity initiative measured in job applications made, addictions beaten, or residences secured among its users, as perhaps it could be. On this view it appears less the case that City Care "underperforms" on any long-term objectives (religious or otherwise), and suggests rather that outcomes for the scheme's users are, in any case, only a secondary issue. Arrivals can, and will, be fed, clothed and counselled; each meal an end in itself on the church's perspective, and one for very simple replication (and record) at the same time each week. These ends, for all their usefulness to recipients and to the city,⁵⁸ are not commensurate with the *institutional* advancements envisions by CLC for itself; advancements which are plainly of primary importance to the church even through the ostensibly welfare-focussed agency of the Initiative.

⁵⁸ One recipient praised City Care because it meant he "didn't have to steal for food"; a comment subsequently reproduced by the Initiative in its performance reports.

The empirical evidence for this is that City Care's operation does itself feed the church's concurrently evolving institutional growth practices: for the weekly scheme has been invested in recent years as a vehicle for core membership "training" as well. The numerous facets of the programme, from catering to befriending roles, are incorporated into the church's "members manual" as a live resource for regular CLC members, who are constantly encouraged by their group leaders to "grow in their lives as Christians" by volunteering themselves to the church's programmes. City Care, for obvious reasons, presents to the leadership of CLC a most appropriate environment for ministering to "the poor and needy" – as they are actually generalised in leaders' discourse, upholding those archaic biblical designations. This objectification of the Initiative's recipients – articulated in fact not just of City Care's homeless and vulnerably housed clients, but of all the Initiative's prospective beneficiaries – is intended by the wider religious institution to speak up for the sovereign moral dispensation of CLC's corpus of Christian volunteers: all of whom, of course, are parties to the "Great Commission." The moral designation of the Initiative's beneficiaries as "the poor and needy" evidences the propositional attitude of neocharismatic members; apparently no different to their denominational forebears, which should not surprise given neocharismatics' doctrinal conservatism. But the practical institution of "training" for members in how to "do" Christian service (though as CLC's leaders determine it, of course) is a site of action-orientation, and one very significant to an account of the conservative post-denominational church as a *technologically* modernised actor. Technologies themselves are something that agencies of the state economy can relate to and approve of, assuming that the more contentious propositional attitudes of church actors – their conservative social dogmas – remain obscured, which they very easily are: kept, in fact, at the level of close interpersonal communication alone, and thus difficult for the outside observer to access.

I have felt some unease at a refrain heard several times from members in the neocharismatic field and during City Care's events to the effect that "there will always be the poor": that they are a God-supplied presence in society, as if instrumental to the mature Christian's labours as "the hands and feet" of Christ's body in the social moral order. This narrative is empirically evidenced by the existence of membership "training" structures like those observed at CLC through City Care. However it became clearer through this participative experience that "the poor" – the body of dishevelled individuals I have watched arriving, eating, fooling, and leaving between 2 and 4 o'clock each Sunday – are operationalised plainly *non-politically* in this way. The physical social environment of City

Care appears to secular eyes as an environment for ends-oriented social service, but is something more under the moral codes that govern a *Christian's* contact with such individuals.

It is perhaps in response to these practical conditions that CLC has recently made attempts to operationalise their recipient cohort more scientifically by designing short questionnaires and keeping short case study accounts, so that they can get to “better understand the needs” of their “guests.” In 2013 the Life Church Community Initiative’s trustees conducted a survey of forty of those present at City Care on a Sunday afternoon. The survey took a quantitative approach to generalising the “needs” of City Care users and the “solutions” they favoured. What actually transpired of this small sample, however, was an attempt by CLC’s leaders to extract an account of “the homeless and vulnerably housed people” of Folkfield that enforced a traditional stereotype of the (Biblically) needful poor; while noticeably over-emphasising their psychological deficiencies, and thusly the *emotional* – read holistic, spiritual, *religious* – needs of individuals. This readied the subjects for charismatic evangelical “engagement.”

Respondents were asked, “What hurts the most?,” and offered eight (increasingly dejectful) options: “Broken Relationships,” “Hurt by others,” “Bereavement,” “Feeling stuck/helpless/unable to change situation,” “Lonliness [sic]/feeling unwanted,” “Bad things happening to others,” and “Relationships (romantic).” Only one among these referred directly to corporeal matters: “Material poverty” – this option then supplemented (presupposing a less than literate respondent) with “life is hard.” Respondents answered pretty evenly across these options, but “Material poverty” was less opted for than all the others except loneliness. This may have been preparing a very agreeable result for the neocharismatic inquirers as they presented the follow-up question, “What helps?” – again with a choice of several answers, the last two this time aggrandising the specifically “Christian” ministrations provided by the Initiative and the City Care team: “Catering,” “Shower” and “Laundry”; but then “Love and friendship (includes welcome, care, support, talking, listening, counselling),” and “Giving hope.” Alas, a considerable majority opted for “Catering” – CLC’s hot two-course lunch, of course – as the most helpful gesture to their situation. “Giving hope” was barely attended by respondents: perhaps explained by that notion’s entrenched Christian reference, likely to have been quite unregistered among the cohort for this survey.

The larger minority of City Care’s respondents to the survey did indeed cite “Love and friendship” as the most welcome gift of the church’s weekly programme, and this was sufficient enough for the Initiative, in its next Charity Commission report, to present the

research as answers that “did not surprise us. They confirmed,” claimed the charity, “the need to continue offering a combination of meeting basic needs, building friendships, and providing emotional/psychological/spiritual benefit (which is the reason we provide opportunities to explore the Christian faith).”

It is tempting to ask why a charity registering no legally-sanctioned “religious objectives” would expend the effort articulating to its secular regulators whatever small religious gains it does make. It is less confusing to assume, however, that such an expenditure is, whatever else, an exercising of City Life Church’s understanding of itself as a “charitable” public actor: and to view this as a modern, technologised notion, manifesting in procedures of organisation – the church’s “training” schemes, for example – more than anything relating to moral propositionality, such is the nature of the religious institution.

Back to Metre Crow

Life Centre Community Initiative Folkfield was set up in 2008 as a separate Charitable Company to house the City Care Fund, an account opened by the church to solicit donations to City Care. The City Care Fund was, at that point, the sole restricted fund within the Initiative. The Initiative, therefore, was created originally to publically incorporate CLC’s “service to the poor and needy” of the city, but with City Care at that time its sole agency. The Initiative was set out, then, very much as the *prospective* institution for “social provision” – a predictor of its future expansion, that is – within the corporation of City Life Church.

This prospectivity was expressed in the creation within the Initiative of an unrestricted “general fund” alongside the City Care account (and two additional restricted accounts that would both be established four years later in 2012, to be discussed shortly). The general fund was designated for the purpose of covering the “day-to-day operations” of the Charitable Company of the Initiative (mostly in consumables, insurance, and clerical supplies). When the time came, however, it would become the primary source for the church’s venture in Metre Crow. During my time, the £9,500 yearly lease for the Life Venue at the Reginald Centre has been provided for from this general fund, as is everything else – equipment, renovation, consumables, and so on – needed to “transform” the empty rooms of the estate’s community centre into a permanent CLC-run agency. The use of the charity’s general fund for financing CLC’s Metre Crow project is easily explained: as an *unrestricted* fund – the central fund stream, common to most charities – it can be accessed for whatever scheme the

church is to devise for advancing the effectiveness of the Life Venue and its programmes. The City Care Fund remains the largest account on the Initiative's books, of course. Recall that it has over 600 people per year to feed each weekend, but this is kept at a relatively low expense in fact, between food and kitchen upkeep less than £20,000 a year, about half the City Care budget; the other half paying a full-time salary to the project manager. A general impression of the sheer rapidity with which CLC has been able to enhance the Initiative's general fund, however, can be gleaned from viewing revenue growth as percentages between 2009 and 2013. During this time, incoming finances for City Care have increased by an impressive 94 per cent. For the general fund – effectively the Life Venue Metre Crow fund as of 2011 – the increase in grant and donor revenues is a rather more impressive 1,500 per cent over four years; by 2013 the Metre Crow fund has already matched the annual financial support that City Care's homeless service – then, constituting the Initiative altogether – has attracted in nearly twice that length of time.

It seems then, that CLC's initial expansion outside the city centre has achieved in its establishment as a secularly-fundable affair some testimony to the high official regard in which public charitable organisation through the agency of a Christian church continues to be held. It is not this simple, of course, as I have explained here. It introduces us in this inquiry to a view upon the organising procedures enacted by conservative post-denominational actors specifically; who in an anthropological regard are motivated not by a response to observable social repression, but by an idealised cultural vision of and for themselves, one made propositionally irrefutable by each of one's experiential "relationships" with a supernatural god – but *then* normatively projected upon the whole of society as a result of a particular doctrinal commitment, namely the New Testament God's scriptured command to "go into the world" and recruit new believers (and, subsequently, experiencers of the same mould). As CLC (and Journeyers) has suggested it, the extensive action-orientation that exteriorises such profoundly obscure internal states of belief – "exteriorised" on the present perspective not as behaviours alone, but as economic assets (buildings, businesses, and contacts in the local political economy) is readily distinguishable from the propositional contents of conservative Biblicism: contents that traditionally draw much of their own critique from secular domains, but can now continue to do so *whilst* their bearers advance themselves as corporate socio-economic actors simply by following the provisions of the neoliberal economy.

It will have been noticed, given all this, that I have attended very little to what specific ministrations there *are* at Metre Crow and the Life Venue. As the dates mentioned have indicated, much of the development taking place within CLC that has addressed the questions

posed by this study just happen to have done so very recently, much of it during the period of my fieldwork in Folkfield, and of course extending in interesting new ways beyond that period – and throughout the time of writing. I would not hesitate to venture, then, that many of the points raised in this chapter – as with the previous one, its case subject marked by similar temporal conditions – will warrant new (and, it is hope, more informed) inquiry in the years ahead.

At the time of my engagement, the Life Venue has been holding small, sparsely attended social clubs three or four mornings a week – a board games club, a coffee club, and the crafts and internet clubs mentioned earlier. These have been conceived and overseen by the Life Venue’s local volunteers, many of whom have been part of the original team that constituted the “new” congregation for Life Centre Metre Crow in the Reginald Centre’s main hall since 2009. The congregation is led by one of CLC’s city centre Elders, of course. But as mentioned earlier, the Metre Crow *church* has not been “pioneered” without consideration of its prospective members’ “life situations.” In the discourse of core members to the project there is a well-articulated Biblical warrant in force; Metre Crow, after all, is a well known quantity in Folkfield’s social economy and the public discourse associated with this, and from that the project’s leaders have extracted whatever suffices their shared sense of prophetic moral warrant for the extension of the Gospel to this “troubled” and “needful” district of the city.

This is enacted, however, in a process that in a way seeks actively to reproduce the New Testament narrative, of evangelicals ministering frequently and directly to a local population. The contemporary evangelical church plant procedure often entails a full work and life migration by a new group of planters – typically a husband and wife pastorship – to a (God-) chosen new city, where they may build a congregation from scratch, often in their own home at first; alone in their labours but for the support (moral, at least) of their original church. In Metre Crow, CLC has professed not to be “planting” but “expanding” – a perfectly accurate summation in the sense that the new Metre Crow church is not independently administered at all, beyond the small logistical details that determine the actual holding the worship services. (For example, Life Centre Metre Crow began as a “café style” church service, with tables arranged around the hall: an “informal” design intended to put new attendees at ease while enabling a small-group pattern of interaction (usually with each table occupied by at least one core member to encourage – and constrain – conversation: this is precisely how Alpha course meetings are structured). This of course consumed a great deal more space than an arrangement of chairs alone. It was originally explained to me that a more

conventional arrangement of rowed chairs would be instituted when the church grew to a sufficient number that a more condensed (and propitiative) worship service arrangement was warranted. But after a few months – with regular numbers still only in the two dozen or so – I arrived one morning to find the chairs arranged in the conventional rows. The decision had been taken, and no explanation was given beyond “we decided this was better.” However, the “multi-site” model that the leaders had prophesised for was not to be administered from the distance of the city centre base.

Alongside the institution of Life Centre Metre Crow – long-preceding the adjacent Life Venue project – the Elders had selected members whom they thought potentially amenable to resettlement in the estate, placing them among CLC’s new target locality. Several have, on the encouragement of the Elders, moved into the estate; others are looking for properties and plan to do the same. All of these members, of course, are to be subsequently closely involved in the Life Centre congregation there, and some took up organisational roles with the Life Venue when that was founded. One such is Dom, mentioned earlier, who had moved into a house on the estate a year or so before, and is now devoting his non-work hours to “feeling [his] way through” the project. (He met his wife at the Metre Crow church.) He explains how he had been approached by CLC’s lead Elder while worshipping at the city centre, and been extended an invitation to consider relocating to help lead the church’s new project at Metre Crow. Dom’s recollection of the exchanges is quite profound: he had been asked if it might be something “on his heart” to move to the estate, and was advised to go away and pray and consult with God over the proposal; before (as I gathered, before long) deciding that “yes it was.” Conveniently he did not have to expend much effort finding a place to live: another older church member owned a property on the estate and was ready to rent it to him; it was there that he and Sarah now lived.

Several doors down, another CLC member, Joe, of a similar early thirties age, lives with his wife. They also moved to the estate within just the previous couple of years, except they own their house. As with Dom, however, it was acquired through church contacts: in fact, they bought the house off one of CLC’s Elders. Joe jokes that house prices in the area are so low compared to the rest of Folkfield that several more CLC members are looking to buy on the estate. Joe, too, is deeply involved in the Metre Crow project, but his participation is more extensive in the congregation itself, and illustrates well – in fact, supplies the only regular example presently in action, that I have found – the kind of “street level” evangelism that CLC’s leaders envisioned instituting locally within the close proximity of the church. It comes as close as I could imagine to approximating the full process of “engagement” with

local “troubled youth” that the Life Church Community Initiative advances in its official documents; more precisely it represents an effective triangulation of the movement of local recipients between the worship service, the Life Venue, and a “spiritually-gifted” church volunteer.

Joe’s Sunday mornings at Life Centre Metre Crow are often spent with the children and youth groups. (As with every other evangelical church I have visited, they would be summoned out of the main service hall at the conclusion of the musical worship, and engaged in their own age-specific activities with the congregation’s youth volunteers in a separate area). During the week, however, he continues some of this work, visiting some of the local households from where the children come. Joe always describes this as “working with local families,” *never* “evangelising”: his internal association of “charitable” and “youth work” with “*evangelistic* youth work” is a fully naturalised one, it appears. He does though concede his intuited “spiritual gift” to be in the role of the evangelist. Indeed, at his home once I leafed through a charismatic exercise book that set out a step-by-step guide to discovering one’s own spiritual gifts: featuring series of questions about one’s interests and one’s views on the world, with the purpose of focussing down on one’s God-ordained special skill (an intriguing practical supplement to the “prayer and reflection” traditionally recommended to find such answers). The answer spaces through the book’s first section had been pencilled upon, I assumed by Joe – though it might have been the hand of another, as he had explained that he and his wife and several other Life Centre couples had recently forged (with the Elders’ permission) a new private home group for such spiritually-advanced pursuits.

Joe is in fact, by day, a full-time “project leader” for the Folkfield office of Youth For Christ,⁵⁹ and commonly speaks self-regardingly in his capacity as a professional in the “youth charity sector”: which of course is not inaccurate (and he did previously work for a non-Christian charity), but was perhaps a singular case of the ambiguity in “public provision” roles I addressed earlier as characterising the neocharismatic local church more broadly. Relatedly, though, Joe is very effective in *understating* any biased preference for City Life Church as the destination for new neocharismatic converts. He declares himself to be strongly “ecumenical” in his personal motivations for Christian expansion, and has articulated this in terms of “Kingdom Theology”: for him, an organised approach to evangelism that emphasises the *non-church* centred side of “Christian life.” He remarks of this “Kingdom

⁵⁹ Youth For Christ, a non-denominational Christian mission charity, was a legacy of Billy Graham’s first tours of Britain in the 1940s. See <http://www.yfc.co.uk/our-story/our-heritage>.

Theology" as if it does not even prescribe conversionistic obligations to its followers; for example, Joe once commented that he may (or had – it wasn't clear) come across "needful" young people whom he "wouldn't *want* to get plugged into a church, because it wasn't the right thing for them at that point." He is fond of citing the cross-denominational social channels through which he works, though this is really always in reference to his professional job with Youth For Christ, a group which has always been a prominent – indeed original – example of evangelical "parachurch" organisation. In other words, Joe's case is something of a special one, given that his life as a professional youth worker and as a local church volunteer are now *both* ascribed to the industry of a non-denominational, charismatic proselytism. It is in this regard, though, that Joe's individual account proposes its own case study of the specifically *neocharismatic* Christian activist, whose personal and professional lives can be equally centred around the local advancement of Christian interests while expressly free of any denominational constraint. In this regard, the case could well be made for Joe as an archetypal contemporary British neocharismatic: meaning that the schedule of his daily life appears to be most faithful to the church's ideological social vision.

Chapter 7. Summary remarks: thesis contributions, limitations, and future research

Existing literature has persuaded scholars – and increasingly so outside the U.S. – that theoretic explanations for evangelical new and “mega-” church growth cannot be drawn from social attitudinal surveys, such is the empirical breadth (and, it would seem, profundity) of popular religious disengagement. This has explained recent studies’ investment instead in cultural models and metaphors of entrepreneurial capitalism, in order to substantiate accounts of stagnation-defying charismatic religious association – regardless indeed of the latter’s weak impact on Western Christian affiliation generally, such is the slim evidence for any wider reversal of religious fortunes.

In the last decades of the 20th century, approximating the late capitalist era, entrepreneurial pastors set out to renovate Christianity. They replaced traditional church cultures, from the physical shape of auditoria to the canon of favoured Bible verses ... Christian leaders have embraced both organisational structures and methods and the communicative style and messages of businesses. They have spared no effort to merge with culturally intensified capitalism. (Maddox 2012: 155.)

As cited, cultural and media-political approaches have reinforced a descriptive focus on high-flying, world-famous pastors – unique personalities, indeed – and on the more aesthetic qualities of their churches and their congregational rituals. Generally then, study of neocharismatic church life has been directed to *leaderships* and to the *visible products* of their organisations: dual elements in a commercial corporate analysis. Recent review, as discussed earlier, has criticised the lack of attention paid by investigators to the lives of these churches’ ordinary adherents – including, of course, locally. The present study has confirmed the wisdom of this general criticism in a particular British context: revealing local public engagement by neocharismatic groups to be substantially dependent upon the innovative dedication of regular members; in turn, however, revealing post-denominational institutionalism more generally as so dependent, at least in Britain.

Putting these findings aside, it had remained unclear to observers what the status of neocharismatic membership should be as a research subject itself – outside of purely theological purviews, of course. The present study was perhaps implicitly motivated by this

dilemma when I articulated some research questions from outside the theoretical domains of recent research: retaining a descriptive focus on congregational church entities, but advancing them instead as institutions of emerging Third Sector industry in Britain. A general expectation of such an approach, then, was the chance to bring recent corporate analyses – of the “megachurch” and its variants – into contact with socio-political local findings. I have argued that in this way, understandings of growth-focussed charismatic-evangelical cultures could be more than abstract-theoretical and institutionally internalistic. They could be empirically and theoretically tied to wider social and economic contexts as well, thereby strengthening the normative political account; something which of course differs from one state and society to the next.

I asserted at the outset of chapter 1 that the “primary institutional unit” for the scientific study of neocharismatic religion is the “local church.” This followed analytic convention. Institutions subsidiary to the church were hypothesised as conduits for the churches’ engagement in state-secular domains. Evidence from the case studies suggests, however, that this original assertion was not fully appropriate to the specific research questions. In summary here I shall address a number of reasons for revising this original design for future work, several of which nonetheless positively emerge from the case studies’ findings.

A pre-determining focus on the institution of the local church presupposed there to be an empirical and theoretical correspondence between the legal entity (operating with the public licence of the state), and the religious associational entity (a private social affair). The participatory fieldwork approach looked for evidence of this correspondence, both objectively in company documents, and subjectively in participants’ own accounts and behaviours. The Journeyers case revealed there to be a not merely conscious but explicit embrace of this correspondence by its leaders: notably, for example, in the context of the lead pastor’s talk about “governance,” in which he went so far as to explicitly commend recent state legislation enabling a corporate, non-democratic “Biblical” church model. These accounts, however, have remained largely fixed to the internal affairs of the church congregation; and often more declamatory than socially substantive. Turning to external matters, the evidence was rather thin of much real advance, thus far, into local public realms. Part of the reason for this, it was found, was the leadership’s rather defiant unwillingness to enter into the (local) state’s terms of “partnership”: an unwillingness borne not from experience, moreover, but from sheer ideological conviction (and judgemental of other churches’ approaches – notably CLC’s, in fact). In Journeyers’ case, pastors’ *talk* of

corporate advance was matched by their refusal to cede their vision of self-governance as a divine institution. Such terms of the state, meanwhile, are integral to the emerging theoretical accounting for contemporary Third Sector industry – as were discussed and subsequently preserved in the research questions. Without some engagement with these terms as a first step, actual achievements in public advance look to be considerably limited.

City Life Church, on the other hand, revealed a different approach. Evidence from the CLC case demonstrated a (more than) comparable consciousness among its leadership and core members that contemporary charity and trading law are broadening opportunities for local sphere advancement. CLC, however, has *demonstrated* this rather more clearly in its actions. In counterpart to Journeymen, this has been partly a result of a more liberal attitude on the part of its leadership – whose structural nature, a trademark of the Newfrontiers movement, prevents the demagoguery of a Journeymen – towards effecting a secularised institutional identity *as required* of it, that is, by real local conditions. This was observed as part and parcel of CLC elites' participation in local, media-orchestrated events. But it was also evidenced more recently and considerably more ambitiously by the company's increasing social and economic investments under new business guises: made in specific locations, and to location-specific welfare ends, what's more. This is something that Journeymen was found to show limited interest in to date – preferring instead to implement non-locally-contextualised “welfare” programmes (exemplified only most recently by its attempt to push Hillsong's *Shine* into local schools).

Both cases together, then, would appear to confirm the general hypothesis that neocharismatic churches are progressing institutionally in explicit response to neoliberal reformations of the voluntary and welfare sectors. The cultural ethnographic approach here has made an empirical case for this, which stands as a contribution to recent accounts drawn more from reflection on commercialistic evangelical discourse, among other things. However, the empirical details of the cases taken individually considerably blunt the impact of this finding: if, indeed, knowledge of British (and, moving forward, other societies') neocharismatic constituencies is indeed to be built upon a respect for local nuance and contextuality. This critical reflection divides to a pair of points: one of a particularising case-specific nature, and one that is of a general nature across the studied cases.

First, to the particular. The two church groups presented here, despite their similar ages, their possession of a common Biblical theology, and commensurate local ambitions, are seen in the empirical account to have taken radically *different* organisational courses over the same fifteen-year period. On the one hand, this constitutes a revealing local history that

awaited ethnographic case exploration – indeed, that would not have been uncovered without it. The cross-case design, however, clearly encounters some problems in its pursuit here of a cultural-theoretical account: at least one which is suitable for any robust generalisation about (British) neocharismatic organisation. Evidently, the original grounds for presupposing a minimum level of public institutional action across church sites were dubious. This is because, as suggested in reflection on chapter 5, the local *empirical* rationale with which case selections were made was nonetheless informed by under-examined assumptions about “neocharismatic” religion (and thus its “church life”) more generally. As noted, of course, the rejection of any presuppositions at that stage would only have begged the cultural question; and to which the case accounts have thus provided some answer. Still, I neglected to discuss the possibility of a single-case study approach (i.e., to one church or/over the other, rather than both equally), with which the local context could of course have been just as well explored. My critique in chapter 2 of recent “megachurch” research inquiries – typifying internal culture accounts that divorce a “religious institution” from its local concerns and conditions – perhaps unduly recommended a comparative cross-case design.

This cross-case research design (which I confess would probably have numbered more groups still, were the reality of a word limit not what is), of course complexified the empirical task, in the interest of pursuing generalisable findings. The latter is itself a highly contested endeavour, perhaps even pushing *against* the strengths of qualitative case study at times, as discussed with references in chapter 3. In any case, though, the individual case findings – generalised to the level of each church case, then, but not necessarily further – offer lessons as to what kinds of further inquiry may be necessary of the neocharismatic subject in order to clarify the presuppositions lamented above. Neocharismatic local churches are not simply to be conceived either as organic products of a locality or as corporatist expressions of spirituality under bourgeois capitalism. They are to be theorised too as the cultural products of the networks/“families” to which they have historically affiliated. The profundity of this was, I concede, under-appreciated prior to my field engagement. In the case report for *Journeymen*, its determinative effect on the interpretative research process is particularly clear in retrospect. There, the research focus became preoccupied by the church’s internal obsessions with a regulated social order, and one that would be continually responsive to the rubric of its leaders’ discourse. This discourse – which was manifest, I now suspect, in many of the responses given by pastoral associates to ostensibly local city issues – has flowed from the wholesale import of Hillsong Australia’s “ecclesial” model under the

direction of Pastor Roy, whose judgment was never seen to be questioned by the core membership.

Where similarities between local neocharismatic groups persist in theory, they have been seen here to divert substantially in *practice*. Subsequent empirical research, employing the same longitudinal ethnographic case methodology, could therefore profit by breaking from the church-based focus that has grounded the inquiry here, and instead make an open approach on local British (sub)urban realms that does not stipulate any “primary unit” of neocharismatic association. The recommendation then is for an institutional study that would foreground local neocharismatic *charities*, not *churches*: charities of the kind uncovered most clearly in chapters 4 and 6, that are not themselves congregations, or indeed governed hierarchically by pastors. My case studies have revealed that on (legal) paper, the local neocharismatic church is not significantly different to the (independent) Christian charity that is run locally by a small group of supernaturalist worshippers under their *own* provisos. These individuals, perhaps, are the true neocharismatic activists: devoted to their “home church” for personal reasons of social taste and so on, but engaging the local public sphere and its populations with as clear an “entrepreneurial” mandate as that frequently assumed in the literature of charismatic pastors. The former have been considerably emboldened themselves in the last few years by what appears to be a nationalising network of neocharismatic lay workers, ably empowered by technology as well as third sector legislation; not to mention too, of course, by the ever-expansive business management literature in which “Kingdom builders” continue to source inspiration.

On this new perspective, the neocharismatic local church itself might be better conceived as a charitable legal entity with the *characteristics* of a Christian religious congregation. In those other prospective institutional cases, though, an abstract presupposition of correspondence between the legal company and the “religious association” at its centre dissolves. On a social scientific view at least, registered neocharismatic Christian institutions that do not possess a congregation cannot be categorised according to centuries-old, state-sanctified terms of “religious charitable organisation”; terms that were created and codified for significantly different church types, in any case – a further issue that deserves discussion in future work.

In short, a new socio-institutional research agenda beckons for the study of local Christian orthodoxy, which in its move away from the local church entity should also spur a renegotiation of classical and contemporary “Christian growth” models, most of which are sociologically indentured to that conventional congregational unit. Such new directions, of

course, already characterise studies of new “spiritualities” in Britain and the wider West. But it must be noted that its scholars retain a standard empirical warrant for moving beyond “outdated” and “orthodox” religious associational forms like the Christian congregation. The suspicion remains, then, that British neocharismatic religion’s academic neglect is a consequence of the phenomenon’s heterodox conflation of hierarchical congregational orthodoxy with “New Age”-style spiritual freedom; this study has offered a way forward from that charge as well.

Second, to a somewhat clearer generalisable finding and its implications. The original contribution intended of the thesis was its focus on the formalising sub-institutions of neocharismatic church groups; but this contained within it an empirical question about the size and quality of the voluntary labour forces required. The fact that the average evangelical Protestant congregation in Britain now significantly outsizes its denominational equivalents was implied as evidence that neocharismatic church activities – of the externalising, intentional kind – were set to outpace all others in their public impact. The case studies have revealed, though, that the vast majority of neocharismatic members do not get involved in their churches’ corporate outreach. Members tend to give a fulsome *impression* of personal involvement on both their own part and of their church. This is achieved significantly through the breadth of local (social and political) knowledge possessed by (core) participants. It would appear, though, that this local knowledge is more “local” than I was first prepared to believe. It is in fact far more like *in-church* knowledge: gleaned from and shared with other members, the closest of whom will spend much of their social time together *out* of church – thus effectively remaining “in” church, and enmeshed in *its* discursive domain, even when not present in the physical building.

This might well compel new avenues of investigation for religious sociologists, as neocharismatic individuals associate in more varied ways and locations, perhaps on a quotidian basis. Maybe in doing so, they will increasingly push the bounds of the socially acceptable according to more conservative leaders’ expectations. In this connection, in addition, it must be acknowledged that neocharismatics are only presently approaching their *first* generational pass-over. The founding pastors of the original churches in Britain, the U.S. and Australia from the 1970s are right now reaching retirement age, and have recently begun to bequeath their flock – and their “vision” – to younger hands. It will, I suggest, be the *next* twenty years, not the last twenty, that determine the movement’s long-term prospects. These second and third generations of evangelical baby boomers, set to inherit the neocharismatic

culture – including in their number the first generation raised on both neoliberal economics and the internet – are sure to be the most interesting so far.

This general finding, then, feeds straight back into the future research agenda I envisage for neocharismatic public engagement in Britain: retaining the wider theory account developed by voluntary sector policy scholars, which I believe remains the most appropriate direction for the present time given the cultural politics of a neoliberal economy and society, which seem unlikely to change in the near future. At the forefront of this revised approach should stand the evaluation of local institutional types as discerned by their members' *direct* involvement in local affairs and outreach, confirmed of course along with evidence of external financial support and/or legitimization. This will mark the continuation and development of the qualitative cultural account of the publicly-engaged neocharismatic. But it will have first narrowed the quantitative field, by which I mean the nearest associated church congregation – which may of course be studied as the collective source of entrepreneurial/activist lay Christians' cultural and theological inspiration and indoctrination, but as a separate (and more specific) research theme.

In 1998, Steve Bruce persuasively refuted the suggestion that a neocharismatic movement offers a counter-thesis to general secularisation in Britain by pointing out that a massive long-term decline in churchgoing entails a deeper rift in the “shared social characteristics” of a population, following which any *general* explanation for religious “resurgence” – such as neocharismatic growth apparently presents – is very unlikely to be found. Instead, he observed, involvement in such a phenomenon should be regarded by scholars as “thoroughly idiosyncratic … [and] largely a matter of personal preferences” (Bruce 1998: 229). The preceding study offers qualitative, ground-level confirmation of this view. However the recommendations for subsequent research on which I have here concluded carry forth the empirical elements of Bruce’s theoretical rebuttal in ways not previously considerable. The evolution of neocharismatic institutional expression as local charitable agency has here revealed an empirical and ethnographic domain that cannot reasonably be ignored in any future micro-social studies of neocharismatic individualism. The “important questions to be asked about why conservative Protestants … have been attracted to this particular variant in the Christian repertoire,” as Bruce put it above, are still to be addressed; but it appears clearer now that local opportunities for corporate progress, in various forms, however “strategic” their judgement by determined participants, are set to be a major factor in neocharismatic religious membership into the future.

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