

Theological Imaginary and Missional Themes
In UK Church Planting

Submitted by Diane Hake Lincoln to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
In December 2018

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Abstract

This thesis examines the theological imaginary of church planting practitioners currently involved in new church work in the UK using qualitative research methods in an exercise in practical theology. It adapts the concept of theological imaginary from Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginary, seeking to capture for this research how church planters imagine church, their expectations, and deeper theological ideas and images that undergird these expectations. This thesis examines how the theological imaginary of church-planting practitioners compares to themes in the missional and emerging church literature of the last 20 years. It examines the significance of cultural changes in so-called postmodernity and post-Christendom as two contextual elements in the imaginary significantly impacting current church planting. A survey of key, representative literature in the missional and emerging church movements in the areas of postmodernity, post-Christendom, missional and emerging church draws out the major theological themes that might be nourishing church planting and the theological imaginary on the ground. The research uses thematic analysis to uncover themes of theological imagination amongst church planters interviewed in the UK in order to determine whether themes from the empirical research data are reflective of those circulating in the missional and emerging church conversation seen in the literature. The themes identified from the fieldwork are compared to the themes in the literature to ascertain what concepts are functioning on the ground in practice. This thesis concludes by outlining a picture of the theological imaginary amongst missionaries, particularly noting neglected theological resources, and makes exploratory suggestions for theological training.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | 2 |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN | 5 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 5 |
| 1.2 Research Overview | 6 |
| 1.2.1 Limitations and Personal Perspectives | 6 |
| 1.2.2 Orientations: Ethnography and Practical Theology | 12 |
| 1.2.3 Theological Imaginary | 15 |
| 1.2.4 Research Question and Objectives | 20 |
| 1.2.5 Outline of the Thesis | 22 |
| 1.2.6 Definition of Terms | 24 |
| 1.3 Related Research Literature Review | 28 |
| 1.3.1 Summary of Research Literature Review | 50 |
| CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL IMAGINARY AND ECCLESIAL RESPONSES | 53 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 53 |
| 2.2 Postmodernity as Referenced in Key Missional Texts | 55 |
| 2.2.1 Introduction to Missional Texts on Postmodernity | 55 |
| 2.2.2 Survey of Missional Texts on Postmodernity | 56 |
| 2.2.3 Summary of Missional Texts on Postmodernity | 67 |
| 2.3 Post-Christendom as Referenced in Key Missional Texts | 68 |
| 2.3.1 Introduction to Missional Texts on Post-Christendom | 68 |
| 2.3.2 Survey of Missional Texts on Post-Christendom | 68 |
| 2.3.3 Summary of Missional Texts on Post-Christendom | 77 |
| 2.4 Two Ecclesial Responses to the Contemporary Context | 79 |
| 2.4.1 Introduction to the Ecclesial Responses | 79 |
| 2.4.2 Secularization as a Common Background Understanding | 79 |
| 2.4.3 Development of the Missional Church Movement | 87 |
| 2.4.4 Development of the Emerging Church Movement | 98 |
| 2.4.5 Summary of the Ecclesial Responses | 106 |
| CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL THEMES FROM MISSIONAL LITERATURE | 108 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 108 |
| 3.2 Themes in Literature | 111 |
| 3.2.1 The Importance of Being a Community | 111 |
| 3.2.2 Participation in the <i>Missio Dei</i> | 122 |
| 3.2.3 The Need for Contextualization in Mission | 133 |
| 3.2.4 Being Incarnational in Mission | 147 |
| 3.2.5 Seeking Kingdom Transformation in Society | 157 |
| 3.2.6 Summary of Themes in Literature | 167 |
| CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGICAL IMAGINARY IN PARTICIPANTS | 168 |
| 4.1 Introduction and Research Questions | 168 |
| 4.2 Methods | 169 |
| 4.2.1 Participants | 169 |
| 4.2.2 Interview Procedure | 173 |
| 4.2.3 Data Analysis | 174 |
| 4.3 The Importance of Being a Community | 178 |
| 4.3.1 Church as Prioritizing Being a Caring Community | 179 |
| 4.3.2 Church as Being Rooted with and Active in a Location | 181 |
| 4.3.3 Church as Needing Deep, Authentic Relationships | 184 |
| 4.3.4 Church as a Community Sent Together on Mission (Inside to Outside) | 185 |
| 4.3.5 Church as a Contrast Community Which Demonstrates the Gospel | 186 |
| 4.3.6 Additional Sub-theme: Community is Inclusive | 187 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4.3.7 Summary of the Importance of Being a Community | 188 |
| 4.4 The Need for Contextualization in Mission | 189 |
| 4.4.1 The Need for Contextualization for a Specific Locality | 190 |
| 4.4.2 The Need for the Church to be Contextualized for a Changing Culture | 194 |
| 4.4.3 Frustration with the Existing Church for Not Being Contextualized | 196 |
| 4.4.4 The Need for Contextualization for a Post-Christendom Context | 196 |
| 4.4.5 Additional Sub-theme: Creativity in Contextualization | 197 |
| 4.4.6 Summary of the Need for Contextualization | 200 |
| 4.5 Participation in the <i>Missio Dei</i> | 201 |
| 4.5.1 Mission as Being a Witness in the World..... | 202 |
| 4.5.2 The Essential Nature of the Church as Sent..... | 205 |
| 4.5.3 Mission as Emerging from God’s Activity and Agency..... | 206 |
| 4.5.4 Mission as Restoring All of Creation | 207 |
| 4.5.5 Summary of Participation in the <i>Missio Dei</i> | 208 |
| 4.6 Seeking Kingdom Transformation in Society | 209 |
| 4.6.1 Church as Having an Activist Faith Which is Serving Society | 210 |
| 4.6.2 Eschatologically Focused on Living Out the Kingdom of God Here and Now | 212 |
| 4.6.3 Transforming Every Area of Society (Overcoming the Sacred/Secular Divide) | 214 |
| 4.6.4 Summary of Seeking Kingdom Transformation | 215 |
| 4.7 Being Incarnational in Mission | 215 |
| 4.7.1 The Incarnational Church has a Renewed Focus on the Person of Jesus | 216 |
| 4.7.2 The Incarnation Models Mission | 218 |
| 4.7.3 The Church Embodies and Represents God to Others | 220 |
| 4.7.4 Summary of Being Incarnational in Mission | 221 |
| 4.8 Summary of the Theological Imaginary in Participants..... | 221 |
| CHAPTER 5: THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINARY | 223 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 223 |
| 5.2 Community in the Theological Imaginary | 224 |
| 5.3 Contextualization in the Theological Imaginary..... | 229 |
| 5.4 The <i>Missio Dei</i> in the Theological Imaginary..... | 234 |
| 5.5 Kingdom Transformation in the Theological Imaginary..... | 238 |
| 5.6 Being Incarnational in the Theological Imaginary | 242 |
| 5.7 Portrait of the Theological Imaginary | 246 |
| 5.7.1 Themes Present and Absent in the Theological Imaginary..... | 246 |
| 5.7.2 Portrait of the Neglected Imaginary | 251 |
| 5.7.3 Summary of the Theological Imaginary | 255 |
| CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION | 256 |
| 6.1 Summary of the Thesis..... | 256 |
| 6.2 Implications for Future Research and Training | 259 |
| 6.3 Personal Reflections on Results | 265 |
| APPENDIX | 267 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 301 |

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

1.1 Introduction

This thesis surveys the theological imaginary of church planting practitioners currently involved in new church work in the UK to examine how the findings in the fieldwork compare to the primary themes found in missional and emerging church literature of the last approximately 20 years. This research is informed by interviews with 21 missionaries in 18 mission works from a variety of church streams. Thematic analysis uncovers themes within the imaginaries which are supporting practice in order to determine if these themes are reflective of those circulating in the missional and emerging church conversation. Why is this important? As a church planter myself in England for over 25 years, I have seen significant changes both in practice and theological framework within new church work. Many books have been written, an abundance of blogs created, and numerous conferences small and large have taken place – all in response to the double crisis the Western church is facing: the crisis of a changing wider culture (postmodernity) and the crisis of a declining and changing church (post-Christendom).

On the ground many churches in the UK have adapted patterns of gathering, worship, technology, language, and ministry activity in response to these two contextual factors. Even more significantly, many diverse new church works have started specifically in response to the decline in the church, forging new paths and potentially both shaped by and shaping new ideas for the church. These missionaries are some of those on the front edge of thinking about the shape of the church in the context of grounded experience. At the same time, I am aware of a whole body of literature which has been aimed specifically at enabling the church in mission to meet the challenges it currently faces. The missional and emerging church dialogue is directed specifically at enabling the church to engage in mission in the contemporary contexts of Britain and other Western settings.¹ Church planters on the ground are potentially influenced by the thinking

¹ Noting the impact of the missional and emerging church movements, see Hannah Steele, *New World, New Church? : The Theology of the Emerging Church Movement* (London: SCM Press, 2017). Pages 3-4. Michael Moynagh, *Emergingchurch.Intro* (Oxford: Monarch, 2004). Pages 9-33. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (SPCK, 2006). Page 28.

generated by the books, blogs, and conferences in the missional and emerging church dialogue.

These two arenas – the practice of church planting and missional theology – are both intended to facilitate the mission of the church. There is no research to date on the ideas which shape the theological imaginary of British church planters, nor research correlating these two arenas: the conceptual base seen in the missional texts and the conceptual base (theological imaginary) inspiring missionaries in practice in the UK. This research attends to the yet unknown reality of the shape of the theological imaginary amongst those at the forward edge of mission practice, and the application of contemporary missional theology to current new church work in the UK.

1.2 Research Overview

1.2.1 Limitations and Personal Perspectives

This thesis topic emerged from my own personal history and orientations, and as such it is important for me to set out in this section a more personal perspective in disclosing for the reader my interests and the genesis of the research. I trained in ministry in America in the late 1980's and early 1990's. My seminary education at Fuller Theological Seminary was influenced by the application of social science to missiology in the Church Growth Movement and leadership formation studies. My husband and I moved to England in 1993 at the invitation of the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in the UK to be involved in new church work. Since then I have been directly involved in three church plants, and participate on a wider church planting team. The past decades of local ministry have been greatly enriched by substantial partnerships with those from a variety of church streams. New thinking and new resources around ministry in contemporary Western culture became available during our continuing years of ministry. A wide reading in the new area of missional and emerging church generated many questions and has served as one resource for the theology and ecclesiology that shapes my understanding of ministry at present.

Today, more than 25 years since I started church planting in England, the theological discussion around contemporary mission is very different from when I trained for ministry. The church is continually in a state of change in its understanding of mission, as illustrated throughout history by missiologist David

Bosch in the highly regarded text *Transforming Mission*.² Bosch points to a crisis in mission during the second half of the 20th century caused by nothing less than a fundamental paradigm shift not only in mission and theology but Western culture as a whole. Bosch believed the harsh realities of today make people re-conceive the church's mission.³ As is true in every era, the church today as it considers mission is confronted with new issues, notably the loss of the dominant position of Christianity in the West (a post-Christendom era) and broad changes in Western culture (often called postmodernity).⁴ New contexts bring out new thinking and new mission practice.

One response to the challenges facing the Western church has been a range of mission thinking broadly referred to as missional and emerging church.⁵ There is a whole body of printed literature, online dialogue, conferences, and training resulting from explorations in mission and ecclesiology, often under the banner of "missional." With the church facing a world perceived as fundamentally different, many missional authors contend that new understandings of mission, and even of the church, are required. This material is aimed specifically at resourcing the church in the West as it considers mission today. It offers a variety of concepts from theology on the *missio Dei*, the incarnation and the kingdom to mission strategies and cultural insights. Many books have been published encouraging the church to be sent out in contextually appropriate ways. Huge conferences featuring missional speakers seek to give vision for mission to participants. Many networks within the emerging church dialogue about the shape of the church for today. Both the missional and emerging church movements have an array of resources undergirding their dialogue. These movements are one response to the state of the church in contemporary culture.

Another response of the wider church to the decline and the new context it faces has been to engage in church planting. Many creative new church initiatives dot the country. Large denominations such as the Church of England and the Methodist Church launched the Fresh Expressions Network to encourage and resource a variety of church plants appropriate for the changing cultural context to serve in mission to non-believers.⁶ The Incarnate Network is the church

² David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission : Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

³ Ibid. Page 8.

⁴ Ibid. Pages 188-189.

⁵ For a full discussion of these terms, see section 1.2.6.

⁶ Fresh Expressions, "Introduction," <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/introduction>.

planting and fresh expressions resource collective for the Baptist Union, encouraging pioneering of innovative church planting.⁷ Small, loosely connected networks of people engaged in localised contextual works connect around fostering cell churches or simple churches.⁸ Eurochurch.net's research into missional organizations and networks across Europe reports a significant range of individual and networked church planting, saying, 'Contemporary church planting activity in Europe is probably more diverse than at any other point in its history.'⁹ There is a diversity of mission and church models going by names such as missional communities, new monasticism, organic church, liquid church, pub church, youth church, and more, as described above, all discussed in the missional and emerging church dialogue.¹⁰

The evidence of some research indicates the impact of new church work is significant. Church Army's Research Unit, led by George Lings, conducted the widest research to date into the effectiveness of the fresh expression of Church since the publication of the report *Mission-Shaped Church*.¹¹ This research culminated in a report called *The Day of Small Things*.¹² Between January 2012 and May 2016, 1109 examples of fresh expressions of Church from 21 dioceses were examined to get a national picture of fresh expressions of Church; to test the representative nature of the earlier research in 2012-2013; to establish characteristics of the more common types of fresh expressions of Church, and to show what is typical across the dioceses and what is particular.¹³ Key findings in the report indicate that these fresh expressions have a significant, positive impact

⁷ For more information, see: Incarnate Network, <http://www.incarnate-network.eu/>. Accessed 17 March 2013.

⁸ See for example networks at: Cell UK. <http://celluk.org.uk/>, Accessed 17 March 2013. Simple Church. <http://www.simplechurchathome.com/>, Accessed 17 March 2013. The Blind Beggar. <http://www.friendofmissional.org/>. Accessed 17 March 2013.

⁹ Darrell Jackson and Tim Herbert, "Missions and Church Planting in Europe," (<http://togetherinmission.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Eurochurch-report-2012.pdf> Eurochurch.net, 2011). Accessed 12 June 2011. Page iv. The authors go on to illustrate some diversity seen: 'A quick review points to the huge variety: emerging church, fresh expressions of church, cafe church, motorbike church, church on the way, simple church, mission-shaped church, cellchurch, virtual church, pub church, mega-church, and many others.' Page iv.

¹⁰ For some examples of new ways of church being explored see Stuart Murray, *Changing Mission : Learning from the Newer Churches* (London: CTBI, 2006). See also Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context : An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM, 2012). Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Pr, 2008).

¹¹ Graham Bp Cray et al., *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

¹² George Lings, "The Day of Small Things," <https://www.churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204265>.

¹³ Ibid. Page 15.

on the life of the Church of England. Over 50,600 people are attending these new works, of whom even the most rigorous figures show that 20% are de-churched and 21% are non-churched. The evidence shows that for every one person sent out to be a part of a fresh expression of Church, now there are more than two-and-a-half additional people attending. The report states, 'Nothing else, as a whole, in the Church of England has this level of missional impact and the adding of further ecclesial communities, thereby fuelling ecclesial re-imagination.'¹⁴ While this report is limited in scope to the Church of England, it indicates something of the potential impact of new church works. Peter Brierley notes church planting as one of two factors (along with the impact of immigration from Christian majority countries) which pushed back the previous rate of decline the church in England by about 5 years.¹⁵

The focus of this research is on the theological imaginary of church planters in part because they may have a particular role in expanding the imaginary for the wider church. Church planters, by the nature of their endeavours, may have a willingness to try new things – to innovate practice which may be undergirded by explorations in the theological imaginary. George Lings notes fresh expressions of Church as 'living laboratories about the meaning and re-imagination of Church, which is essential for that mission.'¹⁶ Stuart Murray says, 'In a changing culture, reflection on the task and shape of the church is a constant necessity. Planting a new church is a wonderful opportunity to engage in this process of reflection.'¹⁷ Research by Michael Moynagh in *Church in Life* adapts innovation theory and applies it as a framework to describe the innovation of new churches.¹⁸ He describes six innovation processes (dissatisfaction, exploration, sense-making, amplification, edge of chaos, and transformation) in studies of new church work, describing how innovation is engaged.¹⁹ Moynagh's research demonstrates these processes of innovation at work in a variety of church plants and experiments in mission.

¹⁴ Ibid. Page 10.

¹⁵ <https://peter-brierley.squarespace.com/where-is-the-church-going>. Accessed 4 December 2018. Quoted from UK Christian Statistics 2: 2010-2020. Page 1.

¹⁶ George Lings, "Church Growth Research Program," (2014). See also David and Ross Dadswell, Cathy, "Church Planting," (2013), http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports.

¹⁷ Stuart Murray, *Church Planting : Laying Foundations* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life - Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology* (London: Scm Press, 2017). Pages 10-11.

¹⁹ Ibid. Page 11. And particularly Part 3, pages 295-408.

Stephan Paas offers an extended examination of church planting, considering the motivations to church plant in Western Europe.²⁰ While the purpose of his research is aimed at sending organizations and denominations considering *why* one would church plant in Europe, his analysis of motivations for church planting also brings some helpful insight. Of Paas' three motivations for planting new churches (confessional, growth, and innovation) the motivation of innovation is particularly relevant.²¹ Paas discusses how innovation in church planting can be innovation for the whole church.²² He notes how church plants may be 'transitional structures' which are potential seedbeds for renewal and places of expectation, although he also notes there is no guarantee given the deep uncertainty of Christianity in the secular European context.²³ Paas concludes in his book that church planting is a way to connect the church and mission. 'As an intersection of ecclesiology and missiology, church planting provides the Western church with a rich potential for missionary experience and reformation.'²⁴

Similarly, research by sociologists Marti and Ganiel call those in the emerging church "embedded agents" and "institutional entrepreneurs" who seek through discourse to reimagine and replot Christian faith.²⁵ 'The concept of embedded agency explains how actors embedded in institutional fields come to envision new practices.... Emerging Christians are not so embedded that they lack the motivation to change the system, yet they are not so peripheral to be deprived of all ability to change it.'²⁶ They note that institutional entrepreneurs have a key role in the process of institutional change, drawing parallels to Max Weber's "prophets."²⁷ Institutional entrepreneurship has similarities to Taylor's social imaginary.

A great deal of research on institutional entrepreneurship focuses on discourse, seeing entrepreneurs' ability to "make meaning," to "frame" new ideas, and employ "discursive strategies" as key to instigating change. Institutional entrepreneurs are able to rework already existing "institutional vocabularies" consisting of commonly understood words, expressions and

²⁰ Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West : Learning from the European Experience*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016).

²¹ Ibid. Pages 42-43.

²² Ibid. Pages 181-241.

²³ Ibid. Page 200.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, *The Deconstructed Church : Understanding Emerging Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Pages 80 and 84.

²⁶ Ibid. Page 193.

²⁷ Ibid. Page 80.

meanings, similar to the ways Weber's prophets reinterpret religious traditions.²⁸

This research is not focused on a rationale for church planting, or a study of emerging churches or fresh expressions of Church; nor is it about institutional entrepreneurship. But each of these threads above speak to the ways in which a particular group like church planters can bring renewal to the wider church. I believe the missionaries I interviewed, and others like them, have the potential to leverage their experiences in pioneering church work to make a particular contribution to the church in mission in Britain. These missionaries are working in the laboratory of new church work. They are potentially deeply engaged in reflecting on church and mission in the current context. Insights or issues from their work can be brought into dialogue with the wider church. Missioners are both within the established church and taking roads which are slightly on the periphery of the established church. They have the potential to be embedded agents for revitalisation of the church in mission.

Much remains unknown about current church planting in its many forms and its fruitfulness over time.²⁹ Many strands of research are needed to explore this area of mission, including research into the shape of the perspectives, motivations, and inspirations – or theological imaginary – that fuel these new mission works. Research is needed into what is potentially inspiring the theological imaginary of missionaries, who may in turn offer the wider church a resource for mission. Qualitative research is needed which begins to describe the interaction practitioners have with missional concepts in part so that church leaders and theological educators can be aware of what is nourishing missionaries, what is potentially neglected, and so be better equipped to meet the challenges of mission in contemporary culture.

The broader missional dialogue is one strand of the attempt at new understandings of mission in the UK and other Western cultures in the face of significant change. Much of the literature is written from an idealist, theoretical perspective, which urges new theological perspectives and experimentation in

²⁸ Ibid. Pages 80-81.

²⁹ There are already some printed evaluations of specifically Fresh Expressions of Church, both positive and negative. See Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Pr, 2008). Andrew Paul Davison and A. G. Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Pr, 2010). Moynagh, *Church in Life - Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*. Steven J. L. Croft, *Mission-Shaped Questions : Defining Issues for Today's Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008).

the face of current challenges. I am interested in the depth and diversity of this recent theological conversation having an influence on church planting practitioners. How are these strands of mission theology being conceptualised and applied in church planting? To what extent can one see particularly the theological influences in participants' imaginaries – their understandings of church and mission? What is the shape of the imaginary of those who are pioneering new church ministries? What ideas, particularly theological ideas, are feeding this set of images and expectations? Ideas – especially theological ideas – are powerful. They continually transform our thinking, images and actions, and certainly shape our understanding and expectations of mission and church. Ideas shape the imaginary. I am very interested in the theological imaginary undergirding new church ministry both personally and for the potential it has to offer the church in mission.

This thesis comes from the perspective of an insider to the world of new church work. It is my professional world, and my experiential world. I believe my experience is valuable to me as a researcher, helping me interpret from inside, rather than striving for an outside, likely unattainable objective perspective. Saying this, it is appropriate for me to identify that as a missionary serving in suburban England I am persuaded positively by some, but not all of the missional and emerging church literature I have read. I am keenly interested in the experimentation in ecclesiology and mission taking place around the UK and believe there are things the wider church can learn from, and be inspired by, in the missional church literature and experiments in practice.

1.2.2 Orientations: Ethnography and Practical Theology

This research project aims to discover the relationship between the imaginary amongst those involved in new church work and the theological ideas which motivate and resource that practice. As discussed above, as a person concerned about mission in contemporary Britain and participating in that mission as a church planter, I have several layers of interest motivating the research, and am engaged in the research process as a practitioner. Although this research is not a full ethnography nor uses a full ethnographic research method for data collection, it could be said to come from an ethnographic orientation, or have an ethnographic sensibility. Pete Ward describes how social scientists Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt describe ethnography in a broad, general way as a

“sensibility” which has some shared values. Jones, Watt and others note values in ethnography such as: participation; immersion; reflection, reflexivity, and representation; and thick description.³⁰

An ethnographic sensibility includes participation and immersion which is fitting for this research as the researcher is already immersed in the context of church planting and the missional dialogue generally, although not specifically involved in any of the participant’s situations. Also similar to ethnographic research, the data will be analysed in a thematic manner, specifically using the method of thematic analysis, to identify and categorize themes.³¹ If the most basic sense of ethnography is “writing culture,” then this research is doing a limited aspect of that, in writing the culture of the theological imaginary of church planters interviewed. If ethnography is ‘the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities,’ then again, this study is in a limited manner an ethnographic undertaking of the theological imaginary amongst church planters.³² This research is ethnographic in the sense Scharen and Vigen discuss of attending to and learning from people – in their words, practices, experiences and insights – in particular times and places to understand how people make meaning and what it can teach us about this particular reality, in this case church planting. This reality can be taken seriously as a source of wisdom and to decentre our assumptions.³³ This de-centring of our assumptions around the reality of how the theological imaginary for church planters is shaped and nourished in actual embodied contexts may inform the wider church. This understanding has the potential for transformative change, particularly in training missionaries. However, this is not a full ethnographic study of any one entire situation in context or a very complete, in-depth study of a group in their context. This research is not using participant-observation, but as a researcher, I participate in church planting in my professional setting.

Scharen and Vigen make the case that ethnography is a fitting tool for theology, to take particularity seriously and discover truth revealed through

³⁰ Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM, 2008). Pages 6-7. The values are participation; immersion; reflection, reflexivity, and representation; thick description; and active participate ethics; empowerment; and understanding.

³¹ Scott and Kuper Reeves, Ayelet and Hodges, Brian David "Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography," *BMJ* 337 (2008). Pages 513-514.

³² *Ibid.* Page 512.

³³ Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2011). Page 16.

embodied habits, relations, practices, narratives and struggles.³⁴ This research sits comfortably within this ethos as it seeks to illuminate the reality of the theological imaginary for church planters through understanding their perspectives in their particular context. Ethnography in theology can function in two ways, both of which function here. First, ethnography can follow in the traditional aim of the “thick description” of Clifford Geertz of what is.³⁵ One aim in this research is to give a picture of the theological motivations and images behind practices in the particular situations of British church planters in their settings. In order to determine if missional theology is influencing practitioners on the ground, research needs to investigate what the actual situation looks like, and what is resourcing church planters. Second, the examination and articulation of a context or situation (in this case the specific slice of theological imagination amongst church planters) can in itself make a contribution to theology through the dialogue of embodied theological realities and other traditional theological sources.³⁶ It is hoped that through better understanding the situation of church planters, the dialogue between church planters, the wider church, and ministry training contexts will contribute to the shared mission in which the church participates. Ethnography as a theological tool can help this research contribute to building a complex enough understanding of the overall church by unfolding this one particular aspect, as a contribution to being faithful to the identity of the church.³⁷

This research also identifies itself as an exercise in practical theology. The traits of ethnographic theology go hand in hand with the characteristics, tasks and constraints of practical theology: the purpose of the transformative practice of faith, rooted in a specific context and particular challenge. Swinton and Mowat; Pattison and Woodward; Graham, Walton and Ward all outline overlapping qualities and purposes for practical theology which are reflected in this research as an exercise in practical theology.³⁸ This research investigates the theological

³⁴ Ibid. Page xxi.

³⁵ Ibid. Page xxii.

³⁶ Ibid. Page xxiii.

³⁷ Ibid. Page 57. This research will seek to follow the qualities of ethnographic research put forth by Scharen and Vigen: humility, reflexivity, collaboration and audacity. Humble in both scope of the study and learning from practitioners; reflexive as I examine my own involvement as a church planter in the UK; collaborative in embodying the voices as participants in what is produced and audacious in claiming that this research reveals partial, imperfect but still significant truth. Pages 15-25.

³⁸ Qualities described by: John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Pr, 2006). Pages 25-27. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers,

inspirations of missionaries and the impact of the theological resources of the missional church. It seeks to ask questions, which examine the theories and assumptions underlying practice towards shaping new theories to feed back into the practice of the mission of church planting. The research is reflectively based and comes from a committed, even insider perspective: that of a Christian researcher who is also a church planting practitioner. This piece of practical theology is not a complete picture, but looks to bring light to one aspect of an important element of mission. The research question seeks to understand the relationship of the theory/theology in missional and emerging church to the practice of church planting, so as to give an account for what theological values practitioners engage with in support of their practice of mission. Through examining the theological imagination of missionaries and the resources they draw from to nourish their practice of mission, this research may contribute to fresh ways of understanding the identity of the church towards training practitioners with the theological resources available to them.³⁹

1.2.3 Theological Imaginary

The term “theological imaginary” is one borrowed and modified for this research from Charles Taylor. A consideration of Charles Taylor’s social imaginary provides a basis for explaining the use of theological imaginary in this research, and its application with church planters. Taylor uses the term ‘social imaginary’ in the context of changes within a society.⁴⁰ Taylor notes he is looking at something broader and deeper than intellectual ideas. He describes the social imaginary as, ‘the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.’⁴¹ The social imaginary is not in itself a new set of beliefs, a theory or even outlook; it is the background imagination that allows a new perspective, the background of often inarticulated assumptions about what is possible or normal.⁴² Taylor underscores this saying, ‘What I am

2000). Pages 13-16. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005). Page 6.

³⁹ Swinton and Mowat. Pages 25-27. Woodward and Pattison. Pages 13-16. Graham, Walton, and Ward. Page 6.

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard Univ Pr; Belknap Pr, 2007). Pages 146 and following.

⁴¹ Ibid. Page 171.

⁴² Ibid. Pages 172-173.

trying to describe here is not just a theory. Rather my target is our contemporary lived understanding: that is, the way we naively take things to be. We might say: the construal we just live in, without ever being aware of it as a construal, or – for most of us – without ever even formulating it.⁴³ Taylor’s social imaginary is a complex concept, including the very deep, often non-verbalised assumptions which give sense to one’s world or give the assumed options one has to think about the world. It is also what one imagines the world to be or can be, the images and expectations one has. Expectations, and thus the social imaginary, can change. A new social imaginary often starts off as theories held by a few people and then infiltrates a larger portion of society. When theory breaks through to a wider social imaginary, people often begin totally new practices or modify their current practices.⁴⁴ These new practices find their context and make sense because of the new outlook, the new social imaginary.

Analogous to Taylor’s social imaginary, the purpose of this research is to reveal the theological imaginary in church planting missionaries.⁴⁵ To rephrase Taylor’s words above, the “theological imaginary” in this research is about ‘how church planters imagine their ecclesial existence, the expectations of church and church planting which are met, and the deeper theological notions and images which underlie these expectations.’⁴⁶ Theological imaginary in this research is intended to be more than a list of theological content – statements one believes – though it may include this.⁴⁷ Biblical or theological concepts will naturally play a significant part in feeding the imagination that underlies mission activity. It is

⁴³ Ibid. Page 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 175.

⁴⁵ Taylor’s concept of the social imaginary has been applied to different fields of research. Examples include: Political practices during the 2008 Greek revolt are examined in Ioannis Kallianos, "The Subversion of Everyday Life: An Anthropological Study of Radical Political Practices: The Greek Revolt of December 2008" (Ph.D., University of St. Andrews (United Kingdom), 2012). The social imaginary of Victorian era temporality is applied to the concept of secularization in Stefan Tørnquist Fisher-Høyrem, "Time Machines: Technology, Temporality, and the Victorian Social Imaginary" (Ph.D., Oxford Brookes University (United Kingdom), 2012). The contemporary social imaginaries of Korean Protestantism and Buddhism are examined in Seung Soo Kim, "Imagining Religion and Modernity in Post-Colonial Korea: Neo-Liberal Brand Culture and Digital Space" (Ph.D., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2016). Taylor’s social imaginary is applied to First Nations people in education in British Columbia in Byron Robbie, "Beyond Inclusion: Transforming the Educational Governance Relationship between First Nations and School Districts in British Columbia" (Ed.D., Simon Fraser University (Canada), 2005).

⁴⁶ Adapted from text in Taylor, C. Taylor. Page 171.

⁴⁷ In keeping with Taylor’s use, I will generally use the term “theological imaginary” but sometimes may also occasionally use the term “imagination,” getting at the sense Taylor describes of how an imaginary is affected by what one imagines possible in society, or in this case, in church life.

recognized that in exploring the imaginary of church planters, not all themes will be equally “theological.” Some themes within the missional literature and within the imaginary of practitioners will be connected to theology, ecclesiology or missiology. However, this research is concentrated on looking for the theological aspects of the imaginary. As a social imaginary is more than theories, a theological imaginary is also more than theories, and includes images and expectations, assumptions about what can be. It is this sense in which I want to use theological imaginary: something deeper than a list of strategies or theological creeds/belief statements. This research puts forth the idea of theological imaginary may be helpful to explore thinking supporting practice: getting at how one imagines church and the expectations of what it is or can be like, the images which guide and nourish around church, the context for understanding the church in mission to contemporary culture. These are some of the elements of a theological imaginary. Also key to Taylor’s social imaginary for this research is the idea that a new social imaginary starts with a few, then infiltrates a larger population. The church planting practitioners are a small group, but demonstrate some influence in the wider church, with their new or modified practices potentially making sense due to their theological imaginary.⁴⁸

This thesis will seek to uncover an outline of themes contained in the theological imaginary of church planters. This research does seek to trace out causation – what motivations cause missionaries to do their new church work in a certain way with a particular emphasis on the theological strands of those motivations.⁴⁹ The theological imaginary is not the full tangle of motivations that brings an individual to church plant in a particular way but it is one important aspect of that complex of resources. Keith Punch discusses that for any particular effect there are likely multiple causes, as well as there likely being multiple effects for any given cause. Punch also notes the power of qualitative research to investigate causality and it is hoped that this research adds insight into the connection of the theological imaginary, new missional church works and the body of literature aimed at inspiring mission in contemporary Western culture.⁵⁰

Many factors come into play when considering the imaginary of a person wanting to be involved in pioneering church work. The individual’s training,

⁴⁸ See for example Lings, "The Day of Small Things". See also Dadswell.

⁴⁹ Keith Punch, *Introduction to Social Research : Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*, Third edition. ed. (Los Angeles, California: SAGE, 2014). Pages 48-50.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Page 53.

personality, the organization they might work with, the context of their ministry – all combine with theological ideas to shape ministry. All ministry, and theological imaginary as an undergirding for ministry, is driven from a mix of motives and experiences, training and external constraints, specific individual and contextual factors – some of which are explicit, and others implicit. Personality issues, gender, organizational constraints, economic factors, church affiliation, and local context all form a part of the theological imagination of a church planter. Each of these elements will have an influence and come out in aspects of the theological imaginary of church planters, but the focus of this research will be to concentrate on the theological images, expectations, and assumptions of new church work. Explicating the complete motivation of church planters, or indeed all of the underlying, unspoken assumptions that make up one's imaginary, is a very complex undertaking and beyond the scope of this research. Targeting the theological imaginary both limits and focuses the scope of this research.

Specifically, this research will focus on using qualitative research methods to uncover the theological imaginary feeding the practice of new church work from an interview survey of church planters in the UK.⁵¹ This research wants to reveal the underlying theological ideas which sustain missionaries in new ministries within the contexts of postmodern and post-Christendom Britain, and subsequently discover if these ideas are indeed comparable to those in the missional dialogue. Graham Ward describes how Taylor sees the social imaginary as providing the “context for understanding” or the “interpretive grid.”⁵² Ward notes that by seeking something of the imaginary in a situation, one can gain insight to difference, in Taylor's words, not just in creed but difference of experience and sensibility.⁵³ This is the background sense which this research seeks to uncover, not just a set of doctrines or creeds amongst church planters, but the sensibility with which church planters are approaching mission in the current context – their theological imaginary. All of these factors form an idea similar to Taylor's social imaginary applied to the arena of theology and in particular to those with a vision to start new churches.

The idea of the theological imaginary is particularly applicable as this research intends to investigate examples of new contexts of mission practice,

⁵¹ A full description of the selection criteria for interviewees is below.

⁵² Graham Ward, "History, Belief and Imagination in Charles Taylor's "a Secular Age", " *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010). Page 345.

⁵³ Taylor. Page 14.

where there is potentially newly applied thinking and practice in church planting, where in Taylor's words the imaginary is changed as people 'take up, improvise or are inducted into new practices' and indeed dialectically the new practices shape the changing imaginary.⁵⁴ These practices find their context and make sense because of the theological imaginary involved. A. T. Lincoln notes that the primary way Taylor understands the lived experience of spirituality is through getting at the social imaginary that shapes it.⁵⁵ In the same way, this research seeks to understand the lived experiences of church planting through getting at the church planter's imaginary. Taylor's modified definition above will help shape the research questions noted in the next section. Church planters as a group were chosen not only due to the professional interest of the researcher, and their potential engagement with the materials under investigation, but because I believe they are amongst those who are potentially pioneers for new theological imaginaries influencing a larger population in the church. They are amongst the most likely to consider the theory and theologies put forward in the body of work of the missional church, and seek to put it into practice.

Missioners are likely to be those who have concepts, which in Taylor's terms, begin as an idealization and grow into an imaginary through 'being taken up and associated with social [or in this case theological] practices, in part traditional ones, but often transformed by the contact.'⁵⁶ New or modified theory then transforms an existing imaginary when people experiment with new practices and their practice shapes the imaginary. As church planters consider mission to a society influenced by postmodernity and post-Christendom, as they enact new forms and patterns of church life and grapple with a range of theological themes in the current context, they may be one group of people who potentially change, even slowly or partially, the social imaginary of the wider church in mission. New church work becomes a laboratory for what Taylor calls the process of the "long march" of change which helps bring about a new social imaginary. This comes about where new practices or modifications of old ones are developed through certain groups in a population, or are launched by elites who recruit to a larger base, or a set of practices gradually change their meaning

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 175.

⁵⁵ A. T. Lincoln, "Spirituality in a Secular Age : From Charles Taylor to Study of the Bible and Spirituality," *Acta Theologica* (2011). Page 75.

⁵⁶ Taylor. Page 175.

for people.⁵⁷ The result can be a transformation in the social imaginary, or potentially for church planters under investigation, the theological imaginary.

1.2.4 Research Question and Objectives

The central problem of this study is as following: at the time of writing there is no survey of church planting practitioners in the UK to understand the theological imaginary involved in contemporary church planting or if the themes in the missional conversation are influencing this imaginary. It is clear there is a significant body of resources in the wider missional movement, and that there is a great deal of imaginative, new church activity on the ground, but there is no research to correlate these two. It is not known what theological concepts are actually underlying new church practice. It is not known whether or how the missional theory in the texts potentially accessed by church planters is being applied to practice or to the expectation of what church will be. This lack of knowledge leads to the purpose of this research: to provide an initial outline of the theological imaginary amongst church planters in the UK currently involved in church plants with a view to discover what theological concepts, images and expectations are shaping their mission to contemporary culture, and to compare the results with the themes in the missional dialogue as seen in key, representative literature.

Research direction draws from the rephrased definition of Taylor's social imaginary: how church planters imagine their ecclesial existence, the expectations of church and church planting which are met, and the deeper theological notions and images which underlie these expectations.⁵⁸ How are church planters imagining what their church life is like at present and might be in the future? What are the expectations of their church plant? What theological images fire their imaginations when they consider their ministry? From what theological resources are church planters drawing to shape and imagine mission in contemporary British culture? By exploring these questions, this study will identify what theological themes are functioning for church planters, what concepts have been fruitful for them, and consider implications for training and education.

This research includes the following objectives:

⁵⁷ Ibid. Page 176.

⁵⁸ Adapted from text in Taylor, C. Ibid. Page 171.

1) To describe the relevant ethnographic, case study and thematic research into missional practices, specific churches, and streams of church exploring missional theology to date in the missional and emerging church movements primarily in the United Kingdom and America.

From this: Readers of this thesis will come to understand what questions have been asked about these movements related to this research, what methods have been used previously, and how this thesis addresses an area that has yet to be researched.

2) To describe postmodernity and post-Christendom as two contextual factors of mission in the West as described throughout the literature of the missional and emerging church authors through examining key, representative missional literature.

From this: Readers of this thesis will become aware of two key concepts compelling a deliberation of mission in the UK through relevant missional literature.

3) To give a background to the missional and emerging church movements in the past 20 years primarily in the United Kingdom and America as ecclesial responses to the church in mission in a postmodern and post-Christendom context.

From this: Readers of this thesis will understand the events, values, and dynamics of these two movements, which are the crucial to this research.

4) To analyse selected key, representative missional and emerging church texts to determine the primary themes and sub-themes present in the missional material. This survey of key concepts in the content of the texts will then be compared to the data gathered from the interviews.

From this: Readers of this thesis will be brought into contact with key concepts flowing through the missional and emerging church movement literature. They will understand the key themes in this field of mission theology.

5) To interview 21 church planting practitioners in 18 new church works from the UK in the area of their theological imaginary, including their images of church, expectations of church life, and theological themes which inspire them in mission. Thematic analysis will be used on the data to discover primary themes and sub-themes arising which form the shape of the theological imaginary from these interviews.

From this: Readers of this thesis will have empirical data that leads to themes of a theological imaginary from this sample of church planting practitioners. As far as the author is aware, no research has been done on the theological imaginary or resources being accessed by practicing church planters for mission to contemporary Britain. This thesis seeks to make an initial contribution to this area.

6) To outline from the data the theological imaginary resourcing church planters, and compare this against the themes in the missional literature to determine what themes are influential to practitioners and what themes are potentially overlooked.

From this: Readers of this thesis will have an initial comparison of themes from practitioners and the missional literature sources which might point to mission resources which are highly functional and those which are potentially neglected theological resources. This may indicate if ideas in the missional conversation have been impactful the theological imaginary of church planters.

7) To give a summary of the thesis including suggestions for future work, including implications for theological training.

From this: Readers will have the outline of the thesis, its aims and findings, and suggestions for future research. The results of this research suggest direction for theological education.

1.2.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis includes 6 chapters outlined as follows. Chapter 1 gives an overall introduction to the research including the research questions, outline of the thesis, objectives, definition of terms, and literature review of related research to date. An introduction to the idea of the theological imaginary sets the scene for the type of research questions this thesis addresses. A definition of terms clarifies relevant terms for the purposes of the research. Chapter 1 lays out the relevant ethnographic and case study research connected to theological imagination and the missional church that has been done to the time of writing. The literature review of current research points to questions that have been asked and shows the gap in the research which this thesis fills.

In Chapter 2 the significance of cultural changes in postmodernity and post-Christendom⁵⁹ are examined as two contextual elements significantly impacting the themes in the missional literature. The missional and emerging church movements themselves are primarily in response to these contextual considerations, so an understanding of these elements is foundational. These two elements are examined via the literature to understand the formative influence of postmodernity and post-Christendom in the missional and emerging church movements. To complete the contextual setting for the research, Chapter 2 also gives an introduction and background of the missional church movement and emerging church movements as two ecclesial responses to the elements of postmodernity and post-Christendom. One focus of the research is to uncover the key themes in the missional body of literature, thus it is key for the research to understand the essentials of the development, history, breadth, and formative influences of these movements.

Chapter 3 examines key, representative literature in the missional and emerging church movements, drawing out the major theological themes that might be encouraging church planting on the ground. An examination of a wide range of texts by significant authors highlights the five selected themes in the missional dialogue: the importance of being a community, participation in the *missio Dei*, the need for contextualization in mission, being incarnational in mission, and seeking kingdom transformation in society. The content from the key literature will form a baseline of the conceptual shape of the missional conversation to compare to the empirical research data garnered from interviews. This thesis investigates whether or how the concepts within the key literature inform the theological imaginary of church planting practitioners and thus this chapter forms an important building block to the research.

In Chapter 4 the fieldwork results are examined. The design, scope and methodology of the research is outlined in this chapter. The empirical research utilizes thematic analysis to look at data from interviews with 21 practitioners in 18 interviews. The content from the data is processed using thematic analysis to identify the themes of the theological imaginary arising from church planters. The interview data is surveyed both against the five themes and sub-themes drawn

⁵⁹ For a full definition of terms, see 1.2.6.

from the missional literature, and for additional theological themes. Each theme is discussed in relation to the relevant thematic analysis of the interview data.

Chapter 5 compares the themes identified from the fieldwork in Chapter 4 with the themes in Chapter 3 in the broader missional and emerging church literature. This chapter recognizes theological themes from the empirical data that are present in the concepts available in missional material, as well as identifying themes not present on the ground. An integrated picture of the theological imaginary is given, as well as the potential imaginary from themes which are less expressed.

Chapter 6 gives the conclusions from the thesis, including a summary of the research, exploratory suggestions for theological training and suggestions for future research, and offers personal reflections on the thesis.

1.2.6 Definition of Terms

Several key terms used throughout this thesis are also used widely both within the literature referenced and in broader society, thus this section will clarify the definition of these terms for the purpose of this research. The terms missional church and emerging church can be used to reference a range of meanings, and are sometimes used synonymously or together as in the “emerging missional church” or “missional and emerging church.”⁶⁰ Throughout the literature other terms for these types of churches can be seen in use, and it is widely noted that much overlap exists between the two movements – common authors, language and concerns – even while there are distinctives. In this thesis, “missional church movement” expresses an understanding of the essential nature of the church as the people of God sent to partner with God in his redemptive purposes in the world, with a high value on developing a culturally contextualized local church life and practice. This definition is similar to definitions given by key missional theorists Darrell Guder, Michael Frost, Reggie McNeal, and Alan Hirsch, with the key elements being an emphasis on the essential nature of the church (rather than a functional view), on the agency of God in his work of redemption, and on

⁶⁰ For instance Frost and Hirsch use the term “emerging missional church” in Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003). Mark Driscoll says of Mars Hill church in Seattle that it is an ‘emerging and missional church’ and uses it in his book title. Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006).

the church as a sent body.⁶¹ Further background on the missional church movement is given in Chapter 2. For the purposes of this thesis, “emerging church movement” refers to those churches seeking new forms of church contextualized within and for mission to postmodern culture, often rooted in sense of cultural and ecclesial critique. This definition highlights elements of definitions by key theorists Eddie Gibbs, Ryan Bolger, Tony Jones and James Bielo, particularly emphasising new forms of church, contextualizing for postmodern culture, potentially from cultural and ecclesial critique.⁶² Further background on the emerging church movement is given in Chapter 2.

This thesis is concerned with the imaginary underpinning missionaries in the UK who are seeking to do new mission in contemporary culture, and with a wide body of literature addressing similar concerns but going by missional and emerging, contextual church, postmodern church and other names. Thus clarifying a term to use in this thesis for this wider group of both practitioners and literature will be helpful. For the purposes of this research, the more general term ‘missional’ will be used to express the concerns, values, and practices of both the missional and emerging church movements: understanding the church to be sent into the world to participate with God in his redemptive purposes thus seeking to explore new forms of church and contextualize ecclesial life to contemporary culture. Using missional as a broader, more inclusive term is supported by others in the field. James Bielo and other researchers find that missional is a desirable

⁶¹ Definitions from these theorists include: ‘...the missional church is the people of God partnering with God in his redemptive mission in the world.’ Reggie McNeal and Network Leadership, *Missional Renaissance : Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009). Page 24. ‘With the term *missional* we emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God’s called and sent people.’ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Gospel and Culture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Page 11. ‘A missional church is one whose primary commitment is to the missionary call of the people of God. As such, it is one that aligns itself with God’s missionary purposes in the world.... The missional church is a sent church with one of its defining values being the development of a church life and practice that is contextualized to that culture to which it believes it is sent.’ Frost and Hirsch. Page 229.

⁶² Gibbs and Bolger give this definition: ‘Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.’ Gibbs and Bolger. Page 44. Tony Jones gives this definition: ‘The emergent church – The specifically new forms of church life rising from the modern, American church of the twentieth century.’ Tony Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008). Page xix. James Bielo notes in particular, ‘Emerging Evangelicalism, we will come to see, is a movement organized by cultural critique, a desire for change, and grounded in the conditions of both modernity and late modernity.’ James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals : Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Doug Gay says the emerging church ‘can perhaps best be understood (and defended) as an irreverent new wave of grassroots ecumenism, propelled from within low church Protestantism by a mix of longing, curiosity and discontent. Doug Gay, *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2011). Page 93.

term amongst the diverse participants, noting, ‘in spite of difference at so many turns, my consultants uniformly affirmed the desire to be “missional.”’⁶³ Missional authors such as Alan Roxburgh and Michael Frost use the term missional and want to resist neat definitions or a “to-do” set of actions, but rather use missional as a whole paradigm of thinking, or imagination.⁶⁴ In this respect, the term missional also fits well with this research which is aiming to capture themes and resources feeding the theological imaginary amongst church planters.

Several terms are used in this thesis to refer to those doing new church work including church planters and missionaries. George Lings makes the case that the term “church planting” has limitations as a paradigm, including the expectations around planting with pre-conceived ideas of the outcome of church. Lings prefers an interpersonal paradigm, with terms including reproduction, and using the term fresh expressions of Church.⁶⁵ However, other missional authors such as Stuart Murray, Michael Moynagh, and US based authors such as Ed Stetzer, Ryan Bolger, and Alan Roxburgh still commonly use the term church planting/planter. In this thesis, both church planter and missionary are used interchangeably.

Other key terms are postmodernity and post-Christendom, both concepts widely used by missional authors and church planters to understand their context of mission. For the purposes of this research, the term “postmodernity” is used to indicate a range of basic attitudes and behaviours of people in contemporary Western society but recognizing the philosophical rootedness of such.⁶⁶

⁶³ Bielo. Page 11. Emerging church commentator Scot McKnight notes on his blog that ‘missional’ is a term many in the emerging church movement favour not only for its positive thrust but for the negative division between Evangelical and Liberal perspectives it avoids. McKnight, Scot. Scot McKnight to Jesus Creed, Nov 3, 2005, 2005, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2005/11/03/what-is-the-emerging-church-proplenty/>. Accessed 3 June 2011.

⁶⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, Mich: BakerBooks, 2009). Pages 27-45. Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional : Journey to the Center of the Church*, Shapevine (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011). Pages 20-39.

⁶⁵ George Lings, *Reproducing Churches* (Abingdon, England: BRF, 2017). Pages 25-33.

⁶⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer puts forth a good summary in five ways of characterizing the postmodern condition. The first characteristic is that of a decentred human subject, the experience of the breakdown of time, space and order as “givens” in modernity. Secondly, postmoderns are resistant to any categorization as ‘natural,’ seeing instead that all schemes of category come from a historically situated and often politically formed discourse. A third postmodern imperative is a resistance to metanarratives – absolute truths. Rather, all knowledge is situated in history and limited. The postmodern turn includes a concern for the “other” and for the marginalized as a fourth trait. This includes the ethical in respecting particularity and difference. Lastly, Vanhoozer picks out the postmodern recovery of the prophetic, mystical, with an emphasis on justice and the messianic hope in “the other to come.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Cambridge*

Postmodernity implies a change from modernity and is characterized by Grenz and Franke as a rejection of the modern era search for objective and universal knowledge, and for certainty.⁶⁷ Postmodernity functions as an umbrella term, a 'conceptual shorthand' for a changing situation with, from or against modernity rather than a neatly defined, precisely measurable set of circumstances.⁶⁸ Many differentiate between "postmodernism" and "postmodernity." "Postmodernism" is often referred to as the intellectual, philosophical expression that rejects the Enlightenment ideals and methods whereas "postmodernity" is often used to refer to the era in which we are living, when the postmodern ethos shapes society.⁶⁹ Some missional and emerging authors use the terms interchangeably and some focus more on one aspect or the other.⁷⁰ "Post-Christendom" for this thesis refers to the reality that the Christian story and Christian institutions were significantly shaped by the Christendom mentality and are currently a declining influence in society.⁷¹ Christendom is the name given to the sacral culture in European society privileging the Christian church, in which the Christian church is a known and dominant cultural reality.⁷² It is a paradigm of understanding the Christian church and Christian faith as central to society, with the assumption that the majority of people belong to or have a background in Christianity. Further information on postmodernity and on post-Christendom is in Chapter 2.

Companion to Postmodern Theology, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Pr, 2003). Pages 3-25.

⁶⁷ Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Pr, 2001). Pages 21-22.

⁶⁸ David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). Page 40. Similarly, Grace Davies calls postmodernism a 'catch all phrase' for large changes in thinking. Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Sage Publications, 2007). Page 94.

⁶⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996). Page 12. Smith echoes this distinction: 'postmodernism as an intellectual movement and postmodernity as a constellation of cultural phenomena.' James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? : Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, *The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). Page 19-20.

⁷⁰ R. J. A. Doornenbal, *Crossroads : An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and Its Challenges for Theological Education* (Delft: Eburon, 2012). Page 90.

⁷¹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004). Page 19. Frost and Hirsch. Pages 8-9.

⁷² Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011). Page 19. Paas also notes it is historically a geographic term, 'Historically, it indicated the geographical area, roughly equivalent with the territory of the modern European Union, where Christian kings ruled. Stefan Paas, "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences," *Mission Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011). Page 11.

1.3 Related Research Literature Review

This thesis examines the theological imaginary of church-planting practitioners and compares the imaginary in practice to missional and emerging theology in popular and academic literature of the last 20 years. This section will survey in chronological order academic research done that is similar to this research to show what has been done to date, and the gap in the research to which this thesis attends. The aims, methods, scope of the research, and relationship to this thesis will be highlighted, along with an overview of the content of the research. Research literature into the missional church that is similar to this research largely falls into two broad but related categories: research focused on the practices of missional churches; and research into specific churches or streams of churches through ethnography or case study. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger's research considers emerging church practices as a group through extensive interviews. Robert Whitesel's research builds on Gibbs and Bolger's work to also consider recurring patterns in emerging organic church through twelve case studies. Robert Doornenbal's research looks specifically into the practices of missional leadership through a study of missional literature applied to the specific training context in the Netherlands. Brian Vann Miller's research also focuses on leadership in flagship missional churches in America. James Bielo's research is done ethnographically, focusing on a set of practices within a group of emerging church participants in America. Case study research by Cory Labanow is rooted in one particular emerging church in the UK. Barry Cooper and Graham John Doel each bring recent church planting into focus considering the practices of church planting in the UK in a specific denomination. Cooper examines the Newfrontiers stream of churches with the aim of suggesting reasons for their growth based in their distinctive ethos and practices. Doel's research within the Baptist Union considers church planter attitudes towards secularization and contextualization. Paul Coulter looks at church planting in Northern Ireland to develop a missional ecclesiology. Darren Cronshaw's case study research in Australia correlates new forms of mission and innovation against the ideal found in missional literature, particularly comparing the data to Hirsch and Frost's *The Shaping of Things to Come*. Hannah Steele does a deep theological reflection on radical emergents in the areas of eschatology,

missiology and ecclesiology. Stefan Paas focuses on motivations for church planting Europe wide.

One of the first significant pieces of research into the practices of the emerging church movement comes with the much-referenced *Emerging Churches*⁷³ by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger. Published in 2006, it was the conclusion of five years of data gathering from case studies and interviews in the UK and US. Gibbs and Bolger's aim is to identify the key practices of the emerging church and explain the concerns that motivate these participants to re-envision mission for Western culture.⁷⁴ They invite key leaders in the emerging church conversation to give their opinions about the nature and mission of the church, as reflected in their practices.⁷⁵ With a brief look at culture and the history of the movement, they identify nine practices common to the emerging church and dedicate a chapter to each, ending with a large appendix of fifty emerging church leaders in their own words. Three of the nine practices are identified as core practices: identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space, and living as community. The first of these three core practices brings an emphasis on the practices of the emerging church to look to the life and teachings of Jesus as a reference point, to emphasize a sent-ness and participation with God's redemption of the world and an outworking of the Kingdom of God here and now.⁷⁶ The second core practice 'transforming secular space' brings out the emerging church practices of holistic ministry flowing from a desire to overcome modernity's sacred/secular divide. The emerging church embraces transcendence and immanence, and deeply incarnational and contextualized patterns of life together to seek a whole-life spirituality.⁷⁷ Living as community is the third core practice seen in Gibbs and Bolger's research, where corporate life is shaped from inspiration in the Gospels of the practices of the Kingdom of God. Emerging churches reject institutional understandings of church as a meeting or place, other loyalties (such as nationalism, individualism and consumerism), and practices of church which hinder patterns of life where church is a people, a community embedded in values of relationship, accountability, and family.⁷⁸

⁷³ Gibbs and Bolger. Bolger and Gibbs' definition of emerging churches is often quoted, 'Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.' Page 44.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 28.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Pages 47-64.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Pages 65-88.

⁷⁸ Ibid. Pages 89-115.

From these three core practices, six other practices flow: welcoming the stranger, serving with generosity, participating as producers, creating as created beings, leading as a body, and merging ancient and contemporary spiritual activities.⁷⁹ Both welcoming the stranger and serving with generosity are derived from the kingdom practice of hospitality within the community and to the outsider.⁸⁰ Emerging churches make space for each person to participate, to bring their gifts and their world – to act as producers in worship, decision making, and in all aspects of the community’s life. Similarly, creating as created beings sees emerging churches bringing all areas of creation, sacred and secular, to express both God’s creative nature and, humanity’s creative nature. The practice of creativity is a part of the kingdom participation in God’s work in all aspects of the world.⁸¹ Emerging churches practice leadership that seeks to avoid control and power struggles, and to facilitate participation by the whole group through servanthood and consensus.⁸² The final practice considered is merging ancient and contemporary spiritualities. An emphasis on spirituality seeks to balance hyperactivism, often looking back to premodern practices that are more holistic, corporate, and encourage personal encounter with God.⁸³ Each of these nine practices is given context by those in the movement, quotes from the interviewees, and Bolger and Gibbs’ insight to the themes and nuances running through them.

Emerging Churches is a significant, layered picture of this movement written by authors evidencing both experience and insight, grounded in research, and it remains a foundational piece of literature in the conversation. The scope of the research within *Emerging Churches* is far broader than the research of this thesis. Its focal point on practices within the emerging church does draw out themes which are deeper than just practices, and have something of the sense of a theological imaginary. Throughout the authors reflect on the changes from modernity towards postmodernity and the impact of Christendom on the church on what for this research would be called the imaginary. Particularly the three core practices: identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space, and living as community are both surface level behaviour practices and deeper

⁷⁹ Ibid. Page 42-44.

⁸⁰ Ibid. See Chapters 6 and 7, pages 117-153.

⁸¹ Ibid. See Chapters 8 and 9, pages 155-190.

⁸² Ibid. Pages 191-214.

⁸³ Ibid. Pages 217-234.

images of the church, expectations of what church can be like – are pictures of expectations, images which guide possibilities, understandings of their life together – the theological imaginary. *Emerging Churches* does not attempt to systematically discern the imaginary nor discern what is resourcing that imaginary; nor does it compare it to any of the body of literature. This current research builds on the foundation of Gibbs and Bolger, not to identify key practices, but to further uncover theological understandings behind those practices and the resources that church planters are specifically accessing for those theological understandings.

Cory Labanow's congregational study of a UK Vineyard church *The Challenges of Reconstruction: a Congregational Study of an Emerging Church*,⁸⁴ submitted in 2006, comes from more than a year of participant-observation, demographic survey, and semi-structured interviews with a particular Vineyard congregation, which he calls Jacobsfield Vineyard. It has three aims: To describe and understand in detail Jacobsfield Vineyard as a self-ascribed 'emerging church;' to identify the central theological question which occupies the church; and to consider how this question and theological reflection might be applied more widely.⁸⁵ Before outlining the research, Labanow surveys the field of practical theology through its history and characteristics, defining his research as practical theology using a mutually critical correlational model.⁸⁶ Part Two focuses on the congregational study and ethnographic description which seeks to find the core themes in Jacobsfield Vineyard centred on reconstructing identity: of a congregation both differentiating itself from, and maintaining some connection with, traditional evangelicalism, the Vineyard denomination, the post-Christian context in which it finds itself, and the emerging church movement.⁸⁷ The theme of safety through honesty, and openness for the individual congregants exploring Christian faith at various stages was another key, as was having space for spiritual growth and maturity (although there was significant

⁸⁴ Cory E. Labanow, "The Challenges of Reconstruction : A Congregational Study of an Emerging Church" (Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2006).

⁸⁵ Ibid. Page 81.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Pages 9-40. Labanow gives his definition of practical theology for the purposes of his study: the theological reflection arising out of and giving guidance to a community of faith in the praxis of its mission as it engages in a mutually critical conversation with the situation of the world and the resources of Christian tradition. Labanow defines his model of mutually critical correlation as where ecclesial practice, situational analysis, theological reflection, and response all interact to form new attitudes and views which guide response and further reflection.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Pages 158-170.

ambiguity as to what this meant as a goal for the individual.)⁸⁸ Lastly, Jacobsfield Vineyard also is marked by experimentation in communicating with the contemporary, post-modern culture around them.⁸⁹

From the themes which arise from his research, Labanow uses Browning's objective of using the details from the descriptive study to formulate a central theological question: 'What are our communally accepted and critically held criteria for reconstruction which result in relevance to ourselves and those to whom we are trying to credibly represent the Christian faith?'⁹⁰ Part Three of the thesis undertakes practical theological reflection, which may have application to other contexts. This section considers themes of relating to religious parentage, safe places for exploring faith, the themes of Christian growth and maturity, communication with contemporary culture, and the challenges of reconstruction.⁹¹ Labanow's thesis has complementary elements to the research in this thesis as Labanow is seeking themes on the central theological question through reflection on empirical data, and making generalizations for applications in other settings. Seeking this type of theological question uncovers elements of the theological imaginary undergirding the congregation, those elements which form the expectations around their ecclesial life together, and how they imagine church to be. So although Labanow does not address the imaginary specifically, his research does come at some similar layers of content about one specific context in Jacobsfield Vineyard. Labanow's research methods include interviews, but they also rely heavily on participant-observation. The scope is different to this research as his interviews and participant-observation are applied in depth to one setting with the significant focus of ethnographic detail of a whole setting, not specifically on a new church plant, making it different from this research; nor is there any focus on the content or use of missional resources.

Research with similarities to this thesis is found in Darren Cronshaw's 2009 thesis *The Shaping of Things Now: Mission and Innovation in Four Emerging Churches in Melbourne*.⁹² Cronshaw's case study research evaluates the claims of emerging churches to stimulate new forms of mission and innovation for the contemporary culture. Cronshaw does four case studies of new churches

⁸⁸ Ibid. Pages 171-176.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Pages 187-193

⁹⁰ Ibid. Pages 68-72, 209.

⁹¹ Ibid. Pages 210-243.

⁹² Darren Cronshaw, "The Shaping of Things Now: Mission and Innovation in Four Emerging Churches in Melbourne" (; Archival Material, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009).

or re-invented churches in Melbourne, Australia, with the aim of understanding the experience of mission and innovation particularly comparing the case study data to the rhetoric found in emerging missional literature, particularly in Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch's book *The Shaping of Things to Come*.⁹³ The scope of the research is to take the four phenomenological case studies compared primarily to Frost and Hirsch's book to examine the categories of mission and innovation. The four case studies are a mixture of sizes, denominations, settings, and approaches, all locally rooted in Melbourne.⁹⁴ Two analytical tools used in the research to understand group dynamics are innovation-diffusion by Everett M. Rogers and the systems analysis of learning organizations by Peter M. Senge.⁹⁵ In each case study, Cronshaw examines how innovation is diffused in the emerging church system and how organizations as systems can best learn together. The thesis evaluates *The Shaping of Things to Come (Shaping)* and several other emerging church theorists which Frost and Hirsch draw from. Innovation and mission are the two categories the authors of *Shaping* suggest should characterize emerging churches for the 21st century, thus they are the key categories for Cronshaw's research. Also key to the research are the categories Frost and Hirsch use for forming emerging missional churches around understanding the context as post-Christendom, mission as incarnational, community belonging as centred-set, and organizational life as an organic system.⁹⁶ Lastly, Cronshaw examines some theological facets of *Shaping*, including incarnational ecclesiology, messianic spirituality and apostolic leadership.⁹⁷

The next Chapters 3-6 are the four case studies. Chapters 7-10 give a deeper analysis of the four cases studies around the categories of mission and innovation: looking at an incarnational model of mission;⁹⁸ the emphasis on inclusive community and if the experience of belonging and inclusion is

⁹³ Ibid. Page 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Cronshaw summarizes the four churches, 'Connection Community is a reinvented Church of Christ congregation with unique bistro "Life Connection" meetings and active community service. Eastern Hills Community Church is an emerging Baptist church plant of predominantly young adults with a social justice focus. Urban Life is a relocated and reinvented Christian Revival Crusade (CRC) congregation with a vision to be a regional missional church. Solace is an Anglican-based group with a focus on celebrating everyday spirituality.' Page 18.

⁹⁵ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York; London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1983). Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline : The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990).

⁹⁶ Cronshaw. Pages 47-57.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Pages 58-69.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 181.

qualitatively different from other churches;⁹⁹ innovation, the role of creative dreaming, and an empowering style of leadership;¹⁰⁰ and innovation and change management for the sake of mission and a culture of change.¹⁰¹ Cronshaw concludes his research by noting the four churches under investigation are generally being shaped by the vision exemplified in Frost and Hirsch's writing, even while they still have things to learn. The four churches can be seen at their best as "learning organisations," using Peter Senge's organisational terms, where they foster mission, community, empowered leadership, and change although their reality does not always match up to their rhetoric; they are not reaching as many unchurched people as hoped and decision processes can be haphazard.¹⁰² Cronshaw's research shares several elements with this research in studying the emerging missional church and comparing the reality on the ground to the ideal found in the literature. While not using the term theological imaginary, some of the concepts Cronshaw is examining might be of a similar nature, although more from a phenomenological perspective. However, his case studies are geographically focused in Melbourne, Australia, and consist of four deeper case studies rather than the UK based wider interview set of church planters included in this research. His comparison to literature is primarily focused on one book rather than the wider set of literature compared in this thesis. There is much to appreciate in Cronshaw's thesis which includes parallels to this thesis, but also focused in a different geographic context and more narrowly focused in terms of literature.

In 2009 Robert Whitesel completed a thesis on the emerging church entitled *Recurring Patterns of Organic Churches: An Analysis of Twelve Emerging Congregations*.¹⁰³ Whitesel's case study research seeks to draw out recurring liturgical patterns in 12 organic churches (the author's preferred term over 'emerging churches') in North America and the United Kingdom. The aim of the research is to discover the recurring patterns of practice of organic churches.¹⁰⁴ Whitesel asks three related questions: What is organic church (Chapter 1); what are the practices of organic church (Chapters 1-12); and what

⁹⁹ Ibid. Page 215-216.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Pages 249-250.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Page 284.

¹⁰² Ibid. Page 289.

¹⁰³ Bob Whitesel, "Recurring Patterns of Organic Churches : An Analysis of Twelve Emerging Congregations" (Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Pages 3-4.

are the recurring patterns of organic churches (conclusion). The patterns discovered are compared in the concluding chapter to previous research on patterns in emerging churches found in literature by Van Gelder, Gibbs, and Gibbs and Bolger.¹⁰⁵ 10 of the 12 case studies are in America, one is in Canada and one is in the United Kingdom, covering a range of churchmanship and attendance size.¹⁰⁶ It is the author's thesis that researching patterns in organic churches that are growing in a postmodern context will be useful for other churches in their mission to disciple believers in the current postmodern North American context.¹⁰⁷ Each case study examines what Whitesel calls 'shared rhythms,' his metaphor used to describe the combination of observed patterns, which the author compares to a composer combining notes into a rhythm.¹⁰⁸ He further breaks these down into three sub-categories – Rhythms of Place (locale, accessibility, and atmosphere), Rhythms of Worship (historical, liturgical, and experiential encounter) and Rhythms of Discipleship (how each setting communicates scripture and nurtures disciples).¹⁰⁹

The final section of the research begins with the analysis of recurring patterns found in the congregations Whitesel studied and a comparison to how these patterns fit into observations by Van Gelder, Gibbs, and Gibbs and Bolger. Whitesel's research identifies 14 patterns repeated in his organic churches, finding each case study had a minimum of 7 of the 14 patterns.¹¹⁰ Whitesel does a very brief description and illustrates each pattern from several case studies,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Whitesel compares his findings to those found in: Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Pr, 2001).; Gibbs and Bolger.; Eddie Gibbs, *Leadershipnext : Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005).; Van Gelder, Craig. 1998. *Missional Context, Understanding North American Culture*. In Guder.

¹⁰⁶ In England: Saint Thomas's Church of Sheffield, England. In Canada: The sol café in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. In America: Mars Hill Church, Grandville, Michigan; The Bridge, Phoenix, Tempe, and Scottsdale, Arizona; Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, California; Freeway Church, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Church of the Apostles, Seattle, Washington; One Place Church, Phoenix, Arizona; Scum of the Earth, Denver, Colorado; Bluer, Minneapolis, Minnesota; The Tribe of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California; Solomon's Porch, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

¹⁰⁷ Whitesel. Page 2-4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Page 15

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Page 15.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. The recurring patterns observed are: Culture is studied and ministry adapted to fit the audience; surfaces and images are communication channels; concern for the disenfranchised and fiscal discretion; Christ offers hope and a haven amid uncertainty; personal, decentralized, and democratized religion; experimentation and improvisation lead to encounter; all arts are welcome and beneficial; community is created and maintained by small groups; change initiated at the periphery with sensitivity to culture; authenticity is preferred over excellence; a missional approach to outreach; mystery, transcendence and relevance are sought in narratives and history; an ask-assertive and inquisitive environment is welcome; and finally, a course correction for the Boomer church. Pages 136-153.

suggesting a rationale for their recurrence. The final part of the concluding chapter is the author's recommendations to the Church Growth Movement, the Emerging Church, and the Church at large based on the findings of his research. Overall Whitesel recommends the Church understand the strategic importance of organic interconnectedness. The organic metaphor fosters an imagination that encourages systems where all parts work together, adapting to their environment with diversity.¹¹¹ Whitesel's thesis is very straightforward in content, but can get a bit muddled with the metaphor of multiple rhythms, has numerous recommendations, and can tend towards generalizations. His research confirms previous observations on patterns of practice in literature by Van Gelder, Gibbs, Gibbs and Bolger on emerging churches. It is similar to this research in touching on themes which might be those of a theological imaginary as evidenced by Whitesel's recurring patterns, many of which are theological in nature and deeper than simple behaviours. The research is conducted with some similarities using interviews, but unlike this research is primarily based in America and is done in a case study pattern. Also unlike this research, Whitesel makes no reference to the resources utilized by these organic emerging churches. The focus of Whitesel's research is on the ethos of the congregations themselves not on the theological imaginary of church planters compared to the body of resources in the missional dialogue.

Barry Cooper investigates church planting in a missional stream of churches in *Newfrontiers Church Planting in the UK: an Examination of Their Distinctives and Practices* in his 2009 Doctor of Ministry thesis.¹¹² Cooper examines the Newfrontiers stream of churches with the aim of suggesting reasons for their growth based in their distinctive ethos and practices. He employs document analysis from printed and other media materials and interviews with a variety of leaders in Newfrontiers. Cooper analysed data from a questionnaire to determine statistically significant factors of growth based on measures of success for a Newfrontiers church plant. The thesis sets the context with a section on church planting in the UK and the history of the Newfrontiers movement as a charismatic church characterized by a mix of neo-Pentecostal and reformed theology, charismatic worship, evangelical revivalism evangelism, and "New

¹¹¹ Ibid. Page 161.

¹¹² Barry Cooper, "Newfrontiers Church Planting in the UK an Examination of Their Distinctives and Practices" (Thesis, University of Wales, 2009).

Apostolic” leadership.¹¹³ A history of the movement forms the basis to ask the question ‘Why does Newfrontiers plant churches?’ Three elements are distilled by Cooper: Newfrontiers prophetic history around church planting; the self-belief within the group of having an identity as a distinct people with a God-given mission; and an eschatological motivation that restoring and planting new churches is a part of God’s intention and connects with Jesus’ return.¹¹⁴ The thesis asks its second question ‘How is its church planting momentum being maintained?’ in Chapter 2. Factors encouraging the high level of sustained interest in church planting include the impact of foundational prophetic words concerning church planting, the influence of Newfrontiers leadership conferences, the mobilization of young people, the influence of founder Terry Virgo, and finally an investment in publicity, financial support for church planters, and training for church planters.¹¹⁵

The second section of the thesis focuses on the practices of Newfrontiers church planting, considering both how it plants churches and the levels of growth from their church plants. Newfrontiers church plants often have significant emphasis on leadership selection, outreach strategies, community involvement, and support within the network.¹¹⁶ For the purposes of his thesis, Cooper distills 6 measurements of success used for evaluating the success of church plants.¹¹⁷ The research highlights those factors that are statistically significant for growth in a church plant and then summarizes what “successful and not-so-successful” church plants might look like. Six statistically significant factors are included: 10% Sunday attendance growth rate, 30% Sunday attendance growth rate, 20% conversion growth, 20% core group growth, recognition of the group as a church, and community involvement.¹¹⁸ The author then concludes with some questions for the future of the growth of Newfrontiers including progress beyond the second generation and its potential for impact in an increasingly unchurched nation.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Ibid. Page 27.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Pages 51-78.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Pages 78-101.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Page 121.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Cooper’s six criteria are: Measure 1: numerical growth in Sunday attendance of more than 10% per year. Measure 2: numerical growth in Sunday attendance of more than 30%. Measure 3: at least 20% of the numerical growth to be through new converts. Measure 4: at least 20% of growth in the number of core groups. Measure 5: progress from being a church plant to becoming a recognised Newfrontiers church. Measure 6: identifiable involvement in the community. Pages 143-144.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Summary, page 177.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Pages 195-198.

Cooper's thesis is similar to this research in being UK based research into church planting as a general topic, with some interviews with church leaders, but is largely researched from historical documents. But the focus of Cooper's' research is different to this research in that it is focused on identifying growth factors in one missional church stream rather than the theological imaginary across a wider sample group of differing churchmanship; nor does Cooper deal with any comparison of resources accessed from missional literature.¹²⁰

Graham John Doel investigated church planting in another particular denomination in *Church Planting in the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1980-2010: A Critical Study*.¹²¹ Doel's 2010 qualitative study examines three decades of church planting within the Baptist Union, with particular aim on the church planter's awareness and response to the concepts of secularisation and contextualization. After reviewing all the statistical data available on church planting in the Baptist Union, the author interviews twelve church planting practitioners to examine their response to secularization and contextualization in church planting. Doel identifies two broad periods of church planting marked by different motivational factors and influences. The first era is churches planted between 1980-1996, labelled by Doel as Reaction.¹²² The author's characterization of this era is that of a negative reaction to the secularisation theory emerging in the previous decades. The mix of motivational factors to church planting includes location driven church plants, churches being replanted or relocated, churches started from evangelistic efforts, and Local Ecumenical Projects.¹²³ The second period of church planting identified by Doel is that of Re-imagination (1996-2010), characterized by a reflection on deeper questions about the nature of mission and contextualization.¹²⁴ Doel uses imagination in the context of church planters using reflection then imagination to explore new, creative ways of responding in mission. Doel's second period of Baptist church planting captures a similar conceptual movement towards what is the subject of this research: church planters exploring deeper questions about the nature of mission and culture, or in other terms, their theological imaginary. Church

¹²⁰ Cooper does have a very small section on UK literature on church planting on pages 31-32, but does not go into detail around the theological themes present in the literature.

¹²¹ Graham John Doel, "Church Planting in the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1980-2010: A Critical Study" (University of Manchester, 2010).

¹²² Ibid. Page 46.

¹²³ Ibid. Pages 49-66.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Pages 83.

planters in this era have a much greater focus on listening to the mission situation and adapting their approaches, particularly noting the place of food in their gatherings, a deliberate integration in their community, and a different approach to worship and learning.¹²⁵ Doel identifies markers or influences that have directly or indirectly influenced practices for this era, including the alternative worship and emerging church movements, Stuart Murray's influence through his writing, and involvement with Urban Expression and Baptist Union church planting consultation and working groups.¹²⁶

Doel's research has significant similarities with this research in that it is seeking to draw out motivational and theological factors fostering and undergirding church planting, which conceptually overlaps with the theological imaginary. Doel seeks out resources used specifically by the church planting practitioners in his research, which is again similar to this research, although his catalogue of resources is broader in type, but limited to Baptist Union focused resources. Similar to this research, Doel interviews church planting practitioners in the UK, but his sample is limited to the Baptist Union, both in those church planters he interviews and the majority of the resources he considers. Doel's research secondarily draws out some of what might be the theological imaginary supporting church planting, but focuses specifically on attitudes towards secularization and contextualization. In contrast, this research considers a broader range of churchmanship, and looks at the wide range of literature in the missional dialogue when considering theological imagination accessed on the ground by church planters. Additionally, this research compares the empirical findings to the conceptual base found in the wider literature. While addressing many similar themes, Doel's research focus is complementary to this research, focused on one church stream and without the emphasis on comparison of the interview data to the wider missional body of literature.

James Bielo brings out the practices that form American Evangelicals in his 2011 *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*. Bielo's research aims to understand how some individuals are taking in and acting on the exchange of ideas in the Emerging Church Movement in America.¹²⁷ The elements Bielo identifies are similar to the theological imaginary

¹²⁵ Ibid. Pages 92-95.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Pages 95-105.

¹²⁷ Bielo.

in that they are ways people imagine their ecclesial life together, expectations of what could be, and ideas and images which undergird these expectations. He traces what he calls Emerging Evangelicalism, characterized as ‘a movement organized by cultural critique, a desire for change, and grounded in the conditions of both modernity and late modernity’ through extensive ethnographic field research.¹²⁸ It is the grounding of both modernity and late modernity that Bielo uniquely brings out – the mixing of impulses from different directions that can be seen in the emerging church. Bielo begins with chapters unpacking two aspects (the use of irony and common stories of deconversion)¹²⁹ of a central tenet that authenticity is an organizing theme for *Emerging Evangelicals*.¹³⁰ He goes on to explore the ways in which emerging participants are formed as religious subjects in three arenas: ancient-future worship, the cultural work of being missional, and the process of church planting. Both ancient-future worship and practices of new monasticism come from individuals who are seeking authenticity by connecting to church history.¹³¹

The practices of being missional also form a way of living out authentic faith for Emerging Evangelicals: Being a missionary to one’s own society through practices of evangelism and cultural learning.¹³² Bielo picks up eschatology as a particular aspect of being missional, where different models of time related to perspectives on kingdom theologies bring the individual the potential for agency to affect the coming of the kingdom. Bielo’s research finds his Emerging Evangelicals following either a now/not yet view of the kingdom or Preterism.¹³³ Finally, the arena of church planting particularly exemplifies Bielo’s thesis that Emerging Evangelicals are both and at the same time modern and late modern religious practitioners. He posits that contemporary church planting characteristics of measurement and mapping, along with a tendency to performing traditional gender roles illustrate modernity, while late modernity is seen in the entrepreneurial spirit, patterns of urban restructuring and valuing a sense of place.¹³⁴ Bielo’s research into church planting notes that church planting is not new and is promoted across theological lines, but among Emerging

¹²⁸ Ibid. Page 5.

¹²⁹ “Deconversion” is a term also used in research by Marti and Ganiel. See Chapter 3, pages 57-77. Marti and Ganiel.

¹³⁰ Bielo. Page 13.

¹³¹ Ibid. Page 99.

¹³² Ibid. Page 136.

¹³³ Ibid. Page 156.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Pages 176, 192-194.

Evangelicals tends to focus more narrowly on a stream of church planting that is reformed, traditional in gender roles and highly professionalized in detailed execution.¹³⁵ Bielo's research focuses solely on American Emerging Evangelicals, and within that group, American emerging church planters, which is geographically different, and a narrower focus group to this research. The purpose of his research is complementary to this thesis in examining how people in his field are taking in and acting on ideas from the Emerging Church Movement (which could be considered parallel to the theological imaginary in this research). However, Bielo has a different focal point in examining the mix of modernity, late modernity, critique, and the drive for authenticity expressing itself in his subjects rather than exploring the resources fuelling those individuals and their potential imaginary. Bielo does not consider the resources utilized by church planters or carry out any comparison of theological concepts in practice and resources. His research is an excellent view of (what could be considered) part of the theological imaginary of a particular segment of the American missional/emerging church grounded in ethnographic research.

Brian Vann Miller's 2011 research on five noteworthy missional churches gives insight into leadership motivations and culture. *Images of the Missional Church: Leadership, Culture and Practices in Context*¹³⁶ seeks to identify common characteristics of what motivates leaders, the organizational culture of their missional churches, and the primary practices of their communities through doing case studies on five leading missional communities in America as identified by a panel of experts.¹³⁷ These three areas of research seek to uncover patterns amongst missional leaders and missional churches, to give a picture of what missional church looks like, as a tool for the wider church in mission. Vann Miller grounds his work on a lengthy section on the biblical basis for mission, before proceeding to look at the context of mission in the Western world including the enlightenment and the changes in the church in the West as a backdrop to the missional church movement. The thesis then moves to a history of the missional church movement before examining the three research areas.

Vann Miller uses a tool by Kim-Yin Chan and Fritz Drasgow, which looks very specifically at *why* a leader chooses to lead and the implications of that for

¹³⁵ Ibid. Pages 176.

¹³⁶ Brian Vann Miller, "Images of the Missional Church Leadership, Culture, and Practices in Context," <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/ecommonsatsdissertations/397/>.

¹³⁷ Ibid. Page 5.

their intensity and persistence at leading, to answer how motivations to lead are similar among missional community leaders. This very technical use of “motivation to lead” brings out specific categories from Chan and Drasgow, including belief and confidence in one’s leadership ability, a leaders motivation due to a desire for harmonious relationships, and a motivation to lead out of a sense of social duty and obligation.¹³⁸ He concludes that for the leaders interviewed, each of the categories of motivation are significantly present, as well as a motivation to lead in ways which contrast with observed deficiencies in more traditional expressions of church.¹³⁹ The second element considered is that of organizational culture in the missional church through the use of a quantitative instrument (Organizational Culture Assessment Inventory) to measure values of internal and external focus, and flexibility and stability.¹⁴⁰ Van Miller concludes that within the missional communities studied, a clan culture of high flexibility with an internal focus was the most significant profile, with adhocracy culture of high flexibility shifting to an external focus as a secondary culture.¹⁴¹ Lastly, Vann Miller’s third research area into common practices that define missional communities shows that the practice of large group gatherings are complemented by small group gatherings, both evidencing the value of a strong family bond. Additionally, these missional communities practice sending the church outwards in invitational ways for the sake of others.¹⁴² Vann Miller concludes his research with some application for the United Methodist Church. Vann Miller’s research on the surface has similarities to this research, but the focus of motivations to lead are very different to that of the theological imaginary. Additionally, Vann Miller’s research is both broader in considering patterns of the missional church across three arenas, and narrower through five highly targeted case studies.

Robert Doornenbal has written on the practice of leadership in *Crossroads: an Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on ‘Missional Leadership’ and its Challenges for Theological Education*.¹⁴³ Published in 2012, set in the context of Dutch theological education, Doornenbal examines the Emerging-Missional Conversation (his term which he abbreviates as EMC) to clarify the idea of leadership specifically seen in the

¹³⁸ Ibid. Pages 93-97.

¹³⁹ Ibid. Pages 113-114.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Page 72-74.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Pages 98-104.

¹⁴² Ibid. Pages 104-112.

¹⁴³ Doornenbal.

literature with the aim of seeing how leader education works in EMC, and how the training institutes in the Netherlands can apply this knowledge for future training. The primary methods used are a wide survey of literature from the EMC, and interviews and focus groups in three theological institutions on the topic of leadership in theological education in the Netherlands. In the first major section of the research, *Crossroads* contains an extensive analysis of the background of the EMC, considering key leaders, characteristics, and the way the concept of 'paradigm' works in the movement particularly as applied to understandings of postmodernity and post-Christendom. Doornenbal's use of paradigm has significant overlap with this research's use of theological imaginary. Richard L. Haney describes them as 'cousins in the family of categories that articulate efforts to describe social or cultural reality.'¹⁴⁴ And while Haney would suggest that Taylor's use of the imaginary is broader than some technical definitions of paradigm, there are certainly similarities as both are getting at 'pre-theoretical articulations' or a framework in which people imagine or expect their social reality, or their underlying assumptions.¹⁴⁵ Doornenbal particularly applies paradigm to uncovering the EMC's call for change in light of paradigm shifts related to postmodernity and post-Christendom, which is in line with this research's discussion of postmodernity and post-Christendom being understanding of context (or paradigms) which shape the imaginary of church planters.

Doornenbal considers the complex and abundant use of metaphor within the EMC which generates great creativity in ideas and gives meaning to actions but also comes with the dangers of imprecision and the potential to ideological overtones, where Doornenbal cautions the EMC to critical self-awareness, discussion and correction.¹⁴⁶ Metaphor by definition in Doornenbal's work is not the same concept as an imaginary, but none the less has relevance.¹⁴⁷ As Doornenbal points out, many in the EMC not only use metaphor (abundantly) but suggest that they are critical to the EMC as many authors consider a missional or emerging understanding of church about living in metaphors, stories,

¹⁴⁴ Richard L. Haney, "Charles Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries* in Light of Michael Polanyi's *Tacit Dimension*," in *Polanyi Society Annual Meeting* (San Diego, California 2014). Page 4.

¹⁴⁵ Doornenbal. Page 69-73.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 139-144.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Doornenbal says, 'In this chapter, metaphor will be understood in the broad etymological sense of transference (Gr. *metaforein* = transfer). In this expansive interpretation, metaphor can be defined as a linguistic process of transference, by means of which a relationship between two entities, qualities, states or processes is established on the basis of an association of given attributes of the one with attributes of the other.' Page 123.

imagination and images. Here there is connection with the theological imaginary – the use of metaphor can express elements of an imaginary, and often does as is illustrated in the *Crossroads* section on metaphor.¹⁴⁸ So while Doornenbal's research discusses metaphor and paradigm in a way that relates to the theological imaginary, his purposes are quite different: to investigate how it is used particularly within leadership, not its thematic content.

Crossroads' second section focuses on exploring different models of leadership, and finding the missional paradigm on leadership most similar to the Organic leadership paradigm.¹⁴⁹ Creativity, uncertainty, relationality, and innovation are all valued in this leadership paradigm. Armed with a particular definition of missional leadership,¹⁵⁰ Doornenbal considers how this concept is acted on in leader education in the EMC generally in the context of learning communities before then moving his analysis to the questions applied to three training institutes in the Low Countries of the Netherlands, concluding with specific questions and suggestions for leader training in these three institutes.¹⁵¹ Doornenbal's research is similar in several respects to the research of this thesis. Both paradigm and metaphor are related to the theological imaginary, but are more specific and technically used arenas of research in Doornenbal's work. Doornenbal brings out the contextual factors also noted in this research of postmodernity and post-Christendom. The research methods employed in Doornenbal's thesis are similar to those in this research: Doornenbal does a significant study of missional and emerging church literature, complemented by interviews and focus groups. Doornenbal's research differs from this research and literature in that the focus is more narrowly on leadership, or one could even say theological imagination and resource in leadership training, which is then applied very specifically to training institutes in the Netherlands. There is much to appreciate in this research. It is thorough, detailed, and provides a significant bibliography which is complementary to the research topic of this thesis.

Church and Mission in Four Aspects: Church planting within a missionary ecclesiology for the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in contemporary

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. See particularly pages 121-122.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 193.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. Doornenbal offers the following definition, 'Missional leadership refers to the conversational processes of envisioning, cultural and spiritual formation, and structuring within a Christian community that enable individual participants, groups, and the community as a whole to respond to challenging situations and engage in transformative changes that are necessary to become, or remain, oriented to God's mission in the local context.' Page 200.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. Page 269-270.

Northern Ireland by Paul Coulter is a 2016 thesis on developing both a ethnographic picture of church planting in Northern Ireland and an integrative missional ecclesiology which holds together four creedal aspects of the church.¹⁵² Coulter's hypothesis is that 'new churches are started in Northern Ireland without adequate analysis of the context or clear vision of the essential nature of the Church and its mission.'¹⁵³ To address this perceived shortfall, Coulter wants to provide a missiological ecclesiology which integrates catholic oneness, holiness, and apostolicity. This thesis begins with a significant look at the context of religion in Northern Ireland, including the influence of postmodernism and post-Christendom. He then considers the practice of church planting, both missiologically and biblically. Coulter does his research in a variety of ways. He does a broad online survey to look at attitudes to church planting, and then ethnographic research through six case studies of church planters in Belfast including interviews and a focus group with 7 other key leaders across a range of types of Christian leaders.¹⁵⁴

Chapter 4 turns to the participant's survey findings, identifying new congregations started, factors for church planting in Northern Ireland, views of the Church, views on mission and church planting, and individuals and books which influenced their understanding of church planting.¹⁵⁵ This aspect of Coulter's research has some overlap with this research in seeking to find sources which have inspired or nourished the participant's church planting ministry, but with a focus on specific material. He categorizes these influences into four strands: fresh expressions via Lings; *missio Dei* thinking from Stott, Murray and Hirsch; church growth theory primarily from Gibbs and Wagner; and Reformed thinkers including Keller, Timmis, Chester and Driscoll.¹⁵⁶ The thesis then moves in the next chapters to the write up of the case studies and supplementary interviews, with a comparison of their influences, support agencies, key ideas, context and methods. From the data, Chapter 7 considers the themes including widespread support for church planting, attitudes towards denominations and

¹⁵² Paul B. Coulter, "Church and Mission in Four Aspects: Church Planting within a Missionary Ecclesiology for the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in Contemporary Northern Ireland" (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen (United Kingdom), 2016).

¹⁵³ Ibid. Page 2.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Pages 7-10. Coulter seeks to gather data from pioneering church planters, leaders of young congregations, leaders of older congregations, denominational leaders and non-denominational agency leaders.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Pages 84-106.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. Pages 114-115.

places of ministry, attitudes towards leadership, and the theological stream of the participants. Coulter examines in Chapters 8 and 9 the creedal concepts under investigation both biblically and historically, as well how these might function in the context of the church in Northern Ireland. The thesis concludes with a proposal for renewing practices of baptism, communion and fellowship, renewing mission which work out Coulter's vision of an integrative missional ecclesiology for Northern Ireland. Coulter's thesis has significant fieldwork amongst church planters, with some overlapping areas of interest with this research in terms of resources and influence on planters. It is dissimilar to this research in that it does not particularly seek out theological themes, the context is very specific to the research setting in Northern Ireland, and the application to the integrative creedal ecclesiology is also very specific. There is much to appreciate in Coulter's thoroughly grounded research.

Hannah Steele examines the theology of the emerging church movement in her 2017 book *New World, New Church? The Theology of the Emerging Church Movement*.¹⁵⁷ Based on her doctoral thesis, *A Critical Appraisal of the Theology of the Emerging Church*,¹⁵⁸ Steele considers the theology of the emerging church, particularly of a group she calls the "emerging radicals"¹⁵⁹ in the areas of eschatology, missiology and ecclesiology. Steele contends that the emerging church is a protest movement to an evangelicalism shaped by modernity, and that the issues these emerging radicals raise are significant to the future of evangelicalism and even Christianity in the West.¹⁶⁰ Particular areas of protest are an eschatology of dispensationalism which promotes a negative view of the world and a limited view of evangelism; a missiology which prioritizes right belief and limits itself to individual salvation; and institutional ecclesiology which is performance oriented, pragmatic and consumeristic.¹⁶¹ After a history of evangelicalism which provides a backdrop against which the emerging radicals protest, *New World, New Church* considers the critical element of how the emerging church relates to culture. In Chapter 2 Steele argues that the emerging church promotes the premise that radical action is required to respond to

¹⁵⁷ Steele.

¹⁵⁸ Hannah Mary Steele, "A Critical Appraisal of the Theology of the Emerging Church - : With a Particular Focus on Its Eschatology, Missiology and Ecclesiology" (PhD, King's College London., 2014).

¹⁵⁹ Steele notes the emerging radicals include USA authors Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Rob Bell, and UK authors Kester Brewin and Pete Rollins. Steele. Page 6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Pages 3-10.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Summary on page 10.

postmodernity, to rid the church of modern influences, and regards postmodernity as so radical a shift that it requires a re-definition of theology itself.¹⁶² While recognizing the need for cultural sensitivity and critique of modernity's influence on the church, Steele questions the significant and sometimes uncritical shift towards postmodernity's values, as well as highlighting the need for the church to have a prophetic voice within culture.

New Church, New World then moves on to look at the emerging church take on eschatology, which opts for a collaborative or participative approach, emphasizing the openness of the future, the participation of humanity in creating the final destiny, and prizes novelty over tradition over against a pessimistic, exclusive, dispensationalist approach.¹⁶³ Steele notes emerging eschatology can result in neglecting soteriology and the doctrine of the resurrection.¹⁶⁴ Next Steele examines the missiology of the emerging church, finding the emergent missiology one of incarnational mission which emphasizes immersion in culture and identification with the world, but may neglect the challenge to transform and redeem culture.¹⁶⁵ The third area Steele evaluates is an emerging church ecclesiology. She particularly highlights three aspects of the radical emergents ecclesiology: a discontent with a perceived syncretized modern church which encourages the need for change; a commitment to the church in all its forms which encourages creativity; and a commitment to the community as shapers of truth. Dangers in the emerging ecclesiology include a tendency towards an ahistorical approach to tradition and an ecclesiology which is too directed by culture.¹⁶⁶

Steele concludes the book with a chapter on the church of tomorrow, offering positive contributions of the emerging church and four theological areas for the emerging church to consider for the future. She appreciates the emerging church emphasis on holistic mission and the church's call to be a part of God's restoration of creation; the critique of the modern church which can lead to creativity in ecclesial life and space for doubts to be wrestled with; and the emerging church's faith to create something new and authentic in the postmodern world.¹⁶⁷ Four areas for theological development include the prophetic

¹⁶² Ibid. Page 52-54.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Page 73.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Pages 78-83, 92-105.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. Pages 122-144.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. Pages 149-203.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. Pages 209-212.

imagination to critique current culture; a broader and deeper Christology which includes Christ as the risen and ascended Lord; a deep church which is connected to the source of tradition and practices of the church; and a development of pneumatology which encourages discipleship, faith in God's activity in all creation and in bringing to completion new life and restoration.¹⁶⁸ *New Church, New World* is a significant piece of theological research on the emerging church, more specifically focused on a "radical" branch of the emerging church. In this, Steele's purposes in research are different from the research in this thesis, focusing on the theology of a particular group of emergents and their writing, where this research focuses on a much broader group of missional and emerging church contributors. *New Church, New World* includes no empirical research grounded in practice, which again makes it quite different from this research. There is an insightful uncovering of what could be called the theological imaginary of these authors, with an additional comparison to their views in light of more traditional evangelicalism. Steele engages deeply with this group of radical emergents and their theological positions around culture, missiology, ecclesiology and eschatology, which highlights similar themes to the theological themes to this research. *New Church, New World* is a helpful contribution to the emerging church dialogue.

Stefan Paas writes about the motives of church planting in secular Europe in his 2016 book *Church Planting in the Secular West*.¹⁶⁹ After taking a look at the historic experience of church planting, and how contemporary church planting including the Church Growth Movement developed, Paas book considers three broad inspirations for church planting in Europe: confessional motives, growth motives and innovation motives.¹⁷⁰ The first motive outlined for church planting in Europe is confessional purity: a church plant is necessary in order to plant purer churches than the existing ones.¹⁷¹ Paas makes the link between confessional stances and mission: that church plants are needed in Europe because of the failure of the existing church (what he terms purity) or church plants giving a wider and richer expression to what it means to be the church.¹⁷² He then goes on to evaluate these in the context of the context of a deeply

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Pages 213-227.

¹⁶⁹ Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West : Learning from the European Experience*.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 2, 16-39.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. Page 48, 50-110.

¹⁷² Ibid. Page 52.

secularized Europe, noting the potential for separating evangelism from social engagement and damaging unity in the church.¹⁷³ The second broad motivation to plan more churches is growth. Paas focuses particularly on numerical growth in numbers of active members through conversion.¹⁷⁴ In a quite detailed chapter, Paas considers Church Growth theory, its developments and claims, and the contemporary claim that church planting is a way to growth. Research into how church growth thinking can be compared to Religious Market Theory and the evidence for growth from church planting across Europe are both considered in Chapter 3. He questions the claim that church planting is the best evangelistic method for church growth and finds that it is hard to get reliable qualitative data. He notes there is some evidence that new churches attract more converts and are more effective at reaching children than older churches, but the evidence ignores other contextual factors.¹⁷⁵

Motive three for planting new churches is innovation, and in Chapter 4, Paas considers not if this is true or how it could be true, but the conditions that must be met to make an innovative context possible. Through outlining the crisis of European Christianity and the theological responses that has brought forward, the shape of community formation, and three different environments for renewal, *Church Planting in the Secular West* considers how innovation in church planting can be innovation for the whole church.¹⁷⁶ Paas makes the case that given the complexity of Christian faith in Europe, many strategies are needed.¹⁷⁷ Paas outlines three biotopes or environments for innovation which come from innovation theory. These are: free havens, laboratories and incubators.¹⁷⁸ Free havens are locations of strong and uncompromising conviction, often countercultural, where absolute commitment to an ideal shapes a lifestyle. A second environment is a laboratory: communities of creative people from different backgrounds and perspectives working together on a problem. The last environment is that of an incubator: settings (perhaps even ones which are free havens or laboratories) which are facilitated and supported from the outside to create innovation at the margin.¹⁷⁹ The book

¹⁷³ Ibid. Pages 93-110.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. Pages 111-181.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Pages 178-180.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Pages 181-241.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. Page 200.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 241.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. Pages 226-239.

concludes with reasons (and cautions) for church planting in the Western world. Biblical justifications include churches resulting from mission and gospel proclamation to all nations and types of peoples in the current pluralistic society.¹⁸⁰ In addition to the biblical justifications, Paas states that there may be logical outworking of faith which brings one to church planting which ‘follows from the deep relationship between church and mission.’¹⁸¹

Church Planting in the Secular West is an insightful, provocative analysis of church planting in Europe where the author notes that he does not want to produce a handbook, methodology or missionary strategy. ‘Instead I want to provide an analysis of church planting in the most secular part of Europe. I want to know why people do it, what they expect from it, and to what extent their expectations are fulfilled.’¹⁸² Paas’ work is deeply theological and also deeply analytical, citing a great deal of research on church planting. His look at motivations, expectations and if those expectations are fulfilled is very similar to the theological imaginary. However, Paas’ research looks at the expectations of *why* one would church plant at all in secular Europe rather than expectations of what church planters theologically envision their churches or ministries to look like. *Church Planting in the Secular West* looks deeply at motivations to church plant but on a larger scale to this research. Although the motivations considered would include motivations which individuals have for church planting, his research is from above, a birds-eye view sweeping over multi-national patterns and divisions of the Church, directed more at sending organizations and denominations. The research in this thesis is from below, grounded in the experience of individuals in practice.

1.3.1 Summary of Research Literature Review

An examination of research to date shows that there is no empirical research examining the theological themes motivating church planters in the UK, particularly with an emphasis on correlating the theological themes of practitioners on the ground with those in a wide body of missional literature. Research literature such as that by Gibbs and Bolger, Whitesel, Bielo, Vann Miller and Cooper focus on practices seen among missional and emerging churches,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Pages 245-255.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Page 256, 256-264.

¹⁸² Ibid. Page 2

which also to a degree brings out more attitudinal and underlying theological perspectives similar to the theological imaginary of this research. However, these are dissimilar to this research in that the emphasis is on the embodied practices and not the theological themes, nor the resourcing behind the themes. The only fully UK based research reviewed are those by Cooper, Coulter and Doel, which focus on particular church streams (New Frontiers and the Baptist Union) rather than the research in this thesis which focuses on a specific perspective supporting mission in church planting practice. Coulter's research focuses on church planters in the context of Northern Ireland and similar to this research, uncovers both ideas which motivate and resources which have influenced them. However, Coulter's context is limited to Northern Ireland and his purpose is to develop an ecclesiology for that context. Research by Labanow and Whitesel is case study based, focused particularly on one or more local contexts. While Darren Cronshaw's research is also case study based, it sets out specifically to compare missional church case studies against themes in missional literature, which has parallels to this research. However, Cronshaw's scope of research is different in doing four case studies in Australia, comparing primarily with one book, rather than a wider selection of themes from missional literature. Doornenbal's research also reflects several aspects of this research in a wider consideration of missional literature, and paradigm and metaphor within the missional church movement, but his focus is specifically on leader education, with application to the specific setting in the Netherlands. Steele focuses very specifically on a group of radical emergents and their books, examining their theology in the areas of eschatology, missiology and ecclesiology. This does uncover areas of theological imagination, but is very specifically focused on radical emergent authors. Paas' work also uncovers some aspects of theological imagination for why to church plant, considered from a more institutional, multinational perspective.

Chapter 1 lays out the reasons, limits and goals of this research. In addition to outlining the research questions and terminology applicable to this study, it describes the fit within practical theological research, with an ethnographic orientation. An examination of research to date shows that this research fills a need to reveal the theological imaginary from the lived experiences and perspectives of church planting practitioners that supports their ministry and correlate this with the significant theological resources of the

missional and emerging church literature. Chapter 1 introduces the application of Taylor's social imaginary to this research and the goal of showing the theological imaginary of contemporary missionaries. The next chapter considers understandings around the context of mission which undergirds the discussion of church planting in Britain: that of postmodernity and post-Christendom. These overlapping and confluent factors are understood by many in the missional church dialogue to be key realities the church must respond to in understanding culture, church, and mission. These two factors are significant in birthing the two church movements under discussion which may be supporting the theological imagination of church planters: the missional church movement and the emerging church movement. Chapter 2 will examine postmodernity and post-Christendom as understood by and relevant to missional church literature. It will then give a background of the development of these two church movements as ecclesial responses to the contemporary context of mission.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL IMAGINARY AND ECCLESIAL RESPONSES

2.1 Introduction

Two concepts compelling the imaginary and undergirding the discussions of the missional and emerging church dialogue are postmodernity and post-Christendom.¹⁸³ They are visible in the literature in the last 20 years as assumptions of reality, images of a changing context or expectations of the world in which we live and do mission in the West. Perceptions of these realities have had significant motivational impact on the rethinking of mission theology, mission practice, and ecclesiology. As will become apparent in the literature below, both explicitly and implicitly, the thinking of the missional and emerging church literature investigated in this research is in response to the perceived challenges of the changing cultural context of postmodernity, and the changing ecclesial context of post-Christendom. Many authors reference these two factors.¹⁸⁴ Missional author Wilber Shenk expresses the concern well:

The rise and flowering of modern culture coincided with the decline and disintegration of historical Christendom. The course of the relationship of the church and modern culture is of great importance if we are to understand where we are today. Furthermore, modernity itself increasingly shows signs of aging and of being superseded by a new stage in culture. In other words, we face a double crisis—ecclesial and cultural.¹⁸⁵

While some missional or emerging authors focus on one element more than the other, both elements are recognized as together forming important factors for the contemporary church in mission. Consequently, they are important as contextual issues for understanding in relation to the imaginary demonstrated by missional authors in the literature. Emerging church researchers Bolger and

¹⁸³ It is not within the limits or the purpose of this thesis to define either postmodernity or post-Christendom in detail individually, as both subjects in themselves are complex and debated. While in some academic circles the very term “postmodernity” and even the discussion around it has moved on, as it will be evidenced, it still serves as a significant point of discussion in the missional dialogue. Just as postmodernity and post-Christendom are neither the full motivational factors nor the only understandings of context, they make up part of the context of the imaginary, which is the focus of this research.

¹⁸⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Leominster, England; Valley Forge, Pa: Gracewing; TPI, 1995). Page 3. Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West : Learning from the European Experience*. Pages 186-1193. Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997). Page 3. Stuart Murray, "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian ... does the Label Matter?," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3 (2009). Accessed 21 May 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission, Renewal, and the Future of the Church," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 4 (1997).

Gibbs affirm the critical nature of these two issues for missional practitioners saying, ‘The combined impact of the challenges to Christendom and modernity has profound implications for the church, the nature of its ministry, mission in the postmodern world, and the ways in which the next generation of leaders needs to be equipped for these new challenges.’¹⁸⁶ Missional and emerging church authors consistently address the need for the church to form new ways of being and thinking directly referencing the contextual change in culture identified as postmodernity and the change in the cultural position of the church understood as post-Christendom.¹⁸⁷

As key parts of the imaginary already in place in the wider missional literature included in this research, it is important to examine how these concepts are discussed within the movement. The literature below is referenced by or written by missional authors and reveals that within the missional and emerging church movements, authors imagine and expect the church in the West to be in the context of postmodernity and post-Christendom. The following chapter first sets out the ideas surfacing from a consideration of postmodernity and post-Christendom as referenced by the broader missional church literature. Using key literature from within the missional dialogue helps build the content base of themes in the missional dialogue around postmodernity and post-Christendom. It also serves to frame the development of the missional and emerging church movements as responses to these contextual elements in the second half of Chapter 2.

The first section will examine key texts in chronological order referenced by or addressing postmodernity in the missional and emerging church movement as seen below in J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, Stanley Grenz and John Franke, David Lyon, Robert C. Greer, and James K. A. Smith. The following section below will examine key texts in chronological order referenced by or addressing post-Christendom in the missional and emerging church movements as seen in Wilbert Shenk, Alan Roxburgh, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, Stuart Murray, and Douglas John Hall. Other texts could have been included, but the highlighted texts bring forward various realities, opportunities, and concerns for

¹⁸⁶ Gibbs and Bolger. Page 18.

¹⁸⁷ For another overview of the contemporary cultural environment and its impact on mission, see Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission : A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018). Pages 225-254.

the church present in the missional literature. Key concerns include: positioning theology within the local community of faith, but in dialogue with a plurality of perspectives; taking contextualization of culture seriously; rooting faith in its historic traditions; having a holistic perspective on knowledge, faith and community life over against a dualistic approach separating sacred and secular; resisting rampant consumerism, individualization, and commodification of faith; resisting power, totalizing narratives, and an image of the church remaining in the centre of culture; and relating carefully but contextually to media and technology patterns.

The second section in this chapter examines the missional and emerging church movements as ecclesial responses to the contextual factors of postmodernity and post-Christendom. This research explores the themes within these two movements; therefore, having a working knowledge of the background shaping the development of these movements is important. To give a wider background, first the concept of secularization is discussed as related to postmodernity and post-Christendom as another contextual reality shaping the histories of the missional and emerging church movements. The concept of secularization is the wider and more historically encompassing concept which functions in the development of the missional and emerging church movements. Then each movement will be examined for the key formative events, people and ideas involved in its development. The development of these two movements set the scene to discuss the missional and emerging church movement's literature in Chapter 3.

2.2 Postmodernity as Referenced in Key Missional Texts

2.2.1 Introduction to Missional Texts on Postmodernity

What is clear for the purpose of this research is that there is significant impact in the missional literature from perceptions of the changing cultural context most often termed postmodernity. Even while examining postmodernity as discussed in the emerging and missional literature, it is recognized that there is significant and messy overlapping cultural and philosophical factors operating, with much of the modern mind-set still functioning in culture.¹⁸⁸ A major theme

¹⁸⁸ Lyon. Page 7. See also C. Van Gelder, "Postmodernism and Evangelicals: A Unique Missiological Challenge at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," *MISSIOLOGY* 30 (2002).

addressed by every author highlighted below from both the practical and philosophical aspects is the contextualization of faith in and for a postmodern culture. Middleton, Walsh, Smith and Lyon specifically highlight the role of identity-forming and the importance of the role of the community in the life of faith. Lyon features postmodern commodification and technologies, while Smith examines postmodern contextualizing with the emerging church. Grenz and Greer more deeply focus on the philosophical roots of epistemological understandings within the church. The postmodern emphasis on shared meaning making and struggle against rampant individualism come through in missional literature in the focus on the community of faith as the locus for theology. There is an emphasis to reorient theology as both functional and widely owned in the church. Taking culture seriously is a major theme in the missional dialogue, where contextualization drives a great deal of missional ministry. Culture is a serious consideration in the emerging church, particularly the postmodern implications for culture and theology in dialogue, reciprocally speaking into each other. The postmodern concern for holistic experience runs through missional and emerging literature, seen both in alternative worship discussions, the reach back to history for ritual and faith resources, and the concern for ministry that is transformative at all levels of society.

2.2.2 Survey of Missional Texts on Postmodernity

One of the first books to survey the strange new world being called postmodern and consider it from a theological and ecclesiological perspective was J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh's *Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*.¹⁸⁹ The book brought postmodernity as contextual reality to the attention of many church leaders particularly in the US for the first time in 1995.¹⁹⁰ The authors outline their understanding of the postmodern shift in culture changing the imaginary and its expectations in the first half of the book through considering the topical questions: our sense of world or place (where are we?), identity or selfhood (who are we?), the story of good and evil (what's wrong? And what's the remedy?). A postmodern sense of "where we are" is a socially constructed world, where in the insecurity of a deconstructed

¹⁸⁹ J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be : Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995).

¹⁹⁰ Gibbs and Bolger. Pages 33-34.

reality we have created a hyperreal, media driven world which can leave the subject overwhelmed and insecure.¹⁹¹ Middleton and Walsh describe the postmodern sense of “who we are” is that of a decentred self, one who is left to form an identity or more likely many different identities, often through market directed consumption.¹⁹² Postmodernity also makes suggestions as to “what is wrong” and “what is the remedy,” questions typically answered in a narrative, or in a larger scale, a metanarrative. The authors put forward the view that postmodernity sees metanarratives inevitably as oppressive and excluding, in addition to being socially constructed therefore all relative and local. Thus grand narratives that have abused power must be replaced by a plurality of local stories, legitimate only in its context.¹⁹³ Middleton and Walsh take a sympathetic but not uncritical position towards postmodernity, suggesting postmodernity constitutes a significant challenge to biblical faith.¹⁹⁴ This challenge is not only rooted in the Christian acceptance of the Bible as a sacred text, but additionally that scriptures constitute a metanarrative which postmodernity suspects as totalizing. The authors use Part Two to attempt to address this charge while noting that biblical metanarratives have been used historically in an ideological manner to legitimate interests as well as to oppress and exclude, but that even local stories have that danger.¹⁹⁵

Part Two begins by discussing the biblical narrative as containing ethical factors that work against idealization through two factors: a radical sensitivity to suffering throughout the narrative and an overarching inclusiveness of God’s intention in creation.¹⁹⁶ In confronting a fractured, powerless identity of postmodernism (who we are), Middleton and Walsh answer with an identity found in the individual as created in the image of God who makes humanity in his own image, to share as royal ambassadors in the rule of the earth, to nurture each other and all else in creation, not to oppress.¹⁹⁷ The authors suggest the postmodern view of place (where we are) is that of a socially constructed, polluted earth which humanity has tried to master. Middleton and Walsh convey a biblical world where creation is a place both in its essence good, as a gift from God, and

¹⁹¹ Middleton and Walsh. Pages 31-45

¹⁹² Ibid. Pages 52-61.

¹⁹³ Ibid. Pages 69-74

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. Page 82.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. Page 84.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. Pages 87.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Pages 119-124.

a place where humanity is called to bring order.¹⁹⁸ Middleton and Walsh offer a thorough, well-researched entry point for those considering the challenges of postmodernity and conceptual building blocks for responses to postmodernity. The authors steer for a middle ground, recognizing that faith is contextual and historical, that modernity is not only in decline but has faults of its own, and that a naïve return to modernity or some premodern Christian ideal even if possible is unhelpful. They also recommend avoiding a postmodern spirit of radical pluralism. The authors reference missional author Lesslie Newbigin in advising that rather than attempting to correlate scripture and one's culture from an "objective" position, the more helpful approach of living as Christians in the postmodern world is in Newbigin's words to "'indwell" or "inhabit" this story in such a way that it becomes our normative "plausibility structure."¹⁹⁹ This is done through the church's praxis that is both faithful to past performances but creative and innovative to God's work in the present. Middleton and Walsh highlight the postmodern challenges to the church of living in a plurality of constructed worlds and identities, and the dangers of consumer religion, totalizing narratives and disempowerment of individual agency.

Stanley Grenz is a theologian who considers the relationship of theology and postmodernity. His was a voice interacting early on with practitioners in the missional and emerging church, and continues to be a well-respected resource in the movement.²⁰⁰ In his large catalogue of writing, Grenz has two books particularly relevant to and referenced in the missional stream that tackle the issues of postmodernity as applied to mission and theology in a changing culture. In the first book, Grenz wrote his concise 1996 *A Primer on Postmodernism* as an introduction to the subject in a condensed and accessible way, with two chapters surveying the postmodern ethos, and three chapters dedicated to the intellectual foundations of postmodernity through considerations of Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty.²⁰¹ Grenz characterizes the postmodern ethos as a mood that is generally pessimistic, with a holistic sense of knowledge, a keen sense of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. Pages 147-164.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. Page 174.

²⁰⁰ "Remembering Stan Grenz," Christianity Today,

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/marchweb-only/12.0b.html>. Accessed 5 May 2013.

Gibbs and Bolger. Donald A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2008).

Jones. Pages 42, 59. Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent : By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008). Page 79.

²⁰¹ Grenz.

belonging to the community, a plurality of belief systems, and an outlook critical of metanarratives.²⁰² Grenz surveys the foundation to postmodernity as Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer all frame new understandings of hermeneutics and language, shifting meaning from somewhere “out there” to meaning from individual interpretation. Understanding all interaction as a socially embedded language game sets the ground for the postmodern perspective of the human being completely embedded in a cultural context where the subject finds their place.²⁰³ Foucault puts forth the postmodern questions about the limits of knowledge, the nature of identity and the use of power; Derrida’s deconstruction of language removes a sense of certainty in knowledge in a text; Rorty proposes truth as what is coherent and functional for the individual and even more for the community, rather than actually corresponding to external reality.²⁰⁴

Grenz’s own perspective bookends the survey in Chapters 1 and 7, where he holds to a metanarrative seen in God’s actions focused on Jesus against a postmodern total rejection of metanarrative and centre.²⁰⁵ He finds common ground with a postmodern rejection of modern epistemology with a certainty of rational knowledge, objectification of knowledge, and an inherent goodness of knowledge.²⁰⁶ Constructively, Grenz calls for a contextualized, missional approach to postmodernity which considers culture where the people of God live out their faith commitment. In seeking how the gospel can connect and be expressed in this context, Grenz calls for Christians to live out the gospel in four “post” positions: post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic and post-noeticentric.²⁰⁷ A post-individualistic position affirms the role of the community in knowing and forming identity. A post-rationalistic gospel remembers that humanity does not consist solely of our cognitive dimension, but knowledge of God is a whole life encounter. A post-dualistic faith seeks to overcome the mind/matter and soul/body dualisms influencing Christian thinking, reuniting the whole person themselves and in relationship to others and nature. Finally, a post-noeticentric articulation of the gospel will recognize faith is more than the accumulation of knowledge, but that knowledge assists us in living out faith in every dimension of life. *A Primer on Postmodernism* challenges the church to

²⁰² Ibid. Pages 13-15.

²⁰³ Ibid. Pages 83-121.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Pages 123-160.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Pages 163-164.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Pages 165-166.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. Page 167-174.

understand the contours of postmodernity and weigh each aspect so that the church can speak to the hearts of postmodern people.²⁰⁸ Here Grenz brings key postmodern issues of rejection of metanarrative, differing perspectives on epistemology, the role of the community, and holistic integration of faith for the church to consider as it continues in its mission to a changing culture.

Grenz's second book relevant to postmodernity as a significant factor in the imaginary of the church in mission today is *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*²⁰⁹ co-authored with John Franke in 2001. They take on the huge task of considering an approach to theological method that could reformulate theology in a postmodern framework in way that overcomes the mainline and liberal division and debate in theological method.²¹⁰ Throughout, Grenz and Franke orient their post-foundational methodological framework towards overcoming accommodation to modernity, overcoming the division of conservative and liberal positions, and fostering the relevance of theology for the church within contemporary society. The authors capably reference a wide range of historical issues and theological responses, highlighting weaknesses that emerged with modernity. Part one considers the fragmentation in the American theological landscape into liberal and conservative positions. Grenz and Franke make the case that each have in fact been responding differently to the same agenda of modernity in seeking to do theology from a foundationalist position.²¹¹ They lay out their conception of theology as both a contextual and an interpretive discipline. Grenz and Franke see a missional purpose for theology, located not in the academy but in the Christ-focused community for the purpose of mission to contemporary culture. Grenz and Franke note theology in the church can 'set forth in a systematic manner a properly Christian interpretive framework as informed by the Bible for the sake of the church's mission in the contemporary context.'²¹²

Theology's sources are considered in part two: scripture, tradition, and culture. Scripture is put forth as theology's "Norming Norm" where the Spirit works through the text to form the community as it lives in the contemporary setting within the participation of the larger tradition of Christian interpretation both

²⁰⁸ Ibid. Page 174.

²⁰⁹ Grenz and Franke.

²¹⁰ Ibid. Page ix.

²¹¹ Ibid. Page 10.

²¹² Ibid. Page 50.

globally and particularly.²¹³ Thus, Grenz and Franke suggest the category of tradition as a source for theology expands beyond creeds, confessions and liturgy to all the ways in which Christians perform the gospel. Culture forms a source for theology in a nonfoundationalist manner when both gospel (that is our understanding of the gospel) and culture are understood not as given, pre-existing realities, but as the authors advocate - dynamic realities dialectically informed by interaction.²¹⁴ Grenz and Franke offer both a historically informed theological view on these topics as well as a carefully nuanced position neither uncritically adopting radical postmodern positions nor ignoring the difficulties brought with modernity. A postmodern view proposed by Grenz and Franke places all theology as ultimately “local,” which leads to the question of what unites these in common as Christian. Part three lays out three focal motifs all truly Christian theology hold: Trinitarian in content, communitarian in focus, and eschatological in orientation.²¹⁵ After tracing the renewal of Trinitarian theology and implications for method, the authors argue that if a Christian theology is Trinitarian, and humanity is called as the *imago Dei*, theology also must be constructed with community as an integrative motif.²¹⁶ The final motif for theology is one that is eschatologically oriented. A nonfoundationalist theology of hope for Grenz and Franke is particular, shaped by God at work bringing the community of Christ into a future disclosed in scripture, the actual world as it will be in the new creation, in which we participate with God in creating now.²¹⁷ *Beyond Foundationalism* is a significant, systematic and constructive proposal for theological method fuelled by a passion to resource the church to be faithful in a postmodern context. The book locates areas the church in mission needs to consider in postmodernity including the implications of a modern foundationalist approach to theological method and the role of the community in both interpretation and contextualization of mission.

*Jesus in Disneyland*²¹⁸ by sociologist of religion David Lyon reflects on the impact on religion in the everyday, ordinary social conditions in postmodernity. Published in 2000, the author’s particular focus is on the lived experience of Christianity in the assumption of a postmodern world considerably affected by the

²¹³ Ibid. Page 91.

²¹⁴ Ibid. Page 158.

²¹⁵ Ibid. Page 166.

²¹⁶ Ibid. Pages 234-238.

²¹⁷ Ibid. Page 272.

²¹⁸ Lyon.

commodification of everyday life, and communication and information technologies. Drawing on both survey material and case studies, Lyon uses the metaphor of “Jesus in Disneyland” to explore the features of faith in the imaginary of postmodern culture, while also still recognizing the significant influence of the modern. He follows the themes of authority, identity, time and space to see how the postmodern influences these aspects of religious experience. Lyon is also concerned throughout the book to expose the traditional theory of secularization of religious life collapsing, but rather, sees religious life being deregulated and finding new non-institutional forms, which is often how the missional and emerging church is characterized.²¹⁹ The power of contemporary media in television and the Internet to communicate in postmodern culture changes the face of religious communication. In the current culture, Lyon describes how electronic media proliferates in a deregulated market where religious symbols are commodified, where practices proliferate and circulate without reference to traditional religious authorities.²²⁰ In the postmodern context of fragmented identities, religious identity is often assembled through consumption from a selection of old and new religious pieces a la carte and sometimes in plurality.²²¹ Lyon explores the concept of ‘glocalization’ to consider the effects of both global and local flow of religious information. Religious activity is greatly disseminated through global media, forming new religious groupings which operate outside of geographical boundaries, but still remain much more diverse and locally flavoured than one might anticipate.²²² Postmodern time is a compression of past, present, and future, a mix of commodified nostalgia for the past, the rapid compression of time across space and the obsession with the immediate which also takes the focus off the future.²²³ The author illustrates how the bricolage approach to spiritual resources and both global and local flow of faith resources can be evidenced in the contemporary church scene.

The future of faith for groups and individuals is typified by a continual process of adaptation and resistance in respect to cultural changes according to Lyon. Echoing many in the missional stream, Lyon both asserts hopefully that faith in postmodern times demands to be understood and lived differently, and

²¹⁹ Ibid. Page 19.

²²⁰ Ibid. Page 72.

²²¹ Ibid. Page 96.

²²² Ibid. Pages 115-119.

²²³ Ibid. Pages 126-135.

that this new situation brings both challenge and opportunity.²²⁴ He suggests religious life needs reshaping in different areas. First, taking the opportunity of making positive use of the new media to communicate faith – to encode faith messages and symbols in a way that communicates within the current culture. Second, Lyon raises serious concerns about largely unaddressed challenges of consumerism to faith. The Christian incompatibility of serving God and money, and the mandate to care for our neighbour and Creation are both challenged by consumerism. Lyon also sees the paradoxical challenges of both globalization and changing patterns of time for the Christian, where religious ideas flow globally, but all recipients remain in a local context.²²⁵ *Jesus in Disneyland* brings together a wide range of theorists to explore the outworking of postmodernity on faith and exemplifies these through a huge range of case studies focused particularly on larger religious trends or phenomena rather than specific churches. Regardless of the focus on larger trends, it is a good resource to examine the implications of postmodern changes (and the imaginary featuring a postmodern reality) on religious practice. Lyon's key issues for the mission of the church in a postmodern context are the pervasive commodification of life and the effects of communication and information technologies that go on to redefine religious authority and personal identity, foster the tyranny of time and confront spatial contexts both global and local.

Robert C. Greer provides a helpful continuum of positions in the debate around modernity and postmodernity in the church in the 2003 book *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options*.²²⁶ He considers four views in which Christian thinkers have responded to the challenges presented by postmodernism (Greer's preferred term), each highlighted by an author. In addition to introducing the reader to the current debate in the church regarding postmodernism, Greer argues that theology should move past modernism and postmodernism, which the author outlines for both strengths and weaknesses. Greer considers the dark side of absolute truth, defined by Greer as the Enlightenment idea of abstracted principles understood to be timelessly valid, immutable, transcultural, and ahistorical.²²⁷ His definition of absolute truth –

²²⁴ Ibid. Page 143.

²²⁵ Ibid. Pages 142-148.

²²⁶ Robert Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism : A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

²²⁷ Ibid. Page 25.

seeking to overcome finitude – leads by implication to an understanding that finitude is not good. It is this error Greer points to in a history of theology, that despite God declaring the finite creation to be very good, both theological liberalism and conservatism seek to overcome the finite by seeking absolute truth either in intuition or in cognitive objectivity.²²⁸ Greer traces the theology of ecumenism where debates rooted in whether God exists outside or inside of time have implications for an understanding of the gospel. If God exists outside of time, the gospel functions in an otherworldly state and doctrinal purity then becomes the priority. If God exists inside of time, the gospel functions in a this-worldly state where reconciliation here and now takes priority.²²⁹

The first of the four positions outlined by Greer is that of foundational realism evidenced in Francis A. Schaeffer. Schaeffer can be characterized by seeking absolute truth through a rigorously applied use of the rational method dictated by the Cartesian Cogito, located not in doubt but faith in an inerrant Scripture.²³⁰ Greer considers the theology of Karl Barth as a post-foundational realist position, anchoring theology in a real world but moving past the methodology of the Cogito where knowledge could only be attained through reasoning. Instead, Barth sees God taking the initiative to break into the world with his Word, providing self-authenticating grounds for truth.²³¹ Greer moves to the far end of the postmodern scale in the post-foundational antirealism position typified by the work of John H. Hick. Rejecting both the Cogito and a positively knowable God, for Hick all world religions equally perceive God from their culture and are judged on their internal consistency and functionality.²³² It is in the position of post-foundational middle-distance realism that Greer finds the most helpful tools for overcoming the dark side of absolute truth and barriers to unity in the wider church. George A. Lindbeck stands as representative of this position. Lindbeck recognized the postmodern stance to human language as culturally relativized, but sees divine speech in the form of the Logos – Jesus Christ – breaking in to be the grounding of all truth. God, as understood through the incarnate Jesus, the Scripture, and historic interpretation can speak to individual communities allowing both the pursuit of and boundaries for ecumenism.²³³ The

²²⁸ Ibid. Pages 35-39

²²⁹ Ibid. Pages 50-54.

²³⁰ Ibid. See Chapter 3.

²³¹ Ibid. Page 100.

²³² Ibid. Page 131.

²³³ Ibid. Page 147.

conclusion of *Mapping Postmodernism* makes the case for post-postmodernism, Greer's term for a way of thinking of absolute truth founded in relationship between Creator and creature.²³⁴ Rather than modernism and its turn to the subject as the beginning of knowledge, or postmodernism and the turn to language as the beginning of knowledge, Greer proposes post-postmodernism as the turn to relationship for the beginning of knowledge. God himself is the ultimate reference of truth rather than abstracted, impersonal spiritual principles. Greer concludes, 'Truth is both singular and plural. It is singular since God is one. It is diverse since God's personality is multi-layered, open to a wide range of responses.'²³⁵ Greer's technical, well explained survey of the debate over postmodernism in the church focuses on philosophical foundations often unexamined, but which are being considered both implicitly and explicitly in contemporary church life. The key issues for the church in mission in postmodernity Greer highlights are the potential dangers of a foundationalist position of absolute truth, the potential dangers of postmodern antirealism, and the potential of a position beyond these both where diversity exists within boundaries, grounded in a living, active relationship with God.

A more explicit consideration of postmodernity and the emerging church written in 2006 is James K. A. Smith's *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*.²³⁶ With an accessible, appealing style that uses films as illustrations, Smith seeks to unpack the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault. His goal is to get beyond what he calls "bumper-sticker" misunderstandings made by Christian critics to recapture truths about the church uncovered by postmodernism which have been lost in modernity, even while accepting some points of fundamental disagreement with postmodern theorists.²³⁷ At the end of each chapter Smith offers a "tour" of a postmodern church illustrating how missional and emerging churches are engaging with the contextual reality of postmodernity. Smith first considers the philosophy of Derrida, whose understanding that everything is interpretation governed by context and the role of the interpretive community flies in the face of the modern notion of objectivity. For Smith, this brings back the Reformers claim of *sola scriptura* and the priority of God's special revelation for our understanding

²³⁴ Ibid. Page 159, also see Chapter 7.

²³⁵ Ibid. Page 162.

²³⁶ Smith.

²³⁷ Ibid. Pages 21-24.

of the world. From insights of Derrida, Smith sees a deconstructed church using global biblical and historical resources to form believers who live prophetically in countercultural ways and proclaim the gospel revelation.²³⁸ The second philosopher unpacked is Lyotard, usually characterized by incredulity towards metanarratives. Smith corrects this misunderstanding by noting that what Lyotard is critiquing is the nature of metanarratives to appeal to some universal reason that legitimates them, without revealing their own grounding in narrative presuppositions. For Smith the postmodern condition of the plurality of the language games, each grounded in their own narrative, opens up an opportunity for a radically Christian witness on a level field in the marketplace of ideas.²³⁹ Thus the postmodern church, Smith suggests, is a storytelling church where the role of Scripture is central, told and enacted in many mediums, inviting both believers and non into the story of God's drama.²⁴⁰ Foucault's claim that "Power is knowledge" is unpacked in terms of analysing the way in which discipline and power structures serve to form individuals. In Smith's view it is this autonomous individualism that Christians should reject, instead learning from the power of formation and discipline towards the proper end of what the Christian story tells us believers are to be in the image of Christ.²⁴¹ Smith's final chapter is 'Applied Radical Orthodoxy: A Proposal for the Emerging Church.' Here Smith sets out his vision for a thoroughly postmodern Christian faith through an appropriation of Radical Orthodoxy that is thoroughly confessional but does not equate knowledge with omniscience.²⁴² His postmodern incarnation of church seen in Radical Orthodoxy is one that affirms both time and history, which in practice sees a church that is catholic and rooted in its traditions. It is also a church which affirms space – the materiality of God's good creation – which in practice may be seen in the embodiment of ritual, liturgy and locality.²⁴³

In laying out his postmodern theology, Smith has several critiques of emerging theology and its engagement with postmodernity. Smith notes, 'The emergent church has flirted with a religion without religion, sympathetic to versions of postmodern spirituality that undercut the role of dogma and the

²³⁸ Ibid. Pages 54-58.

²³⁹ Ibid. Pages 70-75.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. Pages 76-79.

²⁴¹ Ibid. Pages 99-107.

²⁴² Ibid. Page 117.

²⁴³ Ibid. Pages 127-143.

institutional church.²⁴⁴ He wonders if the emerging church continues a modern correlational method, updating the church to postmodern culture rather than modern culture, letting postmodern culture set the agenda rather than mission set the agenda of the church.²⁴⁵ Smith observes that the emerging church has not redressed the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous self, saying critically some emergent spirituality actually increases autonomy and disconnection to institutions. Smith characterizes this attitude: 'We don't want denominations to tell us how to run our churches, and we don't want churches to tell us how to run our lives.'²⁴⁶ *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* is a deeply thought out resource to the church on mission in postmodernity, examining key issues including the importance of local communities interpreting and applying scripture within the context of the wider global faith community, the importance of narrative and ritual in postmodern culture, and the dangers of modern individualism.

2.2.3 Summary of Missional Texts on Postmodernity

Postmodernity is a significant contextual element for the missional church. It is one motivating factor driving the rethinking of mission and encouraging experiments in ecclesiology. It is grappling with this cultural change that forms a set of concepts in the literature, which is potentially feeding the theological imagination of church planters. The literature identifies primary issues in the area of postmodernity that form the concerns, realities and opportunities discussed in the missional church dialogue. The concepts serve not only to understand the context of church planters, but also add to the conceptual background of the literature.

Key themes around postmodernity which come through the literature include the following:

- The importance of contextualizing faith in and for postmodern culture
- The need for local embodiment of the faith community
- The importance of narrative in Christian faith and community
- The consideration of epistemological positions

²⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 119.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. Page 124.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 99.

- The role of the community of faith for identity forming
- The faith community working out theology together, overcoming rampant individualism
- The dangers of the commodification of life and faith
- The importance of a holistic perspective embracing body and soul, overcoming dualism

2.3 Post-Christendom as Referenced in Key Missional Texts

2.3.1 Introduction to Missional Texts on Post-Christendom

The declining status and practice of Christian faith in Western society, often summarized in the term post-Christendom, is another contextual element which has sparked substantial discussion in the missional church. A grasp on post-Christendom is necessary for this research to understand a key motivational factor in the missional dialogue and missional imaginary.²⁴⁷ An underlying theme throughout the literature is that the church in Western culture has been significantly shaped by the values and practices of Christendom and this has had (and continues to have) a negative impact on mission. Shenk, Hall and Murray particularly demonstrate in varying degrees of detail the negative ways in which Christendom still impacts the values, patterns, and perspectives of the church today even while they affirm the end of Christendom as an opportunity for mission. Roxburgh specifically explores these same aspects in relation to leadership through the concept of liminality. Frost and Hirsch consider three aspects of the Christendom church and ways in which a missional model of church can reverse the flaws they see in Christendom influences.

2.3.2 Survey of Missional Texts on Post-Christendom

Missiologist Wilbert Shenk surveys the historical roots and development of the church and modern culture in his 1995 *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*.²⁴⁸ His focus throughout the book is on the damaging entanglement of the church with modern Western culture, Christendom and the Enlightenment,

²⁴⁷ Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Murray makes his case and also quotes Alan Krieder, 'We will not fully understand the current malaise of Western Christianity until we come to terms with the phenomenon of Christendom in its many dimensions. Our Christian past shapes our Christian present; decisions taken in the past shape our current predicaments and possibilities.' Page 24.

²⁴⁸ Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*.

which has, in his opinion, resulted in the marginalization of Christianity.²⁴⁹ Shenk traces numerous factors where the church has failed to engage correctly or has been co-opted by modern culture in terms of integrity, mission, evangelization, and church, even while he acknowledges the positive contribution of both the Enlightenment and Christendom to Western culture. Both modernity and Christendom are considered as historical and sociological influences, or realities in a changing imaginary the church must come to terms with in the current era of cultural change and crisis.²⁵⁰ Shenk proposes first that a lack of integrity has damaged the credibility of the church, thus muting its prophetic properties as witnessed by the many movements of critique and renewal.²⁵¹ He highlights numerous prophetic voices such as Wesley, Kierkegaard and Barth who pointed to the lack of integrity seen in a lack of congruence between the message of the church and the visible conduct of Christians, a church which was indistinguishable from society at large. These prophetic voices also note that structures of the church were controlled by the past rather than being open to the Spirit to meet new demands.²⁵²

Mission in particular is critiqued in Christendom, where Shenk states quite starkly, 'The Christendom model of church may be characterized as church without mission.'²⁵³ The mission of the church in Christendom, as an instrument of the State, was initially to ensure that all inhabitants of the empire were Christian. When the whole territory of Christendom was sacralised, even this sense of mission diminished. The author concludes that the church today must reject any claim that a culture is fully "Christian," must ensure the normal mode for the church is missional towards every culture, and must ensure that mission and evangelization not be separated.²⁵⁴ Shenk proposes that the church's purpose can be seen in serving the *missio Dei* and this purpose must be continuously renewed in the church in each era. He suggests that the church in modern culture had become syncretistic in evangelism by uncritically taking the assumptions and methods of modern culture, dominated by methods, technique, and individualism.²⁵⁵ It is Shenk's hope that when the painful but necessary

²⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 2.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. Page 3.

²⁵¹ Ibid. Page 7.

²⁵² Ibid. Pages 13-29.

²⁵³ Ibid. Page 35.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. Pages 32-48.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 56-64.

erosion of the old structures of Christendom takes place, the church in the West can be truly renewed. He proposes a threefold vision for the church: the church finds hope in times of crisis by turning to God and his *missio Dei*; the church reads the times through God's eyes and heart for the world; and the church renews its covenant to God and to his mission.²⁵⁶ Shenk's small but dense book points to a false historical reality in imagining a "Christian" culture, the need for the church to be inherently on mission within every culture in every time, and the need to be aware of the dangers of uncritically applying cultural patterns to spiritual life.

The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity is Douglas John Hall's thinking on the church and Christendom, first published in 1997.²⁵⁷ He states boldly in the first paragraph that what is happening within Christianity in the world is the end of Christendom, which started in the fourth century under Constantine. He states, 'That beginning and this ending are the two great social transitions in the course of Christianity in the world.'²⁵⁸ Further, Hall proposes that the wider church in the West is predominately unaware or unaccepting of this change. Reliance on the past state of Christendom, and commitment to the established model of church is in Hall's opinion the greatest obstacle to the church's message in contemporary society.²⁵⁹ Hall's short book outlines in Chapter 1 the reality of Christendom: with a history of superiority, with a brief for the church to Christianize society and with a particular vision of a triumphal future – all of which cannot nor should not be sustained in Hall's opinion. Chapter 2 explores the response of the church to generally seek to ignore the reality of a failing Christendom in North America, carry on with business as usual, and why this is so. Hall's conclusion is that the form of Christian 'establishment' characterized by Christendom in North America is cultural, ideational and social, on the level of content rather than form and legality, as seen in a European context.²⁶⁰ By this he means a melding of the content of Christian faith, and the content of cultural values and morality, making Christian "establishment" a complex reality.

Hall lays out the nature of the problem in the first half of the book, and proceeds in the second half to suggest a response. His suggestion is for the

²⁵⁶ Ibid. Page 80.

²⁵⁷ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2002).

²⁵⁸ Ibid. Page 1.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. Pages 2-7.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 29.

church to “disestablish” itself in the hope of then reengaging with mission in the world. Rather than attempt to regain a diminishing sense of centrality and privilege assumed in times past, or fall into despair, the church should actively participate in what the Reformation teaching called the ‘continuous reformation of the disciple community (*semper reformanda*).’²⁶¹ Here the intentional activity of disengagement comes through the work of theology in the congregation which helps discern the Christian message from the culture which with it identifies. It must be a deep work of theology within the whole church to understand the tenets and traditions of Christian faith disentangled from cultural wrappings be they class structures, institutions, modernity, postmodernity, pietism, or free-enterprise democracy. Lastly, in Chapter 4 Hall explores what it looks like to do intentional disengagement from the dominant culture, in order to reengage. Hall notes this is not a complete withdrawal from culture, so that no connection exists for the church to speak in to culture, but is more in line with how scripture speaks of in John 17:14-15 of being in the world but not simply of the world. He gives the concrete examples of how the church can engage with quests within society for moral authenticity, meaningful community, transcendence and mystery, and meaning.²⁶² Throughout the book Hall engages succinctly with both historical context and a variety of theologians, as well as giving examples of unhelpful attempts to deal with the current crisis from a range of church positions. He sees the entrenchment of the church with Christendom shaped behaviours and attitudes as a barrier to the church in mission. Additionally, he brings out the themes of the need for theology done by the congregation and the need for the church to offer society an alternative way of living.

In 1997, missional author Alan Roxburgh looks at the experience of the marginalization of the church in *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality*.²⁶³ Roxburgh wonders if churches in North America appropriately understand their current situation of marginality. It is a crisis of the imaginary – the deeper understandings of reality and expectations of what might be. He proposes that church leaders will not be able to meaningfully shape the direction of the church for mission unless they have a good grasp of the reality of marginalization. Marginalization describes the experience of the church in which

²⁶¹ Ibid. Page 42.

²⁶² Ibid. Pages 57-64.

²⁶³ Roxburgh.

the church both cannot assume to hold the centre ground in Western culture as it did in the Christendom church and in which it is experiencing the changes of the culture as a whole.²⁶⁴ Roxburgh points out that the assumptions behind the experience of marginality are of a church which no longer holds the centre of unity and meaning in the culture, reflecting a move from the public to private sphere.²⁶⁵ Churches adapted, with a struggle, to the post-Christendom reality of going from a more public to a private location. However successful churches were in this area (exemplified in the white, middle class suburban church) this success could not last because the changes did not stop there. Postmodernity is a world without the centre-periphery structure, but a plurality of beliefs and special interest groups in a free market environment where no one group can claim even private spiritual oversight as in Christendom. Therefore the lived experience of marginalization is detrimental to new forms of mission as it keeps the church tied to a centre-periphery paradigm no longer functioning, or seeking a new private existence on the margins.²⁶⁶ In responses to the first experience of marginalization where the church moved to the periphery in the role of private lives, pastors took on roles shaped by modernity such as pedagogue/teacher and professional/expert where congregations are consumers of these services. With these roles now primarily being fulfilled by doctors and psychologists amongst others, Roxburgh sees pastors currently reconfiguring the image of leadership into three areas: first is that of counsellor, secondly technical or methodological expert, and thirdly community builder.²⁶⁷

Roxburgh then engages with the concept of liminality as a framework for understanding the current context, and puts forth some ideas for leadership in a liminal context. He unpacks Victor Turner's concept of liminality as a transition from one state to another, going first through stages of separation from the old roles into a second liminal stage where marginalization is the experience, followed by the third and final phase of reintegration into the social group in a new role, status, or identity.²⁶⁸ It is the middle stage of liminality where Roxburgh finds the most relevance for the church today. The liminal stage has two critical parts: almost everything previously considered normal is gone, followed by the potential

²⁶⁴ Ibid. Pages 3-4.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. Page 10.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. Page 12.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 22.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. Pages 27-29.

for making a new identity. Roxburgh finds in this last element significant potential for the church today to re-discover what it means to be the people of God, but only if the church can resist the temptation to want to return or recover a previously held position.²⁶⁹ Roxburgh is clear that the situation is complex as multiple factors and indeed two types of liminality (the end of Christendom and the shift from modernity to postmodernity where there is no centre point of meaning in a culture) are at work. It is the second type of liminality (no centre-periphery structure) which confronts the church today. One primary resource Roxburgh sees for the church from Turner's work on liminality is *communitas* – the formation of a group of people into new identities from an alternative vision of how to be a community together.²⁷⁰ Roxburgh sets forth suggestions for leaders towards the church together forming a new identity in the liminal time using the metaphors of apostle, prophet and poet. The poet helps articulate experience and remember tradition. The prophet helps apply the Word of God into the real, historical experience of the people. The apostle equips and disciples the church to encounter the culture.²⁷¹ He encourages leaders to imagine new roles using metaphors of apostle, prophet and poet, leading in ways that can encourage the church to a new vision of being God's people in the contemporary reality. Roxburgh points to the post-Christendom challenges of the church adapting to a new social location of public to private, and the even greater challenge of a pluralist, market driven culture without a centre of meaning. He also brings out the Christendom issue of leadership shaped by modernity's emphasis on expertise and technique.

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in the 2003 *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*²⁷² includes material working through the implications of how the contemporary church remains tied to a Christendom model. Further discussion of the book is included below in Chapter 3, but for the purposes of considering post-Christendom some selections are discussed in this section. Frost and Hirsch consider the metanarrative of the Christendom era detrimental to the mission of the church today. The Christendom story of a sacral culture, with a church-state symbiosis meant that members of the society were assumed to be Christian, taking the church from a state of

²⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 34.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. Pages 52-55.

²⁷¹ Ibid. Pages 58-66.

²⁷² Frost and Hirsch.

mission to that of religious institution.²⁷³ This put the church into maintenance mode, moving it away from what Frost and Hirsch propose is the normative apostolic-missionary mode as evidenced in the New Testament.²⁷⁴ The authors are quite strong in their insistence that the church today is still largely shaped around Christendom values, and ingrained in a Christendom imaginary in Taylor's terms, which is detrimental to the mission of the church. In characteristically strong wording, the authors insist, 'Christendom is not the biblical mode of the church. It was/is merely one way in which the church has conceived of itself. In enshrining it as the sole form of the church, we have made it into an idol that has captivated our imaginations and enslaved us to an historical-cultural expression of the church.'²⁷⁵

The bulk of *The Shaping of Things to Come* deals with reversing three flaws Frost and Hirsch highlight in the Christendom-mode church. The first flaw they see in the Christendom mode of church is that the church is attractional, working from an assumption that the church has a place of honour in society so that if the church gets their internal features right, people will come. Rather, a missional church is incarnational, going out into the host culture, assuming a posture of listening and contextualization.²⁷⁶ Second, the Christendom church is marked by a dualistic approach to life, separating the sacred and the profane, the "world out there" and the "church in here." Frost and Hirsch contrast this to a messianic spirituality, which they characterize as holistic spirituality patterned after Jesus, rooted in an everyday 'action as sacrament.'²⁷⁷ The third flaw in the Christendom model of church is where leadership is hierarchical, with a tendency to top-down, institutional and bureaucratic leadership structures.²⁷⁸ The missional church will have apostolic forms of leadership and all-church ministry, functioning in leadership particularly from the fivefold ministry gifts outlined in Ephesians 4:1-16 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher).²⁷⁹ Frost and Hirsch point out the patterns they see of a Christendom church still operating today which are detrimental to effective mission: attractional ministry, dualistic perspective, and hierarchical leadership structures.

²⁷³ Ibid. Page 8.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 13.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 15.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. Chapters 3-6, pages 33-110.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. Chapters 7-9, pages 111-64.

²⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 21.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. Chapters 10-12, pages 165-224

Stuart Murray is a leading voice from the UK on the church and post-Christendom. His two volumes *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*²⁸⁰ (2004) and the follow up *Church after Christendom*²⁸¹ (2004) are detailed examinations of Christendom – its rise and fall, effects on Church practice then and now, and the emergence of the church in post-Christendom. Murray writes with both broad-brush strokes and detail as he argues that to negotiate the post-Christendom experience, the church must understand where Christendom values and patterns came from, why they are disappearing, and how to move forward into new patterns.²⁸² While there is a small nod to the cultural, literary, and religious heritage of Christendom, Murray in *Post-Christendom* is happy to see Christendom end, saying his book, ‘celebrates the end of Christendom and the distorting influences of power, wealth, and status on the Christian story. It grieves the violence, corruption, folly, and arrogance of Christendom.’²⁸³ The first half of *Post-Christendom* examines the historical and ecclesial development of Christendom: the history of Constantine, the changes brought about to individuals and structures in the church after the shift, and the cultural values of Christendom. Murray traces how Christianity moved from the margins to the centre of society, and then as a movement expanded outward into new territory.²⁸⁴ He examines three aspects of how at least in the early centuries of Christendom, faith for the individual was often shallow and varied; behaving in ways consistent with Christian faith was also not markedly different from non-believers; but thirdly a fairly strong sense of belonging to a Christian nation and church was widespread.²⁸⁵ Murray summarises 19 ‘Christendom Shifts’ which include: the creation and progressive development of a Christian culture; the assumption that all citizens (except Jews) were Christian by birth; imposed common beliefs, church attendance, and morality to be shared by all; a hierarchical church system; a division between clergy and laity; and the use of political and military force to impose Christianity.²⁸⁶

Post-Christendom turns to concrete realities in Chapter 7 on “The Christendom Legacy.” In this chapter Murray spends six pages listing the

²⁸⁰ Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*.

²⁸¹ *Church after Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

²⁸² *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Page xv.

²⁸³ *Ibid.* Page 21.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Pages 49-50.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Pages 63-72.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Pages 82-83.

vestiges of Christendom realities, practices, and mind-sets.²⁸⁷ As he does throughout the book, Murray then asks quite pointed questions of these vestiges, providing an agenda for conversation, options for responses and much on which to reflect.²⁸⁸ The last three chapters of the book are a more hopeful examination of the implications for a post-Christendom setting for mission and church, with some tentative but specific suggestions for the future, given the legacy of Christendom. Murray concludes with a short but suggestion-filled consideration of resources in the global church on which the post-Christendom church can draw. Dissident traditions are a resource for the post-Christendom church, where traditions which rejected aspects of Christendom long ago might hold insights for today as does the global non-Western church. The Bible, theology, and imagery all offer potential assets for consideration, with a suggestion the church carefully watch terminology and keep Jesus the central focus of mission in post-Christendom.²⁸⁹ Murray's *Post-Christendom* is packed with lists of cultural, historical and ecclesiological elements related to the effects of Christendom and lists of questions and proposals for the church to consider. While the content jumps around in categories from overarching values to very specific behaviours, the overarching theme of the invasive mentality of Christendom still active in the church today comes through clearly. It brings out themes including the assumptions of an attractional church in the centre of culture, institutional power and wealth in the church, connections between church and state, a "Christian nation" mentality which detracts from mission, hierarchical structures, and lecture style preaching/teaching.

Church After Christendom picks up where *Post-Christendom* leaves off, focusing on the shape and ethos of the church in the transition into a post-Christendom world. Part one considers the shape of the church, overlapping with the first book in bringing out the consequences of Christendom for the church today and attempts to find new ways forward. Murray considers the many complexities of belonging, believing, and behaving in the flow of church life in a post-Christendom setting including where people can both believe but not belong while others belong but no longer believe, and every shade between.²⁹⁰ He

²⁸⁷ Ibid. Pages 189-193.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. On pages 206-216 Murray notes the following for options of response to Christendom: denying, defending, dismissing, dissociating, demonising, disavowing, disentangling, deconstructing and disembarking.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. Pages 287-317.

²⁹⁰ *Church after Christendom*. Pages 13-23.

considers how these factors relate to a church that models either centred-set or bounded set inclusion and investigates why people join and leave churches.²⁹¹ Lastly, in considering the shape of the church in post-Christendom Murray asks if new forms of church will be needed for the new context or whether churches from the Christendom era can reinvent themselves. To answer, he surveys emerging churches, putting forth a categorization of different types by their orientation to mission, community or worship, and further breaking them down into groups, only lightly touching on their theological engagement.²⁹² In Murray's opinion, the way forward for the shape of the church in post-Christendom is a symbiotic relationship between inherited and emerging churches, both evolution and emergence.²⁹³ In part two, Murray makes suggestions for at least one angle of the complex work needed towards church which can survive and thrive in post-Christendom, using the biblical image of God's people in Exile. To enable the church to mission, three paradigm shifts are needed: from maintenance to mission, from institution to movement, and from the centre of culture to the margins.²⁹⁴ The church also needs to be internally healthy, characterized by honesty and harmony.²⁹⁵ Finally, Murray hopes for a church after Christendom which is simple and sustainable – one that asks itself hard questions about its inherited patterns, commitments and complexity.²⁹⁶ In total, Murray's work is engaging and readable, opinionated but thoughtful, and provides some of the most thorough considerations of both large themes and details of the church dealing with the effects of Christendom and their potential damage to the missional engagement of the church in contemporary culture.

2.3.3 Summary of Missional Texts on Post-Christendom

Post-Christendom is the second significant contextual reality in the missional church literature. This section examines key literature within and referenced by missional practitioners that deals with the implications of the context of post-Christendom. Thinking through the ways in which Christendom

²⁹¹ Ibid. Pages 26-33, 39-66.

²⁹² Ibid. Pages 74-92. Murray notes on theology in the emerging churches, "Despite their diversity, emerging churches evince similar theological emphases: creativity rooted in God as Creator; community rooted in God as Trinity; and contextualization rooted in God incarnate in Jesus." Page 94.

²⁹³ Ibid. Pages 107-126.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. Pages 136-164.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. Pages 165-194.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. Pages 217-232.

has and continues to affect the church and wider culture forms a set of concepts threaded throughout missional literature. The concepts around post-Christendom add to the conceptual background of the literature.

Key themes which come through the literature include:

- The need for the church to accept and address the significant changes caused by the decline of the Christendom model
- The Christendom mentality of religious centrality, power and maintenance of status quo obstructs the church in its missional nature
- A lack of integrity, including ties to the State and abuse of power in Christendom which has damaged the church and the church's reputation
- The negative influence on leadership in the church through patterns dominated by methods, technique, and individualism in Christendom
- A Christendom view of a sacral culture and division of the world into "Christian areas and non-Christian areas" or "sacred and secular" dualism has muted the impulse to mission
- The decline of Christendom as an opportunity for new patterns of mission to Western culture

Both contextual factors – post-modernity and post-Christendom – form important parts of the platform upon which the dialogue of mission to the West is based. The conceptual matrix that make up these factors have been instrumental in informing and inspiring much of the dialogue that is in the missional and emerging church. It is the challenge of a declining church in a significantly changing culture which has motivated the dialogue and in turn spurred on the experiments in ecclesiology in which church planters are participating. Building on the understandings of the contextual factors of post-modernity and post-Christendom above, the next section looks at the missional and emerging church movements as ecclesial responses to the contemporary context.

2.4 Two Ecclesial Responses to the Contemporary Context

2.4.1 Introduction to the Ecclesial Responses

The missional and emerging church form part of the ecclesial responses to the imaginary which includes an understanding of postmodernity and post-Christendom as key considerations for mission to Western culture. The sections below outline the background for each movement to form understandings which are foundational to this research. The terms emerging church and missional church are used in both academic and popular dialogue in Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and other Western nations.²⁹⁷ Each has specific historical roots – some commonly held and some unique to each movement. Each has specific emphases – some in common and some very specific to each movement. Eddie Gibbs notes the commonalities he sees, ‘As the missional church and a significant segment of the emerging church together represent a concern to redefine the church in post-Christendom, missional terms, they should not be regarded as conflicting entities, but rather as complementary and converging approaches; the former represents a more deductive approach, while the latter is more inductive.’²⁹⁸ While there are both fuzzy edges and some disagreement on the definition of each and their relationship to each other, there is enough clear consensus for the purpose of this research to set out the general background and historical development of each movement in preparation for Chapter 3 which surveys the literature for key themes. It is not the brief of this chapter to give a critique of these movements, but to give a contextual history for the themes within the literature. A relevant general history around the concept of secularization in the decades prior to the 1980s will set the scene for each movement’s specific history to be examined in closer detail below, providing background for this research investigating the theological imaginary resourcing church planters.

2.4.2 Secularization as a Common Background Understanding

Both the missional and emerging church movements can be developed against the intertwined understandings of cultural change in postmodernity and

²⁹⁷ Stephen Hunt, "The Emerging Church and Its Discontents," *Journal of Beliefs & Values-Studies in Religion & Education* 29, no. 3 (2008). Gibbs and Bolger.

²⁹⁸ Eddie Gibbs, *Churchmorph : How Megatrends Are Reshaping Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009). Page 41.

the decline of traditional church in post-Christendom from the middle of the 20th century as discussed above. Aspects of this decline are discussed in sociological terms as secularization. The concept of secularization overlaps with postmodernity and post-Christendom. It is not as prominently discussed in missional writing, but is acknowledged as part of the background to both movements, thus is important to mention in a general background in the decades leading up to the development of both the missional and emerging church movements. Fully unpacking the secularization debate is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is helpful and important to note secularization as a concept as it is the often assumed background against which both academic and popular authors are writing in the missional and emerging church.²⁹⁹ The overarching concept of secularization operates as an assumed trend or historical context in the emerging and missional church literature, even while opposing trends of sacralisation are noted in the sociological study of religion.³⁰⁰

The period following World War Two is characterized by a general stability in church involvement, but the 1960s start to see significant falls in all areas of church – confirmations, ordinations, membership and attendance.³⁰¹ Historian Adrian Hastings plots church history in *A History of Christianity in England from 1920 to 1990*.³⁰² Hastings makes the case that secularization is a key background concept to understand the religious change in British society marked from the 1960s. Hastings notes that while a variety of factors were at work and some social science has moved away from the secularization theory, the term secularization still proves useful. Hastings states, ‘The crisis of 1960s religion was a crisis of “secularization,” that much used and much abused word. It should not need to be disputed that in many very real ways something fairly called “secularization” was proceeding extremely rapidly – all the statistics point to it.’³⁰³ Woodhead, Heelas and Davie summarize that the term ‘names a trend, evident in the past and the present and generalizable into the future.’³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Lyon. Page 27.

³⁰⁰ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging*, Making Contemporary Britain (Oxford ; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994). Grace Davie, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead, *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures*, Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2003). Page 7. Graeme Smith, *A Short History of Secularism* (London [u.a.]: I.B. Tauris, 2010). Page 3.

³⁰¹ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1991). Page 551-552.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid. Pages 585-586.

³⁰⁴ Davie, Heelas, and Woodhead. Page 1.

The traditional formulation of secularization has been challenged by those such as Grace Davie who differentiates between the decline of the Church and the decline of Christian belief. Davie notes the disparity between markers of religious belief in Britain and the statistics of declining religious membership or practice, proposing Britain as a society where there is “believing without belonging.”³⁰⁵ Davie’s most recent research discusses the complexity of the British paradox around religion, noting that two different things are happening at the same time. ‘On the one hand are the increasing levels of secularity – or simply indifference – in modern Britain, which has led in turn to an inevitable decline in religious knowledge as well as in religious belief. On the other is a series of increasingly urgent debates about religion in public life....’³⁰⁶ Davie outlines features of the complex picture of religion in modern Britain, noting the sometimes conflicting features including the role of the historic church in shaping British culture, the same historic church’s lack of influence in the beliefs and behaviour of the majority of the population, religious activity by choice rather than duty, and a greater plurality of religions in Britain.³⁰⁷

Author Charles Taylor, whose concept of “social imaginary” is modified for this research for the “theological imaginary,” writes a deep, complex history of secularization in his 2007 award-winning book *A Secular Age*.³⁰⁸ His central question asks how the West has moved from medieval society where it was nearly impossible not to believe in God, to society today in which belief in God is only one possibility of others – and a challenging option at that.³⁰⁹ Taylor traces sweeping and subtle changes which see Western society move from a cosmos of divine purpose and interaction to one of impersonal, natural order; from a society understanding itself as grounded in a higher reality, to one in which humans live exclusively in secular action and time; from living in an “enchanted” world, open to the interaction of transcendence to one closed and self-sufficient.³¹⁰ In particular, Taylor resists linear, reductionist narratives of modern science forcing a trajectory of secular humanism, and illustrates how Latin Christianity unintentionally contributed to the change in society over time. His

³⁰⁵ Smith. Page 43. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging. Religion in Britain : A Persistent Paradox* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015).

³⁰⁶ *Religion in Britain : A Persistent Paradox*.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. Pages 3-4.

³⁰⁸ Taylor.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. Pages 3, 25.

³¹⁰ Ibid. Pages 25-26.

account is significantly insightful to the history of secularization in a much larger timeframe than will be addressed in this research as a history to the ecclesial responses of the missional and emerging church. It is particularly noted here as this section discusses secularization as a general background to the responses to postmodernity and post-Christendom, and as Taylor is an important author in other respects in this research. *A Secular Age* is a compelling work which has much to offer, but is, in its entirety, not relevant to the needs of this section, and is far too long and complex to even attempt to summarize. The long historical reasoning Taylor deals with are not generally considered in the missional literature, although the resulting realities of a secular society are very relevant and a matter of discussion in literature discussed below. Some excellent summary articles and materials are footnoted here,³¹¹ but several themes which Taylor draws out and his perspective on the reasons for secularity will be included as relevant below.

A more concise summary of the nuances of secularization is to be found in an article by Stephen Paas entitled "Post-Christian, post-Christendom, and post-modern Europe: Towards the interaction of missiology and the social sciences."³¹² Paas's article is helpful in summarizing different aspects of secularization and their overlap with the previously discussed aspects of postmodernity and post-Christendom. Paas observes that the 'post' terms are useful conceptual lenses but while they illuminate some features in society, they are blind to others. Additionally, they are often used without precision and interchangeably, creating difficult exchanges between the fields of missiology and the social sciences. Paas makes the case that each term is in fact related to different aspects of secularization.³¹³ He outlines five different definitions of secularization in use in the current debates: differentiation, rationalization,

³¹¹ For an excellent book particularly written to bring *A Secular Age* to a broader audience, see James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (2014). Scholarly articles summarizing and interacting with *A Secular Age* include: Lincoln Ward, "A Secular Age" in a Mission Perspective: A Review Article," *transformation Transformation* 28, no. 3 (2011); John Milbank, "Reviewarticle: A Closer Walk on the Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2009). Gregory Baum, "The Response of a Theologian to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *MOTH Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010).

³¹² Paas, "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences."

³¹³ *Ibid.* Page 6. Paas notes the term "secularization" functions as a catchword for when the "secular" realm increases at the expense of the "religious" realm as societies become more modern. He differentiates this from "Secularism" as an ideological stance to make societies more secular or a world-view which considers non-religious perspectives as normal. Page 6.

privatization, pluralisation, and individual loss of faith.³¹⁴ Paas then outlines three concepts used by missiologists: post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and post-modern. The author suggests that “post-Christian” should be used to refer to the aspect of secularization where individuals lose their faith, having a change in beliefs, motivations, and practices on a personal but not institutional level.³¹⁵

Paas finds the term post-Christendom a useful lens particularly when limited to changes directly related to power and the collapse of the church’s power in Europe, in contrast to the term post-Christian, referring to personal rather than institutional faith issues.³¹⁶ Thus for Paas, post-Christendom is related to the secularization concept differentiation, though in a more historical and theological manner.³¹⁷ Post-modern as a term is notably complex but the author comes to a short definition of being aware of the deconstructability of all meaning and truth.³¹⁸ In terms of relating the term post-modern to the definitions of secularization, Paas argues that quite a lot of modern assumptions related to rationalization are still at work, where institutions leaned on scientific insight, and different sectors including the church developed their own area of specialized, rational, professional, and efficient functioning. However, the idea of post-modern as no longer having one dominant metanarrative or regime of knowledge and belief can most be related to the fourth definition of pluralisation, the multiplication of worldviews.³¹⁹ Paas reflects on some specific aspects of post-Christendom in relation to secularization, but also confirms the overarching themes noted in other literature of the negative impact of continuing Christendom patterns of mission in the West, and the end of Christendom as an opportunity for new forms and thinking for mission.³²⁰ Paas’s article is helpful in setting out five elements discussed around the concept of secularization (differentiation, rationalization, privatization, pluralisation, and individual loss of faith) and how they overlap with the previously discussed imaginary in the missional and emerging literature of postmodernity and post-Christendom.

³¹⁴ Ibid. Pages 7-9.

³¹⁵ Ibid. Page 11.

³¹⁶ Ibid. Page 14.

³¹⁷ Ibid. Page 14.

³¹⁸ Ibid. Page 15. Paas quotes Vanhoozer, ‘In short, the post-modern condition “pertains to ones awareness of the decon-structibility of all systems of meaning and truth” (Vanhoozer 2003a: 13).’

³¹⁹ Ibid. Page 16.

³²⁰ Ibid. Page 13. See also Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Page 34. And Douglas John Hall, “A Theological Proposal for the Church’s Response to Its Context,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 6 (1995).

Charles Taylor differentiates three types of “secular” where: ‘secular 1’ encompasses things earthly or temporal, as in the sacred/secular divide; ‘secular 2’ refers to the non-religious, neutral space within society and a description for where people hold no religious affiliation or beliefs.³²¹ Taylor notes that ‘secular 2’ is what is often assumed by the secularization thesis/secularism where modernization and technological advancement force disenchantment of the world as a linear reality. Taylor’s ‘secular 3’ is the focus of most of his work in *A Secular Age*, where the religious conditions of belief mean that belief in God is understood as one option amongst many, and is therefore contestable.³²² While there are other perspectives on secularization, including a large number of authors who see the traditional secularization theory as disproven or at very least in very poor health, there is widespread agreement on the overarching realities of a significant negative change for Christianity in the West which has come from, or come with, changes in society at large.³²³ When considering researcher Peter Brierley’s extensive statistical evidence of the decline in church attendance, scholars and missional authors may differ in what type of change has occurred, but note a negative change for the institutional life of the Christian church is undeniable.³²⁴ Figures from the most recent Census show a decline in “Christian” self-identification, moving from the 2001 figure of 72% to the 2011 figure of 59%. Meanwhile those identifying with “no religion” rose from 15% to 25%.³²⁵ More striking is the information from the British Social Attitudes surveys. Religious affiliation by birth year in samples from England show the remarkable change from 1900-1909 birth cohort when approximately 15% claim no religion or other religion to most recent figures where 58% claim no religion.³²⁶

³²¹ Taylor. Pages 1-2.

³²² Ibid. Pages 3-4, and Chapter 1 particularly.

³²³ Davie, Heelas, and Woodhead. John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004). Page 41. Colin Greene and Martin Robinson, *Metavista: Bible, Church, and Mission in an Age of Imagination* (Colorado Springs, Colo: Authentic Media, 2008). Chapter 8. Smith. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging*. Lyon.

³²⁴ See also Brierley quoted in David Goodhew, *Church Growth in Britain : 1980 to the Present* (Farnham: Ashgate Pub., 2012).Pages 7-8. Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007). Page 24. P. W. Brierley, *Future Church : A Global Analysis of the Christian Community to the Year 2010* (Crowborough, East Sussex; London: Monarch Books ; Christian Research, 1998).

³²⁵ Davie, *Religion in Britain : A Persistent Paradox*. Pages 42-48.

³²⁶ "Religious Affiliation by Birth Decade, 1900-9 to 1980-9," British Religion by Numbers, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/affiliation-and-attendance-from-1983/religious-affiliation-by-birth-decade-1900-9-to-1980-9/>. Accessed 22 November 2018. See also *Religion in Britain : A Persistent Paradox*. Pages 46-59.

Not all scholars are in agreement regarding the degree or nature of the decline of the church in Britain, and of the theory of secularization, although the range of views is from the profoundly negative to a slower decline and change of religious perspective.³²⁷ David Goodhew makes the case that ‘Some churches in some regions are declining, but this volume shows that substantial and sustained church growth has also taken place across Britain over the last 30 years.’³²⁸ Goodhew sites the significant numbers in black majority and other ethnic minority churches, the new congregations which have been planted across a variety of denominations, and the challenge of getting accurate statistical data, even while acknowledging large decline in mainline denominations.³²⁹ Goodhew summarizes some good news stories given by authors in the volume around large-scale church growth in London, of Baptist churches, and the vitality of cathedral congregations. Further evidence of growth is given around new churches and new forms of Church, where George Lings’ chapter examines fresh expression of church, church plants, and emerging churches.³³⁰ Other views of the collapse of Britain’s Christian heritage are illustrated by Hollinghurst, showing not only the decline in church attendance, but belief in God, infant baptism in the Church of England, and the generational breakdown of Christian affiliation.³³¹

Whether one takes the secularization thesis as an overarching reality, a slightly outdated concept, or one more specifically attributes overall church decline to post-Christendom or postmodernity, the reality of a massively changed context for the church in the West has garnered a great deal of attention since the 1960s. Robinson and Smith note that the established church in Europe had significant financial insulation in the form of land and buildings, the gradual nature of the decline, and the sheer challenge of knowing what to do about the problem which provided some sense of insulation or avoidance from the critical nature of the decline of church for a period of time.³³² But the urgency was felt and brought with it a number of responses. The Church Growth movement in America of the

³²⁷ For a range of views on church growth, decline and secularization, see essays in the volume by Goodhew.

³²⁸ Ibid. Page 3

³²⁹ Ibid. Pages 3-5.

³³⁰ Ibid. Pages 6-7.

³³¹ Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture* (Norwich: Canterbury Pr, 2010). Pages 11-23.

³³² Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith, *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2003).

late 1970s and 1980s applied sociological analyses to growing churches.³³³ George Lings notes Church Growth as one of four successive lenses or paradigms of how growth was understood and tackled within that paradigm. Lings notes that the Church Growth paradigm is a managerial or mechanical view, which was a distinct change from the long held institutional view.³³⁴ While this was a very different view of church brought over to the UK from America, it was still a “come to us” view. Many church leaders sought to apply these principles within existing churches in attempts to curb the deteriorating attendance and see growth. Ling’s next paradigm is the horticultural paradigm of church planting.³³⁵ It was a shift towards the church as an organism, towards growth by multiplication rather than addition, and from an outward to an inward mission focus.³³⁶ Church planting and evangelism in Britain received a high profile amongst a wide group of churches in the 1990s as a part of the Decade of Evangelism.³³⁷ Mega-churches in America and the Natural Church Development principles by Christian Schwarz were influential in the 1990s, adding to church growth and church health in technique and program driven methods.³³⁸ However, the move away from church growth and its numerical metrics to an emphasis on church health or church effectiveness still came from a technique driven perspective.³³⁹ Each paradigm with its respective tools for growth have attempted to not only reverse the downward trend of church connection but to grow the church. It is against this background of church decline where one begins to see ecclesial responses in recent decades including the missional and emerging church movements.

This general background brings one to the specific development of the missional and emerging church movements as responses of the church to the

³³³ For an extensive history of church planting and the resulting Church Growth Movement, see Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West : Learning from the European Experience*. Pages 10-49

³³⁴ Lings, *Reproducing Churches*. Pages 20-23.

³³⁵ *Ibid.* Page 25-28.

³³⁶ *Ibid.* Page 25-26.

³³⁷ Murray, *Changing Mission : Learning from the Newer Churches*. Page 19-22. For a full report on church planting in the 1990’s see: George Lings, Stuart Murray, and Army Church, *Church Planting : Past, Present and Future*, Grove Evangelism Series, 1367-0840 ; Ev 61; Grove Evangelism Series ; Ev 61. (Cambridge :: Grove Books, 2003).

³³⁸ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, Ill: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996). Ed Stetzer, "The Evolution of Church Growth, Church Health, and the Missional Church: An Overview of the Church Growth Movement from and Back to, Its Missional Roots," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 17 (2006). Roxburgh and Boren. Page 83.

³³⁹ Eddie Gibbs, "Church Responses to Culture since 1985," *Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2007). Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 9.

perceptions of a changed context of mission, particularly around postmodernity and post-Christendom. Although they are two distinct movements, there is significant overlap.³⁴⁰ Both movements are international and interdenominational. They are broad, diverse and the emerging church is notoriously difficult to define, likened to ‘wrestling with jelly’ or ‘nailing jelly to a wall.’³⁴¹ There are ambiguities and divergent sub-streams within each movement. This background is for the purpose of having a fuller understanding of the context in which church planters are forming their theological imaginations. The following sections give a sense of these movements in broad strokes as a context for the thematic content from the key literature in each movement in Chapter 3. The following sections outline the chronological development of the missional church movement and then the emerging church movement.

2.4.3 Development of the Missional Church Movement

While the term “mission” is a very familiar one over the history of Christianity, the term “missional” in its current widespread use is fairly recent. Although the term “missional” can be found sporadically in the late 1800s and early 1900s tied to historical missionary work, it appears in a form closer to contemporary use in a few publications in the mid 1970s. But it is Francis DuBose’s 1983 book *God Who Sends* where a more thought-out, intentionally theological use of missional is used.³⁴² There DuBose connects “missional” to the mission of a sending God, working largely from the theology of Karl Barth. Missiologist Charles Van Engen uses “missional” in 1991 in *God’s Missionary People* to emphasize that the church is missionary by nature.³⁴³ It is in 1998 that the term comes into a much wider use through the publication of *Missional Church*.³⁴⁴ Since that time, many books on the topic or using missional in the title have been printed, and is very much still in vogue today in Christian publications. Alan Roxburgh goes so far as to say it has ‘travelled the remarkable path of going

³⁴⁰ Some have noted that the missional literature tends to be put forward more by academics, while the emerging literature is largely practitioners, although examples of both can be found in each movement. See Sine. Page 41.

³⁴¹ Moynagh, *Emergingchurch.Intro*. Page 14. Croft. Croft, S. Page 90.

³⁴² Francis M. DuBose, *God Who Sends : A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1983).

³⁴³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*; Charles Edward Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People : Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991). Page 45.

³⁴⁴ Guder.

from obscurity to banality in only one decade.³⁴⁵ While a very popular term, *Missional Church* editor Darrell Guder notes that the descriptor “missional church” might be described as a “scaffolding term” which like scaffolding, may complete its job and be dropped. Guder comments, ‘It should not be necessary to speak of the “missional church,” but since it is possible for a church to exist that does not understand itself defined by God’s mission, the term is needed.’³⁴⁶

The contemporary missional church conversation is rooted in a number of theological and historical threads. Ed Stetzer describes three historical streams to the contemporary missional church. The first he describes as ‘the missionary stream,’ often referred to as the modern missions movement, with an emphasis on the church in the West having a critical role in worldwide mission.³⁴⁷ This emphasis can particularly be noted starting in the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910 and The International Missionary Council formed in 1921. The Edinburgh conference is also noted as the peak of the foreign mission society period, where organizations like the Student Volunteer Movement were highly active.³⁴⁸ In the modern missions movement of the early 1900s, mission in the church became active from parachurch organizations which came along from outside or in cooperation with existing churches.³⁴⁹ Many churches developed specialized structures even from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to participate in primarily foreign missions. While there is a significant mobilization and fervour for world-wide mission, Van Gelder and Zscheile point out that these developments brought a sense of church and mission as two different categories, which becomes a subject of the missional conversation.³⁵⁰ The dichotomy of church and mission continues in this early timeframe, but Stetzer concludes that in this first historical stream, there is distinct sense of unity around the church having a missionary mandate.³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ Alan Roxburgh quoted in Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 1.

³⁴⁶ Ed Stetzer, "Guder: "Missional" Church as a Scaffolding Term," Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/august/guder-missional-church-as-scaffolding-term.html>. . Accessed 1 December 2014.

³⁴⁷ "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Part 1: The Missionary Stream," Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-part-1-missionary-.html>. . Accessed 25 April 2015.

³⁴⁸ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 21.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 19. See also Bosch. Pages 262-345.

³⁵⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 22.

³⁵¹ Stetzer, "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Part 1: The Missionary Stream". Accessed 25 April 2015.

Stetzer calls the second stream 'mission,' emerging from 1928-1951, based on the indigenous church in non-Western countries assuming responsibility for mission and worldwide evangelism, and developing a different relationship to historic, Western churches.³⁵² An understanding that indigenous, non-Western churches also shared in the task of mission was discussed in 1938 at the Tambaram (Madras), India conference. It was in Tambaram that ideas of indigenization come to the fore. In this period of time, movement tentatively begins towards an integrated understanding of mission and church as one.³⁵³ Here also, the division between "Christian" nations and "pagan" nations was discarded, bringing the potential for the West to be a mission field. Bosch notes that the Tambaran discussions had a significant impact on the idea that church and mission belong together, even if this was not fully developed it lays the ground for discussion in the missional conversation in decades to come.³⁵⁴

Stetzer's third stream is the "*Missio Dei* stream" which focuses on the mission of God at work outside the church. Stetzer highlights in this period the International Missionary Council in Willingen, Germany that emphasized two things: God is at work outside the church, and the mission of God is bigger than the mission of the church.³⁵⁵ Bosch characterizes the time between Tambaram and Willingen as having seen a subtle shift from a "church-centred mission" to a "mission-centred church."³⁵⁶ At Willingen God's mission becomes a focus: the concept that God's work in the world preceded both the church and mission, that neither were above the other but rather both were to serve the *missio Dei*. 'The missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God.'³⁵⁷ Michael Goheen echoes the importance of 1952 as a key date where the Willingen conference provided the theological structure of the

³⁵² "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Part 2: The Mission Stream," Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-part-2-mission-str.html?paging=off>. Accessed 25 April 2015.

³⁵³ Ibid. Accessed 25 April 2015.

³⁵⁴ Bosch. Page 370.

³⁵⁵ Ed Stetzer, "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Stream Part 3: The *Missio Dei* Stream," Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-stream-part-3-miss.html>. Accessed 25 April 2015.

³⁵⁶ Bosch. Page 370.

³⁵⁷ Jacques Matthey, "Willingen 1952-Willingen 2002 the Origin and Contents," *IROM International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003). Page 464.

missio Dei which is foundational in the history of the missional church movement.³⁵⁸ While Stetzer notes churches split over the importance of the church in the role of *missio Dei*, as an idea it remained a focus through the 1970s and theologically remains important today.³⁵⁹ Other theological developments in the middle half of the 20th century also provide a context for the missional church movement.³⁶⁰ They include the discussion around the themes of Trinitarian missiology, where of particular note is the work of Karl Barth around an understanding of God's revelation in the Trinity. Barth recaptured the idea of God sending: The Father sent the Son, and the Father and Son sent the Spirit. Barth then connected this Trinitarian formulation to the sending of the church into the world, furthering the foundation for the concept of *missio Dei*.³⁶¹

In the middle 1900s the theological development around the kingdom of God and reign of God as an organizing principle of the message of Jesus – the already-and-not-yet aspects of the reign – was also foundational for the missional church movement.³⁶² In a similar time frame, developments in the Catholic Church have parallel theological developments, further laying the ground for a broader movement around missional theology. Encyclicals before the Second Vatican Council start to move towards a missionary view of the church, but in the Second Vatican Council itself, a 'missionary ecclesiology of the local church' is found not only in the specific Decree on Mission, but in *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church), where the perspective on the church is thoroughly missionary.³⁶³ In the 1970s and 1980s, the renewed interest and expanded application for the discipline of missiology brings a much broader dialogue focused on a global mission.³⁶⁴ John Drane further expands this history, observing that the ecumenical movement brought the church in the West into global gatherings that brought new understandings of contextualization and an

³⁵⁸ Michael W. Goheen, "Historical Perspectives on the Missional Church Movement: Probing Lesslie Newbigin's Formative Influence," *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry* Vol. IV, no. Fall 2010 (2010).

³⁵⁹ Stetzer, "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Stream Part 3: The Missio Dei Stream". Accessed 25 April 2015.

³⁶⁰ For another overview of factors in this section from the mid-1970's to the early 2000's which led to the development of the missional church movement, particularly in the United States, see Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Participating in God's Mission : A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*. Pages 188-221.

³⁶¹ *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 26-27. See also pages 29-31.

³⁶² *Ibid.* Page 27-29.

³⁶³ Bosch. Pages 371.

³⁶⁴ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 35.

awareness of the decline of the Western church, driving a desire to get to grips with the resulting evangelistic task.³⁶⁵ Two theologian missiologists play foundational roles in laying the groundwork for the current emphasis on the missional nature of the church: David Bosch and Leslie Newbigin.³⁶⁶

The work of missiologist David Bosch, culminating in his 1991 *Transforming Mission*, is an important and foundational text for missiology still much used and referenced today.³⁶⁷ In *Transforming Mission* Bosch applies paradigm theory to the history of mission, tracing different patterns of crisis and paradigm shift. Bosch made the case that the church is currently experiencing a paradigm shift not only in theology and mission but in the wider culture, proposing that this shift does not only bring dangers but opportunities. Bosch is also known for bringing Barth's Trinitarian theology of *missio Dei* into the wider missiological conversation.³⁶⁸ Bosch discusses mission as being derived from the very nature of God and is often quoted as stating, 'The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.'³⁶⁹ Bosch notes 'God is a missionary God' and 'Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission.'³⁷⁰ In *Believing in the Future: Towards a Missiology of Western Culture*, Bosch further outlines a vision for mission in the post-Christian West.³⁷¹ Bosch reaffirms a *missio Dei* that includes restoring all of creation, and the church as called to participation in God's mission. 'Mission is more than and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is alerting people to the universal reign of God.'³⁷² He goes on to note that Western missiology is tempted to either seek a Christian society or withdraw from public

³⁶⁵ John William Drane, *The Emerging Church* (Milton Park, Oxon, UK: Routledge Journals, 2006). Page 5.

³⁶⁶ Bosch and Newbigin are noted as critical mission theorists by many authors, including: Guder. Page 3, 80-82, and quoted throughout. Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Pages 35-36 and quoted throughout. Ross Hastings, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2012). Page 77, and both authors referenced throughout.

³⁶⁷ Bosch.

³⁶⁸ Timothy Keller, *Center Church : Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012). Page 251.

³⁶⁹ Bosch. Page 390.

³⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 390.

³⁷¹ David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Leominster, England; Valley Forge, Pa: Gracewing; TPI, 1995).

³⁷² Ibid. Page 33.

life.³⁷³ Instead, Bosch encourages Christians to have a missiology that includes an ecological dimension, that demonstrates a countercultural faith that is also engaged with society, that is ecumenical, contextual, significantly lay-led, and flowing from a local, worshipping community.³⁷⁴ Bosch's work forms a foundation stone for the missional conversation, bringing missiological thinking to the cultural and ecclesial changes in contemporary Western society.

The second significant figure in the formative history of the missional church movement is Lesslie Newbigin. When Newbigin returned from being a missionary in India, he found a very different faith context in Britain than when he left nearly 40 years earlier. He saw Britain in the context of mission, and applied to his home culture the same lens and tools he used in his cross-cultural ministry in India. Newbigin's writings after his return to Britain focused on the missionary encounter with post-Christian society. He focused on analysing the assumptions of Western culture, and on the authority of the gospel.³⁷⁵ In the last 20 years of his life, he wrote numerous books on the need for the church to engage contemporary culture. Newbigin is often quoted in his 1986 book *Foolishness to the Greeks*: 'It would seem, therefore, that there is no higher priority for the research work of missiologists than the question of what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and this modern Western culture'³⁷⁶ Newbigin was not the first to write on issues of culture and gospel in a Western context, but educators and church leaders in both Britain and America recognized that his writings 'named the conversation' critical to the church in the West.³⁷⁷ His insight as a missionary, theologian and ecumenical leader with decades of mission experience helped Newbigin bring a conversation about mission in Western culture to a wider audience. Newbigin's insights crystallized the direction of a movement of academic thinking and practical response to the West as a mission context to be taken seriously. Darrell Guder says Newbigin's work brought 'into public discussion a theological consensus that had long been

³⁷³ Ibid. Pages 33-35.

³⁷⁴ Ibid. Pages 55-60.

³⁷⁵ M. Goheen, "Liberating the Gospel from Its Modern Cage. An Interpretation of Lesslie Newbigin's Gospel and Modern Culture Project," *Missionalia* 30, no. 3 (2002).

³⁷⁶ Lesslie Bp Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids; London: Eerdmans; SPCK, 1986). Page 3.

³⁷⁷ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011). Page 49. See also Goheen, Michael (2010). "Historical Perspectives on the Missional Church Movement: Probing Lesslie Newbigin's Formative Influence." *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry*. Fall 2010, Volume IV, No. 2. Pages 62-84.

forming among missiologists and theologians. In a word, what had once been a Christendom society was now clearly post-Christian, and in many ways, anti-Christian.³⁷⁸

Throughout the history of the missional movement traced here, Newbigin was instrumental. He authored the 1952 Willingen statement, negotiating a compromise between competing positions, which would provide a theological framework which guided mission discussion for the next several decades. He was the inspiration for the 1998 book *Missional Church*.³⁷⁹ His writings are referred to today as foundational for the missional church movement.³⁸⁰ Following participation and writing done with the British Council of Churches, a group formed in the 1980s to support Newbigin's work, which came to be known as the Gospel and Our Culture programme (GOC). Shortly afterward a North American version of the GOC conversation also began. The British based group had largely faltered by the mid-1990s but the North American Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) continued to develop under the leadership of George Hunsberger, with key participants including Wilbert Shenk, Charles West, Craig Van Gelder, Darrell Guder, Jim Brownson, Alan Roxburgh and Lois Barrett.³⁸¹ It was from this collective that the 1998 book *Missional Church* was born. The publication of *Missional Church* is noted not only as the first significant book to use the term missional but also as a key springboard for the contemporary missional discussion.³⁸² The argument of *Missional Church* is outlined in six statements as follows: The church in North America is now located within a dramatically changing context. The good news of the gospel announced by Jesus as the reign of God needs to shape the identity of the missional church. The missional church with its identity rooted in the reign of God must live as an alternative community in the world. The missional church needs to understand

³⁷⁸ Guder. Page 3.

³⁷⁹ Goheen, Michael (2010). "Historical Perspectives on the Missional Church Movement: Probing Lesslie Newbigin's Formative Influence." *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry*. Fall 2010, Volume IV, No. 2. Page 69.

³⁸⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 6. Tim M. Sheridan and H. Jurgens Hendriks, "The Missional Church Movement," *ngtt Dutch Reformed Theological Journal = Nederduitse Gereformeerde Theologiese Tydskrif* 54, no. 3 & 4 (2013). Goheen, Michael (2010). "Historical Perspectives on the Missional Church Movement: Probing Lesslie Newbigin's Formative Influence." *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry*. Fall 2010, Volume IV, No. 2. Page 62.

³⁸¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 46.

³⁸² Ed Stetzer, "Monday Is for Missiology: Missional Voices," Edstetzer.com, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2010/04/monday-is-for-missiology-10.html> Accessed 31 January 2013. See also Goheen. Page 63.

that the Holy Spirit cultivates communities that represent the reign of God. The missional church is to be led by missional leadership that focuses on equipping all of God's people for mission. The missional church needs to develop missional structures for shaping its life and ministry as well as practice missional connectedness within the larger church.³⁸³ These statements outline key concepts which run through the missional literature.

The North American Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) furthered the missional discussion through publishing a series of books, as well as undertaking research and seminars.³⁸⁴ The GOCN continues to further research and publications, and involves missional authors such as Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger, Lois Barrett, and Craig Van Gelder. The GONC focuses on three things: 1) a cultural and social analysis of our North American setting; 2) theological reflection on the question, 'What is the gospel that addresses us in our setting?' and 3) the renewal of the church and its missional identity in our setting.³⁸⁵ The GOCN does not offer a precise definition for "missional church" but they do give 12 indicators of a missional church – key qualities which may be found in missional churches.³⁸⁶ In 2011, to clarify the term missional, several evangelical leaders and missional authors wrote a small document called the "Missional Manifesto" to articulate 10 core ideas of their use of "missional."³⁸⁷ At the heart of this statement is a theocentric vision of mission, where an understanding of God's purpose in the world drives an understanding of the purpose of the church in mission. Mission is first and foremost a result of God's purpose to restore creation, not one of many activities of the church.³⁸⁸ This concept returns to statements issued from the Willingen mission conference in

³⁸³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Pages 49-51.

³⁸⁴ The purpose of the GOCN as stated on their website is: "A network to provide useful research regarding the encounter between the gospel and our culture, and to encourage local action for transformation in the life and witness of the church." Gospel and Our Culture Network, "What and Why," Gospel and Our Culture Network, <http://www.gocn.org/network/about>. Accessed 1 May 2015.

³⁸⁵ George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, *The Church between Gospel and Culture : The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996). Page 290.

³⁸⁶ Lois Barrett, *Treasure in Clay Jars : Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series; Gospel and Our Culture Series. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004). Pages 159-172.

³⁸⁷ Ed Stetzer and Alan Hirsch, "Missional Manifesto," <http://www.libertynetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Missional-Manifesto.pdf>. Accessed 18 May 2015. The framers of the document include Ed Stetzer, Alan Hirsch, Tim Keller, Dan Kimball, Eric Mason, J.D. Greear, Craig Ott, Linda Berquist, Philip Nation and Brad Andrews.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*. Guder. Page 4.

1952, which becomes further developed in the idea of *missio Dei*. The sense of the church being sent and mission informing ecclesiology are themes which reach from the documents at Willingen to current writing on missional church. The influential writings of Bosch, Newbigin and the resulting work of the GOCN with authors including Van Gelder, Guder, Zscheile and Roxburgh moved the idea of a missional church into popular evangelical discussion.³⁸⁹

A foundational publication for missional church coming from the UK is the report from the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council entitled *Mission-shaped Church*. As a follow up report to *Breaking New Ground*, where church planting is "a supplementary strategy," *Mission-shaped Church* makes the bold statement that 'the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose.... A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary.'³⁹⁰ *Mission-shaped Church* concisely and coherently looks at the current cultural context in England and both the history and current array of 'fresh expressions of church' emerging as a response to the changing setting before moving on to offer a theological framework for the Church of England in mission. A fresh expression of church was defined by the Fresh Expressions core team: 'A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.'³⁹¹

Mission-shaped Church presents a variety of theological concepts for exploration but does present them in very brief form: the nature and mission of God in creation and redemption, the incarnation and the Spirit, Christ and culture in inculturation/contextualization, and the nature of the church's missional character.³⁹² It then moves on to apply these to the Anglican church and set out some reflection on what this might look like in practice. *Mission-shaped Church* provided some 'helpful new language' including "the mixed economy Church" and the term "fresh expressions of Church" which has become widely used and is the banner term for the joint Church of England and Methodist Church initiative for contextual church planting.³⁹³ Stephen Croft notes that *Mission-shaped Church*

³⁸⁹ For an outline of the importance of Bosch, Newbigin and GOCN for the missional church movement, see Keller. Pages 251-261.

³⁹⁰ Cray et al. Page xi.

³⁹¹ Croft. Page 9.

³⁹² Cray et al. Pages 84-99.

³⁹³ Croft. Pages 2-3. Croft notes that 'mixed economy Church' was originally coined by Archbishop Rowan Williams while he was Archbishop of Wales. For further contributions to

'provided the vehicle for the Church of England to say that the development of fresh expressions of church should no longer be marginal but central and normative in our common life and our understanding of God's mission.'³⁹⁴ Six years after the 2004 *Mission-shaped Church* report, the Mission and Public Affairs Council published a follow up report noting 'No Synod report for many years has had such an impact as *Mission-shaped Church* on the way the Church of England understands itself and its commitment to mission. ... It is not too much to say that the report identified and provoked a revolution in the church's understanding of its mission in a changing context.'³⁹⁵ The study group and subsequently published report has in large part fostered a whole movement within the Church of England and then partner groups, evidenced in the Fresh Expressions website. On the website one can see an array of publications, training seminars, stories, and interaction focused on a mixed economy of new church initiatives.³⁹⁶

Two notable publications which makes an in-depth, sustained argument for the "mixed economy" of church and the innovation of new ecclesial forms, written from the UK context are found in Michael Moynagh's *Church for Every Context*³⁹⁷ and *Church in Life*.³⁹⁸ Neither books are an official Church of England Report as was *Mission-shaped Church*, but are written by Moynagh who as a Church of England minister has been a member of the national Fresh Expressions team since 2005. *Church for Every Context* is a 2012 introduction to the theology and practice of what Moynagh calls "new contextual churches," where he argues throughout for a mixed economy of new churches.³⁹⁹ It considers the themes of community and contextualization particularly, but because of its overall coverage of many topics, and its nature as a reference book which outlines the broader vision of missional church, *Church for Every Context* is outlined in this section on the missional church rather than below in thematic content. Moynagh's detailed, well-referenced book covers a wide range of topics

language in the report see also Graham Cray, "An Introduction," Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/introduction>. Accessed 26 February 2013.

³⁹⁴ Croft. Page 4.

³⁹⁵ Philip Giddens, "A Mixed Economy for Mission – the Journey So Far," (2010), <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1237677/gs%201761%20web%20version.pdf>. Accessed 26 February 2013.

³⁹⁶ Fresh Expressions. <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/home> Accessed 26 February 2013.

³⁹⁷ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context : An Introduction to Theology and Practice*.

³⁹⁸ *Church in Life - Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*.

³⁹⁹ *Church for Every Context : An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. Page xix.

including the history of new contextual churches from the New Testament, through Western history to the contemporary history of new contextual churches in Britain, and the sociological context of this movement.⁴⁰⁰ *Church for Every Context* gives a much more in-depth theological development and rationale for new contextual churches than was seen in *Mission-shaped Church*, considering the nature of church and how new contextual churches are church.⁴⁰¹ He builds on this to consider how the *missio Dei* makes mission a priority for the church, and then argues that contextual churches are necessary but also how contextualization has boundaries.⁴⁰² There is a practical turn in the second half of the book, where case studies are used to examine how mission works out in community, and in specific contexts while also staying within the Christian tradition.⁴⁰³ The book concludes by looking at what maturity of new contextual churches within a mixed economy of church might involve.⁴⁰⁴

Church in Life, published in 2017, extends the theological and theoretical framework for new ecclesial communities using several frameworks. Moynagh believes the church is being called to put mission at the heart of its life, and that new congregations rooted in everyday life are one important part of what God is doing in mission.⁴⁰⁵ He sees that these new ecclesial communities are best understood through a framework of innovation, seen in six overlapping processes: dissatisfaction, exploration, sense-making, amplification, edge of chaos, and transformation.⁴⁰⁶ Moynagh examines this process in seven case studies which range from a local to national level. In part 2, *Church in Life* offers a theological rationale for new ecclesial communities as intrinsic to the mission of God, based on God's call and Jesus' example for the church to give itself away, from a position of being deeply embedded in every context and demographic group.⁴⁰⁷ There is reflection on the nature of the church and what maturity looks like in new ecclesial communities.⁴⁰⁸ Finally, the book takes a more practical turn, offering methodological structures for practice in new ecclesial communities using the innovation framework, set within Moltmann's theology of hope, seeing

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid. Part 1, pages 3-96.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. Pages 99-120.

⁴⁰² Ibid. Pages 120-193.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. Pages 197-325.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. Pages 329-447.

⁴⁰⁵ *Church in Life - Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*. Pages 1-15.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. Pages 28-36, and used throughout.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. Pages 143-236.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. Pages 237-295.

God's future kingdom bringing transformation into the present.⁴⁰⁹ Both of Moynagh's books are thorough theologically and theoretically, written with textbook qualities including a blend of academic and theological rigour, and grounded in examples of practice. They are helpful contributions to the missional dialogue, particularly in the UK context.

A similar text-book style overview of both theology and practice within the missional church in the US context is Tim Keller's 2012 *Center Church*.⁴¹⁰ While it is not a GOCN publication, it is worth a brief comment here as it is written by a widely read missional author who deals with several aspects of missional church including contextualization, and to a lesser degree, community and kingdom transformation. Keller writes *Center Church* to discuss the idea of theological vision which he defines as 'a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history.'⁴¹¹ This place of theological vision is the middle space, built on top of the foundation of one's doctrinal beliefs, and from which comes one's ministry expression.⁴¹² *Center Church* considers the role of theological vision around three axes: gospel, city/culture and movement. In these three axes, Keller outlines continuums of possible positions, noting both the history of each area, different possible rationales, and the theological and missiological ramifications of each end of the continuum. Keller's book is a good resource to the missional church as he highlights a wide breadth of material including theologians and missional authors.

2.4.4 Development of the Emerging Church Movement

Concurrent to the development of the missional church movement, another movement was in process: the emerging church. There is overlap with the missional church movement, but the emerging church covers a much more diverse expression of ecclesial response to the changing context, as well as history, distinctives and literature very specific to it as a movement. Much of the background history for the missional church movement above is formative for the emerging church conversation. The ecumenical movement bringing a new awareness of both contextualization and decline to the church in the West as well

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. Pages 297-408, 391.

⁴¹⁰ Keller.

⁴¹¹ Ibid. Page 19.

⁴¹² Ibid. Page 20-21.

as theological themes coming to the fore around Trinitarian missiology, the kingdom of God, *missio Dei*, and the missionary nature of the church.

One of the earliest uses of the term “emerging church” in writing was in 1970 when Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne published a book titled *The Emerging Church* which predicted a movement characterised by contextual and experimental mission, new forms of church, the removal of barriers and division, a blend of evangelism and social action, attention to both experience and tradition, and the breakdown of clergy/laity distinctions.⁴¹³ Larson and Osborne’s book was written before the contemporary emerging movement gathered momentum but is prophetic in its insight. Since the emerging church movement is very diverse there is no single history but rather a convergence of people and streams of dialogue which gathered momentum and sometimes flowed together.

In his research of American Emerging Evangelicalism, James Bielo traces points of dialogue that brought into being the broader emerging church movement, pointing out the variety of factors that contributed to forming it. Bielo’s outline gives a helpful summary to the diverse streams contributing to the development of this movement which will be outlined in more detail below. First, Bielo points to the epistemological critique of philosophical modernism in the conservative Protestant church. Second, Bielo points out the missiological foundation of Newbigin and the application of Newbigin’s missiology as a critique of the methods of evangelism and engagement with culture. Ecclesiology is a third stream of dialogue, particularly around house churches and church planting which follow from a critique of the conservative Evangelical church growth and megachurch movements. Fourth, a dialogue around meaningful connection with church history contributes to the emerging movement in the form of the “ancient-future” worship. Lastly, Bielo posits a fifth dialogue stream which merges with the others for Emerging Evangelicals around the mobilization in support of political causes.⁴¹⁴ These all form a context for significant questions considered in the emerging church discussion.

Well before the term “emerging” had come to the fore, concurrent experimentation in church life and theological conversations were taking place across the Western world from the middle and late 1980s. A variety of terms was used to express what was taking place at that time including: youth church, GenX

⁴¹³ Bruce Larson and Ralph Osborne, *The Emerging Church* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1970).

⁴¹⁴ Bielo. Pages 10-16.

church, alternative worship and postmodern church.⁴¹⁵ Youth pastors and young church planters began to focus on generational ministry. For some, the initial focus on bridging GenX aged people into church broadened into a realization that it was actually about addressing the contextual background of postmodern culture.⁴¹⁶ Luke Bretherton notes 'In North America, the emerging church grew out of a concern for patterns of church appropriate to 'Generation X', a reaction against mega-churches and mechanistic church-growth strategies, and a re-engagement by evangelicals with the full range of the historical Christian traditions....'⁴¹⁷

Many examples of early experimental or alternative worship form part of the history of the emerging church movement. In 1986 St. Thomas' Church in Sheffield began the alternative worship service called the Nine O'clock Service. In 1989 in New Zealand, Mark Pierson and Mike Riddell formed Parallel Universe, a monthly alternative worship featuring unique multimedia in an old nightclub. In the middle 1980s in Southern California, Dieter and Val Zander began NewSong as a church primarily to Generation X and Sanctuary began as an outreach to Goths, metal heads and punks.⁴¹⁸ As both the generational ministry focus and alternative worship focus groups continued, it developed into something deeper, focusing on the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity. Dialogue began in a variety of settings on finding new forms of church and church practice for growth and renewal in the church as well as connection to postmodern culture.⁴¹⁹

In the UK, church planting was significantly on the agenda in the 1990s with various national initiatives during the Decade of Evangelism. Unrealistic targets and concerns about viability and health of new church plants prompted a slowdown in church planting by mid-decade but allowed missiological and

⁴¹⁵ Andrew Jones, "Emergant.: A One Week Tour," http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/03/emergant_a_one_.html. Accessed 12 March 2013. Jones makes the case that the countercultural movement of new forms of ministry has been active worldwide since the 1970's.

⁴¹⁶ Gibbs and Bolger. Page 33.

⁴¹⁷ Andrew Walker, Luke Bretherton, and Richard Chartres, *Remembering Our Future : Explorations in Deep Church*, Deep Church (London ; Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2007). Page 33.

⁴¹⁸ For histories of the wider emerging church movement see: Gibbs and Bolger; Andrew Jones, "Emerging Church Movement (1989 - 2009)?," <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2009/12/emerging-church-movement-1989---2009.html>. Accessed 20 April 2013. Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (Jossey-Bass, 2008).

⁴¹⁹ Tim M. Sheridan and H. Jurgens Hendriks, "The Emergent Church Movement," *ngtt Dutch Reformed Theological Journal = Nederduitse Gereformeerde Theologische Tydskrif* 53, no. 3 & 4 (2012). Page 313.

ecclesiological issues to come into discussion.⁴²⁰ It also created an environment where churches were able to be honest about the challenges presented by a post-Christian culture, a key issue in the emerging church dialogue.⁴²¹ Bretherton notes the UK specific developments of the emerging church to include the collapse of the Nine O'clock Service, the debate around Dave Tomlinson's *The Post-Evangelical*, the charismatic renewal movement after the Toronto Blessing and of particular importance, Bretherton notes the publication of *The Mission-shaped Church* and focus on fresh expressions of church.⁴²² While Bretherton notes both UK specific and US specific formative contexts, he sees the emerging church across the globe as best understood as one aspect of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, with an anti-institutional style and emphasis on the person of Jesus and the kingdom of God over church or denomination, an emphasis on relationships and the church as family, and an openness to engagement with non-Christian cultural forms.⁴²³

The emerging church movement began not in any organized fashion, but through a diverse set of grassroots networks, including significant networking online. While denominations and networks were reconsidering church planting as a response to the challenges facing the church, Stuart Murray notes another wave of new churches was emerging, 'an apparently spontaneous phenomenon... without central planning, coordination or consultation. Loose networking, shared stories, "blogging" on websites, and developing friendships were all that connected otherwise isolated initiatives.'⁴²⁴ The emerging church discussion has taken place in unique ways in the blogosphere. In "We Know More Than Our Pastors: Why Bloggers Are the Vanguard of the Participatory Church" Tim Bednar researches blogging and what he calls the "participatory church." He notes that the impact of this participatory media is nothing less than a sea change for the church. He states, 'Emboldened by this participatory movement and empowered by easy-to-use technology, we are starting to expect different things from our churches, pastors, and denominations.... We expect to participate; we

⁴²⁰ Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Page 69.

⁴²¹ Drane.

⁴²² Walker, Bretherton, and Chartres. Pages 32-33.

⁴²³ Ibid. Pages 37-38.

⁴²⁴ Murray, *Church after Christendom*. page 69-70.

expect to co-create the church.⁴²⁵ Blogging, social media and web-based networking remains a component of the emerging church conversation.

While one can trace a broad history of the emerging movement through unrelated people and ministries spontaneously springing up in the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, one network of individuals who formed Emergent Village has played a noteworthy role in the development and profile of the emerging church movement. In 1997 Doug Pagitt was working with Leadership Network's Young Leaders Network and hosted a gathering of next generation evangelical leaders in Colorado Springs to discuss ministry to Gen Xers. Jones recounts how in that meeting Brad Cecil noted that something totally different was happening than the need to attract Gen Xers back to church, and diagrammed the shift to postmodern culture.⁴²⁶ Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay and Mark Driscoll were key leaders of the Youth Leaders Network, and together with Brad Cecil began to explore this whole new way of understanding culture and Christianity. Tony Jones led the online and on-the-ground network formed known as Emergent Village, and became a well-known spokesperson in the movement. Emergent Village became a significant focal point for the emerging church conversation, with a number of prominent people in the movement on its board of directors in 2007 including: Brian D McLaren, Joseph R. Myers, Tony Jones, Tim Keel, Chris Seay, and Karen Ward.⁴²⁷ The Emergent Village website has ceased under that name, and now the Emerging Voices blog continues with a different group of contributors.⁴²⁸ Emergent Village's history on their website reflects what others note as two images of protest and proactive mission associated with the emerging conversation.⁴²⁹ The Emergent Village website stated, 'We began meeting because many of us were disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conventional ecclesial institutions of the late 20th century. The more we met, the more we

⁴²⁵ Tim Bednar, "We Know More Than Our Pastors: Why Bloggers Are the Vanguard of the Participatory Church," scribd.com, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/47331/We-Know-More-Than-Our-Pastors>. Accessed 4 March 2013.

⁴²⁶ Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. pages 41-44.

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Slick, Matt, "The Emergent Village" in <https://carm.org/emergent-village>. Slick notes on his blog from emergentvillage.com/about/, the "Emergent Village is a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

⁴²⁸ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/emergentvillage/> Accessed 5 March 2013.

⁴²⁹ Moynagh, *Emergingchurch.Intro*. Page 11. Drane.

discovered that we held many of the same dreams for our lives, and for how our lives intersected with our growing understandings of the kingdom of God.⁴³⁰

There are two broad images of the emerging church movement: proactive mission and protest.⁴³¹ The 'proactive path' of emerging is particularly concerned with mission and church restructuring in the current context, and asking fundamental questions about the nature of the church and contextualization.⁴³² Of particular concern is thinking about how to reform for mission to a postmodern and post-Christendom culture.⁴³³ This aspect has significant overlap with the missional church movement as can be seen in Van Gelder and Zscheile's similar language for the missional church as 'incarnational (verses an attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context.'⁴³⁴ Kevin Corcoran distinguishes the "alternative worship" movement in the UK as a part of this proactive image within the emerging church umbrella, which began within the church. He compares this to the emerging movement in the US which began a bit later as a reaction against the institutional church of evangelical Protestantism.⁴³⁵

A proactive view of the emerging church can also be seen in *Remembering Our Future: Explorations in Deep Church* by Andrew Walker and Luke Bretherton.⁴³⁶ Bretherton and Walker note in the introduction of the book that four overlapping streams are informing the deep church conversations about what it means to be the church in contemporary Britain. Some of these are expressly noted as emerging church and other streams are identifiable as in the general ethos of missional and emerging church. One stream identified as one end of the emerging church is the attempt to sustain a Christian life outside participation in a congregation or identifiable church tradition, people who believe but don't belong, who might find nurture for faith in events, small groups or other faith practices. A second stream is fresh expressions of church attempting to develop

⁴³⁰ http://emergentvillage.org/?page_id=42. Accessed 12 March 2013. This website is no longer active.

⁴³¹ Marti and Ganiel. Page 26. See also Gay.

⁴³² Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Page 95. Murray also notes the second characteristic of protest and dissidents.

⁴³³ Steven J. L. Croft, Ian Mobsby, and Stephanie Spellers, *Ancient Faith, Future Mission : Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Traditions* (New York: Seabury Books, 2010). Page 9.

⁴³⁴ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Page 4.

⁴³⁵ Scot McKnight et al., *Church in the Present Tense : A Candid Look at What's Emerging* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2011). Page xii.

⁴³⁶ Walker, Bretherton, and Chartres.

regular forms and patterns of worship outside inherited, denominational or existing patterns of church. A third stream is that of renewing existing or inherited forms of church seeking vision within the Christian tradition as a whole including fresh expressions within denominations or new forms of inherited church. A fourth stream is the attempt to sustain identity, belief and practice of faith in the face of declining church attendance and the perceived threats of the wider culture.⁴³⁷ Bretherton expands on the similarities between the deep church conversation and the emerging church concerns.

On the other hand there is an image of the emerging church being made up of those who are angry and disillusioned with traditional church, who sometimes go on to establish their own faith communities.⁴³⁸ Many authors note the culture of protest.⁴³⁹ In his survey of emerging blogs and books, Jim Belcher summarizes the sense of protest into seven main categories: 1) captivity to enlightenment rationalism 2) a narrow view of salvation 3) belief before belonging 4) uncontextualized worship 5) ineffective preaching 6) weak ecclesiology 7) tribalism.⁴⁴⁰ Emerging church author Scot McKnight puts forward eight catalysts to the Emerging movement, centring around: limitations of inerrancy; an incomplete gospel; antagonism between science and the Bible; lack of integrity of evangelical leaders; exposure to multiculturalism and pluralism; postmodern deconstructionism; the debate over homosexuality; and the postmodern critique of language.⁴⁴¹ James Bielo places many individual's narratives of protest within a framework of "deconversion." Bielo considers the person striving for authenticity against the modern cultural constraints as similar to those in the emerging movement who seek to 'recover a lost sense of Christian authenticity.'⁴⁴² He

⁴³⁷ Ibid. Page xvii.

⁴³⁸ Drane. Drane also notes that the term 'emerging church' is used in three ways: 1) nothing more than an exercise in advertising: a way of repackaging an existing product in order to present it to a new generation. 2) those who are dissatisfied with existing churches and create new independent models (we'll show them how to do it right), 3) creative groups who in different ways are still embedded within the tradition and heritage of historic Christianity and ask radical questions about the nature of church in the context of our ever changing culture. See also Croft. Page 90-91. Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Pr, 2009).

⁴³⁹ Drane. Bielo. Belcher. Carson.

⁴⁴⁰ Belcher. Pages 38-43.

⁴⁴¹ Scot McKnight, "The Ironic Faith of Emergents," (2008),

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/september/39.62.html>. Accessed 5 May 2013.

⁴⁴² Bielo. Page 45. Martyn Percy mentions similar traits regarding Charismatic Christianity as a revival movement, which amongst other things attempts to reach back to restore something lost, arises from its own social and cultural genre, often during times of social upheaval, and uses experience as a key to self-knowledge. Percy also discusses charismatic movements as a sign of protest against the establishment. Percy in Davie, Heelas, and Woodhead. Pages 100-104.

notes research uncovering the challenges to authenticity from living in contemporary modern culture that repeats themes reflected in the protests of many in the emerging movement who are critiquing the traditional church.⁴⁴³

Prior to exploring themes in literature in Chapter 3 and to complete the historical background, it is helpful to get a sense of the diversity and breadth of the emerging church movement as an ecclesial response to the contexts of postmodernity and post-Christendom. In the face of the huge diversity of what might be called emerging churches, attempts have been made to categorize them. Murray suggests emerging churches are shaped and can be characterized by their interactions with either semi-churched, de-churched, pre-churched, post-churched or anti-churched.⁴⁴⁴ George Lings bundles the emerging church into five groups: networks, small groups, alternative congregations, community development, and a mix-n'-match of these.⁴⁴⁵ Researcher Ed Stetzer's categories of emerging church are referenced in some literature, highlighting the diversity and levels of engagement. He sees "relevants" as those who contextualize the practices in the church, particularly music, worship, and outreach, often with a conservative, evangelical theological position. "Reconstructionists" are concerned with existing church structures and stress an incarnational model of church, often finding themselves in a house church movement. "Revisionists" are willing to re-vision both theology and methodology. Authors in the revisionist category tend to draw the most criticism and some are considered to have left the bounds of evangelicalism.⁴⁴⁶

Finally, Scot McKnight provides a useful visual image of the wider emerging church movement. McKnight emphasizes the emerging movement as a missional ecclesiology characterized by five rivers flowing, in varying degrees and strengths, into "Lake Emerging." The first river is "prophetic," using intentionally provocative language regarding the need for the church to change. Reminiscent of biblical prophets, many in the emerging church movement use rhetoric of overstatement and exaggeration to make their point, while seeing that

⁴⁴³ Bielo. Page 45-46. These challenges to authenticity include themes such as anonymity and belonging, authoritarianism, rigidity, conformity, and consumption.

⁴⁴⁴ Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Page 73.

⁴⁴⁵ Moynagh, *Emergingchurch.Intro*. Page 14. George Lings classifications are noted in Moynagh's book.

⁴⁴⁶ Ed Stetzer, "First-Person: Understanding the Emerging Church," Baptist News, <http://www.bpnews.net/22406/firstperson-understanding-the-emerging-church>. Accessed 5 May 2013.

such language can also divide.⁴⁴⁷ Secondly there is the “postmodern” river, where there is serious engagement with postmodern philosophy. Within this stream is a range of differences: those who minister to postmoderns in an attempt to rescue them from the dangers of postmodernity; and those who minister with postmoderns, accepting it as the context in which one adapts the gospel.⁴⁴⁸

A third river flowing into Lake Emerging is that of “praxis.” McKnight paints this at the heart of the emerging movement, with four different emphases of praxis in play: worship, orthopraxy, social justice and missional. It is the fourth missional element within praxis that for McKnight gets to the heart of the emerging movement. Missional as an element of praxis includes participating in the *missio Dei* in ways that are ecclesiological, community oriented, and holistic. ‘Praxis shapes theology and theology shapes praxis,’ says McKnight of the importance of this praxis river.⁴⁴⁹ The fourth river is that of “post-evangelical,” a protest against an evangelicalism that is characterized or perhaps caricatured by a narrow gospel message of personal salvation, “Bible-study-piety” focused on correct theology without behavioural changes, and in-vs-out mentality. McKnight posits that the vast majority of the emerging Christians are evangelical theologically or evangelical conversionally, but are post-evangelical in describing the Christian life and theology.⁴⁵⁰ McKnight forms a fifth “political” river, which he only attributes to the United States. He describes this branch as concerned with social justice but often attached to party politics.⁴⁵¹ These five streams give a good overview as to the breadth and concerns of the emerging church movement resulting from its response to the conditions of postmodernity and post-Christendom. A full survey of themes of the emerging church movement will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2.4.5 Summary of the Ecclesial Responses

This chapter frames the missional church movement and emerging church movement as responses of the church to the imaginary which includes an understanding of postmodernity and post-Christendom as the context of mission in the West. Both movements are concerned with contextualizing patterns of

⁴⁴⁷ Scot McKnight, "What Is the Emerging Church?," in *Fall Contemporary Issues Conference* (Westminster Theological Seminary 2006).

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. Pages 11-13.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. Pages 22-26.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. Page 29.

ecclesiology and praxis in contemporary culture, and with thinking of the church in mission in a post-Christendom context. The history of the modern missions movement and a variety of international missions conference brought contextualization to the front as an essential element for missions, which then transfers to contextualization for the West as a mission field. Understanding the church as joining in God's mission and being sent to the world, often termed the *missio Dei*, further propelled thinking amongst mission theologians, including David Bosch and Leslie Newbigin. The Gospel and Our Culture Network pursued the question of what mission to the West looked like, as did various independent and loosely networked movements seeking to reach out to a postmodern generation. Those who participate in these movements have access to a huge variety of resources in books, online content, and conferences from fellow practitioners and academics. The following chapter will consider key texts in the missional and emerging church movements around five primary themes found in the imaginary present in the literature. Distilling these themes is a critical step towards comparing the themes present in the literature to those in the empirical research to find which themes may be nurturing the theological imaginary of church planters.

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL THEMES FROM MISSIONAL LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

With the wide array of literature in the missional and emerging church movements, there are many and varied themes discussed. The challenge of narrowing the themes and selecting representative literature was substantial. This chapter contains a thematic review of key missional texts. Five themes have been selected: the importance of being a community, participating in the *missio Dei*, the need for contextualization in mission, being incarnational in mission, and seeking kingdom transformation in society. These themes will form a base-line for comparison against themes arising from research with church planting practitioners which will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5. A thorough survey of missional texts is needed to understand the themes central to the literature to further consider if these themes are being accessed and feeding the theological imaginary of missionaries.

I have undertaken as wide a reading of texts as is possible within the time limits of the thesis, but it is acknowledged that noteworthy books can still be missed. As a practitioner, I also read for my own development. While this does bring a potential bias, it also is a strength of the ethnographic orientation of my research.⁴⁵² Ethnographic research highlights reflexivity, and as a person immersed in the context of church planting and the missional dialogue through my own reading, I bring a knowledge of the missional texts to my research. Subjectivity in text selection is addressed as far as possible by selecting texts through the use of recommended book lists from a variety of missional and emerging church websites or blogs.⁴⁵³ Texts are prioritized which are both widely read amongst the audience of missionaries and frequently referenced in bibliographies. Texts selected are those of the contemporary missional and

⁴⁵² See Section 1.2.2 for further information. See also Scharen and Vigen. Ward.

⁴⁵³ Examples of which are: J. R. Woodward, "A Primer on Today's Missional Church," jrwoodward.net, <http://jrwoodward.net/2008/11/a-primer-on-todays-missional-church>. Accessed 13 July 2011. Fresh Expressions, "Reading List," <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/reading>. Accessed 24 April 2017; "Recommended Missional Resources," Allelon, http://allelon.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=96&Itemid=89. Accessed 14 July 2013; "A Basic Reading List on the Subject of Missional," Friend of Missional, http://www.friendofmissional.org/reading_list.html. Accessed 13 July 2011; "Recommended Sites," Fuller.edu, <http://blog.fuller.edu/churchthenandnow/> Accessed 10 June 2011; "Reading List," The Urban Mission Centre, <http://www.urbanmissioncenter.com/reading-list/> accessed 24 April 17; "Reading List," Missional Church Network, <http://missionalchurchnetwork.com/reading-list/>. Accessed 27 April 2015.

emerging church movements, with the aim of those texts both most representative and widely read in those movements, and thus potentially influencing the theological imaginary of missionaries. I have not taken themes nor included texts from those who might be considered resource authors for missional and emerging church authors. Missional and emerging authors note the influence on their writings of theologians such as Barth, Brueggemann, Hauerwas, Moltmann, Zizioulas, Volf, and philosophers such as Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault.⁴⁵⁴ It is beyond the scope and the focus of this thesis to engage with these authors directly and their influence on the theological imaginary of the missional authors or research participants. I have sought a diversity of authorship amongst mission and emerging church authors. The vast majority of missional and emerging literature is written by men. Texts written by women's voices are noted where possible. The missional conversation is dominated by a mix of American, British and some Australian authors. The research and researcher are based in the UK, and thus, British authors are highlighted where possible.

The challenge of scope also applies to the themes selected. The approach for this thesis has been to seek significant themes which are repeated in a wide selection of literature. Five themes noted above were selected as widely represented in the literature and encompassing a broad area of thinking. Part of the process of selecting themes involved making a spreadsheet of themes found in over 75 missional texts. Priority was also given to the themes from texts which appear to be widely read and referenced. Numerous books, academic and popular, list their own ideas of the key themes of both missional and emerging church and these lists were collated. Part of the process was untangling the themes in the literature as many are overlapping, different language is used for similar ideas, or themes which are discrete in some literature are combined in others. There is a sense in which to tease out discrete themes forces them into an artificial separation when in reality theological themes are often different parts of a whole, and are organic and connected. However distinct themes are distinguishable in the literature and for the purpose of this research are delineated. The list of potential themes combined easily to 12 themes from an

⁴⁵⁴ See for example Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City : Introducing a Missional Ecclesiology* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2012). See also Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? : Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*.

initial list of 20 themes.⁴⁵⁵ Another consideration of the texts and language rendered seven themes. Of those seven themes, five themes have been chosen as significant and representative for the purposes of this research. The five themes chosen are: the importance of being a community, participating in the *missio Dei*, the need for contextualization in mission, being incarnational in mission, and seeking kingdom transformation in society. The two themes less represented and thus not selected for this chapter were being creative and an ancient/future orientation.

Several key texts are selected below to unpack each theme. Within each theme are highlighted sub-themes, which weave through various texts. The focus of the research is to look particularly at the *theological* imaginary in church planters and in the literature. The five themes selected are the most consistently, widely referenced themes – and are all, in some way, theological. However, it is noted that not all themes are theologically equal. The focus of the reading has been for content which is thematic, theological or theoretical rather than for content around technique or strategies for practice. The texts below are selected as a good representation by well-known authors of the theme seen across the literature. Many of the books could easily have been in multiple categories as they equally address several themes. I have used my own discretion to place these texts into the categories where they can highlight a particular theme.

A complete list of the themes and sub-themes in the literature are as follows:

The importance of being a community

- church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside)
- church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel
- church as prioritizing being a caring community
- church as being rooted with and active in a location
- church as needing deep, authentic relationships

Participating in the *missio Dei*

- the essential nature of the church as sent

⁴⁵⁵ The initial 20 candidate themes: Jesus focused, hospitability, transforming society, participation, being a community, being creative, leadership style, spiritual practices, sending, contextualized, essence of church, God as a missionary, participating in the *missio Dei*, kingdom of God, spirit filled, resisting consumerism, local, eschatological, ancient resources, humility.

- mission as emerging from God's activity and agency
- mission as restoring all of creation
- mission as being a witness in the world

The need for contextualization in mission

- the need for the church to be contextualized for a changing culture
- the need for contextualization for a specific locality
- the need for contextualization for mission in a post-Christendom context
- frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized

Being incarnational in mission

- the church embodies and represents God to others
- the incarnation models mission
- the incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus

Seeking kingdom transformation in society

- transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide)
- eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now
- church as having an activist faith which is serving society

3.2 Themes in Literature

3.2.1 The Importance of Being a Community

The idea of a church as some type of community is often discussed around the nature of the church. But for those in the missional and emerging church movements, the idea of being a community is critical. Over and over in the literature these kinds of phrases are heard: living as a community, called out community, being a particular people, communities in life, and people of God in community.⁴⁵⁶ Descriptors like authentic, relational, organic, incarnational and

⁴⁵⁶ Gibbs and Bolger. See particularly Chapter 5: Living as Community, pages 89-115. Croft. See Chapter 2 by Martyn Atkins. Michael Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens* (2014). See especially pages 25-54. Frank Viola, *From Eternity to Here : Rediscovering the Ageless Purpose of God*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009). See Chapter 5, and Part Three, pages 223-305. Hunsberger and Van Gelder. See particularly Inagrace T Dietterich's chapter: A Particular People: Toward a Faithful and Effective Ecclesiology, pages 347-369. Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith : Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999). See particularly pages 72-92. Hunsberger and Van Gelder. See Part IV, Defining The Church, pages 285-369. Gibbs, *Churchmorph : How Megatrends Are Reshaping Christian Communities*. Pages 42-55.

contrast are applied to the term community.⁴⁵⁷ Hannah Steele notes, 'If one word were to describe emerging ecclesiology then "community" would stand in strong contention.'⁴⁵⁸ There are several recurring sub-themes within the general theme of the importance of being a community, which are below.

The importance of being a community

- church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside)
- church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel
- church as prioritizing being a caring community
- church as being rooted with and active in a location
- church as needing deep, authentic relationships

Within the missional literature, there is expressed a desire for authentic, deep relationships within the church. Here the sense is that the church is not an event, but intentional relationships and connections with others, both within the church and with the wider community. There is the idea of an incarnational community, with two nuances: first, where the life of believers together mirrors the character of Christ and the Godhead, and second, where the community demonstrates in its communal life the Christian faith in a specific place. Thus community is a concept sometimes paired with incarnation and with contextualization. Another notion around this theme is that of being a contrast community, set apart and showing the wider society what it looks like to be God's people. Being a contrast community sometimes comes out in the literature with demonstrating the kingdom of God. Other overlapping themes include a community sent in mission which overlaps with the *missio Dei* theme and a community which lives out the gospel which overlaps with kingdom transformation. Some authors discuss the need for community from a position of protesting a perceived lack of community in the contemporary institutional church. In this, one of numerous binary contrasts seen in the literature is portrayed: institutional vs organic, people vs place, or institutional vs authentic community.⁴⁵⁹ The theme of community in some ways is

⁴⁵⁷ Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart : The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004). See Chapter 4: Be Real, Not Real Religious. Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Hendrickson, 2006). See Chapter 4, pages 81-105. Cray et al. Page 82. Barrett. Chapter 3. Sine. Page 39. Keller. Pages 257. Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007). Frost and Hirsch. See page 13, and Chapter 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Steele. Page 193.

⁴⁵⁹ Gibbs and Bolger. Particularly the chapter on Living as Community. Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005). Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities : The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011). Belcher. Bielo.

the most diverse, but was also very frequently referenced as a theme in the survey of literature. Below is a selection of key, representative texts from the missional conversation which highlight the importance the theme of being a community.

Michael Moynagh is a UK based lecturer and researcher involved in the Fresh Expressions organization. His book *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens* is illustrative of the importance of community within new church work in the UK.⁴⁶⁰ Moynagh summarizes numerous themes around community, and illustrates them frequently throughout his book with real life examples. 'Witnessing Communities' is the author's term for the expression of life within new mission work, characterized by community, visibility and activity.⁴⁶¹ The characterization of community is brought out in several ways. Humanity is characterized from the beginning of scripture in a sense of community. From creation in the garden of Eden, God's gathering of a people in Israel, in Jesus' calling a community of disciples and formation of the church – faith is seen expressed as a corporate activity. The community around him is key in Jesus' public ministry. Moynagh points to witnessing communities as sent by the Spirit into the world, emphasizing the communal nature intended in scripture. Other authors emphasize the church in community as God's intention and goal. Andrew Davidson and Alison Milbank discuss this particular point extensively in *For the Parish*, which focuses on the theology of church within a critique of Fresh Expressions seen in *Mission-Shaped Church*.⁴⁶² Davidson and Milbank discuss in depth the inherently communal nature of the church. The authors examine the church-shaped realization of final salvation as seen in a corporate and not individualistic union with God through Christ.⁴⁶³ They point out that salvation and the Church are closely connected, particularly for the apostle Paul. Davidson and Milbank relate the doctrine of mediation and the importance of the church community saying, 'Supremely, what we draw people into through mission is the life of Christ lived out – and thereby mediated – in the community of his Body, the Church.'⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁰ Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. Page 32. Expanded in Chapter 2, pages 54-86.

⁴⁶² Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish : A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

⁴⁶³ Ibid. Page 42.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. Page 39.

Moynagh points to the tendency in recent decades for church in the West to be understood as an event attended on a Sunday, with Christians then going out to practice mission on their own in the week.⁴⁶⁵ But rather, missional authors like Moynagh direct attention to the church in mission as a community expressing the divine communal character of God. *Being Church, Doing Life* summarizes this important theological aspect of community. It is the very nature of God as a Trinitarian, divine being-in-community which sets the form of the church. Other missional authors expand on this thread, as seen in Pete Ward's *Liquid Church* discussion of perichoresis, or mutual participation, to describe the relationships within the Trinity. Ward describes the relational Trinity as 'not just a vision for the individual; it is a pattern for the corporate life of the church.'⁴⁶⁶ A more detailed biblical outline of the people of God is seen in *From Eternity to Here* by Frank Viola.⁴⁶⁷ Viola considers God's purposes not in the more traditional aspects of *missio Dei* discussed below, but in terms of God's purpose for creating a people where He dwells. In vivid story-telling form, Viola writes passionately about God's love for the church. Viola uses three images of the church as the Bride of Christ, the House of God, and the Body of Christ/Family of God demonstrating through scripture the love of God searching to find a home in his people. Viola discusses the church as community from a very different perspective, but within his book the same core elements of a deep, relational community reflecting the image of God, expressing the kingdom of God, and in that, calling others to join in God's life.⁴⁶⁸

As well as looking at the church in new mission works as characterized by community, Moynagh discusses the characterizations of visibility and activity. He unpacks visibility in terms of representing the gospel to people in everyday communal life. The church must be seen within society in the ordinary day-to-day life. If the church as a witnessing community is largely invisible, hidden away in church buildings, it cannot be seen by those outside the church. Witnessing communities connect the church to those around them. The life of the community of faith connects in pubs, schools, workplaces, clubs and other places. By having church life rooted in visible aspects of the wider community, others are potentially

⁴⁶⁵ Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*. Page 57.

⁴⁶⁶ Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster Pr, 2003). Page 54.

⁴⁶⁷ Viola.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Page 288-289.

drawn in to join, and have the opportunity to experience the church where they are.⁴⁶⁹ Visibility also connects with sentness, an aspect of community life frequently discussed in the literature. Moynagh discusses the community sent to go on mission together, but this aspect will be discussed in greater detail in Chester and Timmis below. A witnessing community is both visible and active through its acts of service. Not only is service in the wider society acts of kingdom life, but they also open people to hear the good news.⁴⁷⁰ An active community is organized as 'hubs of activity that telescope the Kingdom into everyday life.'⁴⁷¹ Here the idea of intentionality comes to the fore. Being part of a missional work is characterized by participants who cooperate and intentionally shape their lives around the activities of community life. Different aspects of community life must be done intentionally.

The entwined aspects of life together are often shorthanded as: UP towards God, OUT towards the world, IN towards fellow members of the church community and OF in the sense of being a part of the whole body of Christ.⁴⁷² Each of these parts of a witnessing community have intentional activity associated with it: community worship, meals, prayer, service, pastoral care, and outreach are just some illustrations. Moynagh gives many short story examples of new witnessing communities throughout the book. A much more detailed example of intentional, active and visible missional community life can be seen in Huckins and Yackley's book *Thin Places*. This description of the NieuCommunities life together expands on the 6 missional postures which frame their rhythm of life. These 6 postures are: listening – to God, self and their neighbourhood; submerging – embodying Jesus in the neighbourhood; inviting – inviting others into God's redemptive story; contending – confronting things which hinder kingdom life; imagining – discerning God's intend for transforming lives and communities; entrusting – giving people to God, celebrating God's call and the future.⁴⁷³ In addition to the 6 postures, participants in NieuCommunities commit to living within 10 minutes' walk to each other, regularly sharing meals, worship and prayer, serving together locally, and participating in coaching and

⁴⁶⁹ Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*. Page 56-58.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. Pages 71-77.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. Page 39. See also pages 38-43, 64-65, 73-77.

⁴⁷² Ibid. Page 66.

⁴⁷³ Jon Huckins and Rob Yackley, *Thin Places : 6 Postures for Creating & Practicing Missional Community* (Kansas City, MO: House Studio, 2012).

mentoring.⁴⁷⁴ These types of missional communities and their patterns of life are seen widely in other missional literature.⁴⁷⁵ In *Being Church, Doing Life*, Moynagh overviews many themes around being a community in short summaries, with a variety of illustrations particularly from the UK context.

Michael Frost is a missional thinker from Australia, and author of *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*.⁴⁷⁶ Frost builds on Walter Brueggemann's work in finding parallels between the Old Testament Jewish exiles in Babylon and the modern day experience of dislocation, uncertainty and irrelevance.⁴⁷⁷ As the Jewish exiles were displaced, humiliated and on foreign soil – so the church today is grieving its loss of a prominent place in society in the passing of Christendom. Here Frost moves to firmly embed his vision of the church as a contrast community, anchored Christologically. He proposes returning to the teaching of Jesus and looking to the missional practices of the early church as the pattern for today, 'all lived out boldly on the soil of a post-Christian empire.'⁴⁷⁸ The theme of a contrast community threads through many missional texts and is well illustrated in *Exiles*. Frost explains:

The Christian movement must be the living, breathing promise to society that it is possible to live out the values of Christ – that is, to be a radical, troubling alternative to the power imbalances in the empire. In a world of greed and consumerism, the church ought to be a community of generosity and selflessness. In a host empire that is committed to marginalizing the poor, resisting the place of women, causing suffering to the disenfranchised, the Christian community must be generous to a fault, pursuant of justice, flushed with mercy.⁴⁷⁹

This alternative community is what Frost sees as necessary for the contemporary church – to be a model farm, an example of what the kingdom of God is like. This contrast community emerges from one's relationship with Jesus. A missional, contrast society follows Jesus' life and ministry today as they eat and drink together in community life, and as they offer and accept hospitality.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Minatrea. Minatrea discusses patterns of missional churches including: high commitment, authentic relationships, and worship and outreach as a community. See also: Myers. M. Scott Boren, *Missioretate : Becoming a Church of Missional Small Groups* (Houston, Tex.: Touch Publications, 2011). C. Christopher Smith and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Slow Church : Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014). See also McNeal.

⁴⁷⁶ Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. Pages 8-11.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 26.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. Pages 15-16.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. Page 29.

As Jesus goes to humanity to pursue reconciliation, likewise Christians must be prepared to go to the poor, marginalized and suffering in their host community.⁴⁸¹ This incarnational contrast community will participate in the life of the host community, share in appropriate language and forms with the community and participate in acts of service, loving relationships and good deeds. Frost uses the thinking around “third places” as locations to connect with the host community in coffee shops, community centres, cafes, local hangouts, etc. Being rooted to a place is key.

This particularity to a local place is a theme also written about by other missional authors, especially well outlined by Sparks, Soerens and Friesen in *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*.⁴⁸² The authors take on what they call the “myth of the individual” and “living above place.” They remind their readers that all people actually live in and depend on community in various ways, and that contemporary society tends to live in a way that disconnects the daily cause-and-effect of the physical space and time where we live. Instead, they describe in detail how the nature of the incarnation models both a relational calling and a missional calling to live into a specific time and place. They outline the need for the Christian community to be a faithful presence in a place, integrating life together in community, forming maturity in faith together, and bearing witness to the reign of God in the local community.⁴⁸³ Some missional authors discuss non-geographical network connections in connection to contextualizing for postmodernity; however many authors like Frost, Sparks, Soerens and Friesen focus on the geographic place of a community in mission.⁴⁸⁴

A contrast community for Frost is characterized by five promises, the first of which is being authentic in a hyper-real world.⁴⁸⁵ Living honestly, with integrity and truthfulness in a world of fast (chemical) food and (fake) reality TV can make

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. Page 54-77.

⁴⁸² Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish : How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

⁴⁸³ Ibid. Page 85-86.

⁴⁸⁴ For an example of non-geographical network mission, see *Liquid Church* by Ward, *Liquid Church*. For more on local, geographical ministry of a place, see Roxburgh, *Missional : Joining God in the Neighborhood*. See also Dan White, J. R. Woodward, and David E. Fitch, *Subterranean : Why the Future of the Church Is Rootedness* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015). Chapter 8.

⁴⁸⁵ Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. The five promises are summarized on page 81. Chapters 4-8 cover each promise in detail.

a startling gospel contrast. Here the exile community can earn the right to be heard by living in ways which do not flee from culture but instead forge new patterns of authentic living. James Bielo suggests that authenticity is an organizing trope in *Emerging Evangelicals*. His argument is Emerging Evangelicals are reacting and responding to both modernity and late modernity, and that the desire for authenticity is critical to the cultural times.⁴⁸⁶ Bielo echoes Frost in describing the desire for an authentic, lived, everyday faith. A second promise Frost discusses in *Exiles* is serving a cause greater than oneself – not buying into the prevailing values of society, but instead being a community of service, love and justice. To engage in this aspect, Frost calls on the concept of “liminality and communitas.”⁴⁸⁷ Liminality is taken from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner. It is a transition from one state to another, going first through stages of separation from the old roles into a second liminal stage where marginalization is the experience, followed by the third and final phase of reintegration into the social group in a new role, status, or identity.⁴⁸⁸ It is the middle stage of liminal where Frost spends his time thinking, where communitas is formed. In the liminal stage of transition, a group is formed which Turner called “communitas,” where there is an intense feeling of belonging, where the forming of community is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The shared experience of feeling displaced in a liminal state brings deeply authentic community with a shared purpose, seen in Frost’s third promise: to form missional community. Here individuals offer their gifts and learn from each other, while committing to a common task. Frost reiterates the missional bent towards focusing on the simple and communal nature of following Jesus in communities.⁴⁸⁹ Frost continues his explication of the contrast community with promise four: practicing generosity and hospitality. Frost sees these seemingly mundane, daily activities as powerful opportunities to bring God’s grace and activity to the world. Lastly, a contrast community promises to work righteously. As noted above in Moynagh’s active community, Frost explores how a contrast community of exiles will see everything they do – work and leisure – as an expression of their being sent by God into the furthest reaches of society.

⁴⁸⁶ Bielo. Pages 16-21.

⁴⁸⁷ Liminality is explored in depth by Alan Roxburgh in Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality*. Liminality and communitas is also detailed in the *Shaping of Things to Come* by Frost and Hirsch.

⁴⁸⁸ Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Pages 108-129.

⁴⁸⁹ Frost offers the suggestion that groups are churches when they are Trinitarian in Theology, covenantal in expression, catholic in orientation and missional in intent. *Ibid.* Pages 146-156.

The separation of the sacred and the secular, and more specifically how to overcome this divide, is a theme discussed in a variety of missional texts.⁴⁹⁰

Another reflection on a contrast community is seen in Graham Tomlin's *The Provocative Church*.⁴⁹¹ Tomlin speaks to the need for the church to be inviting questions about faith from a church living in a provocative way – as an expression of the kingdom of God. It is the church together, living out the taste of kingdom life which will bring natural opportunities to share faith.⁴⁹² The church is a demonstration of the kingdom of God, which will naturally stand out from the wider culture. The community that loves God and loves others creates interest so people in the church have the chance to communicate faith with those they encounter. Lois Barrett's chapter in *Treasure in Clay Jars* also considers contrast communities.⁴⁹³ Barrett's book focuses on patterns of missional faithfulness from congregational studies of missional churches. Barrett's third pattern is taking risks as a contrast community. Her emphasis on risk-taking is rooted in a community which 'understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death and resurrection of its Lord.'⁴⁹⁴ Risk-taking behaviours as a contrast community include being present with the poor/resisting materialism; practicing creative generosity; a high commitment to community; ministry to those on the edges of society, and sharing in the sufferings of Christ.⁴⁹⁵

The missional focus on being a community is often discussed as being a people sent out on mission, grounded in the everyday. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis write of this extensively in *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Culture*⁴⁹⁶ and *Everyday Church: Mission by Being Good Neighbours*.⁴⁹⁷ In *Total Church*, the authors' premise is that the church must be focused on two things. The first is being gospel-centred, which is built around two

⁴⁹⁰ Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom : Creating Incarnational Community : The Posture and Practices of Ancient Church Now*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008). George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 2010). Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People : The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

⁴⁹¹ Graham Tomlin and Knowledge Society for Promoting Christian, *The Provocative Church* (2014).

⁴⁹² Ibid. Pages 18-24.

⁴⁹³ Barrett. Chapter 3.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid. Page 74.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. Pages 74-84.

⁴⁹⁶ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church : A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007).

⁴⁹⁷ *Everyday Church : Gospel Communications on Mission*, North American ed. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

components: the word of God and the mission.⁴⁹⁸ These two elements are worked out in many ways through the second priority of the church being a community, through which the good news flows outward to others.⁴⁹⁹ On this foundation, the larger, second part of the book looks at the practical potential outworking of these two elements in a variety of ways including evangelism, social action, church planting, pastoral care, theology, and children and young people's work. Their passion for the church to be a deeply rooted community living life together, which is also intentionally pointed outwards, comes through time and time again. Inviting friends around for dinner, sharing life over the washing up, practically and pastorally caring for someone in crisis, or integrating young people into the life of the church community: these examples and more evidence the mission and good news being lived out in the church community.⁵⁰⁰

Total Church may lean a bit more towards the committed, close functioning of the church community, whereas *Everyday Church: Mission by Being Good Neighbours* by Chester and Timmis continues an exploration of what a missional community might look like in a UK context. Framed around missional reflections on 1 Peter, the authors explore what everyday mission to Post-Christendom culture could be in very practical terms. They note that a 2007 Tearfund report found that almost 70% of the UK population has no intention of attending a church service at any point in the future. Given that figure, 'It is not a question of 'improving the product' of church meetings and evangelistic events. It means reaching people apart from meetings and events.'⁵⁰¹ The church community must go out to connect with people where they are, in their wider communities, schools, neighbourhoods, clubs and shops. *Everyday Church* gathers up several elements discussed above by other authors: the nature of the church, living as exiles, being a contrast community, and having deep, authentic relationships. The church is a community in its very being, as all believers are born into God's new family through Christ, and it is from this senses of Christian identity that everything else flows. Christians today in the post-Christendom context are not in a culture that shares a knowledge of Christ, like the 'strangers in the world' of 1 Peter 1:1, 1:17 and 2:11. Rather than simply call people to church where most have no interest, Chester and Timmis encourage Christians to be as those foreigners Peter

⁴⁹⁸ *Total Church : A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community*. Pages 23-36.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Pages 37-48.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.* Examples from pages 62, 133-134, 182.

⁵⁰¹ *Everyday Church : Gospel Communications on Mission*. Page 15.

discusses, to treat their host culture with respect, and seek its prosperity.⁵⁰² In addition to being the contrast community demonstrating the gospel as examined above, a community must exercise mutual pastoral care. This care is a community activity, born out of deep relationships over time. Again the threads of authentic relationship and community living come through.

Everyday Church focuses the second half of the book more practically on being a sent community. Moving on from the foundation of being the church, Chester and Timmis turn to how believers can join God in his eternal purpose of restoring all people to relationship with Him. Given the “on-the-margins” status of Christians in a post-Christendom context, the authors urge their readers to think differently about mission. ‘Live such good lives among the pagans that, although they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us,’ 1 Peter 2:11-12 says. Chester and Timmis say in the same way that Peter urges his readers to ‘attract the world to God through the quality of our lives’ so today it is not first evangelistic services or events which will draw people but rather the lived apologetic of the sent out community of faith.⁵⁰³ They emphasize over and over again the normal, even mundane activities of daily life as opportunities of everyday mission. For all of the activities which make up life’s “normal,” the authors ask if there could be a community component by involving another member of one’s church, a missional component by involving an unbeliever and a gospel component by finding natural opportunities to talk about Jesus.⁵⁰⁴ They encourage that everyday mission is not about a technique or “5 steps to success,” but about focussing on the core elements of loving Jesus, loving people and loving life. In a passionate and deep relationship with Jesus, in genuinely loving people for who they are, and in loving life as God’s gift to us, each person is empowered to be everyday missionaries. The book’s subtitle is discussed: mission by being good neighbours. It is Chester and Timmis’s opinion that small and often quiet works of neighbourly service done by a faith community is a powerful and effective witness in today’s culture. Being a missional community sent together to share the gospel news with their neighbours can be challenging if one is assuming a Christian culture. But when the context is a post-Christian culture, different assumptions and thinking are needed. *Everyday*

⁵⁰² Ibid. Page 47.

⁵⁰³ Ibid. Page 103, 104.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid. Page 105.

Church explores ways of sharing the gospel that integrate both the normality of life and engagement with others as a sent community. Other texts which focus on a sent community include Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson's *The Externally Focused Church* and Steve Addison's *What Jesus Started*.⁵⁰⁵

The theme of community within missional literature is a rich and diverse one. This theme is of course inherent to theology generally where the nature of the church is examined. But the emphasis on the need for deep, authentic community is a call which echoes throughout the missional and emerging church literature. Whether from a perceived lack of genuine community or from a drive to be a community on mission, community is a focus. There is an emphasis on the need for the faith community to be active and visible. The church is frequently understood in terms of being a contrast community, distinct by living out the kingdom rule of God in a watching world. The community is sent into the world, rooted in the everyday witness of life together. Community also overlaps with themes around contextualization, incarnation and kingdom of God, but in itself is a key topic in missional literature.

3.2.2 Participation in the *Missio Dei*

Missional authors are never too far away from the theme of the *missio Dei*. It is one of the clearest, most frequent themes explicated in the literature. God's mission or purpose in the world is not a new concept to consider in theology, but missional authors place an emphasis on the church participating in the *missio Dei*, often as a corrective to a Christendom mode of church.⁵⁰⁶ Key sub-themes within the *missio Dei* include:

Participation in the *missio Dei*

- the essential nature of the church as sent
- mission as emerging from God's activity and agency
- mission as restoring all of creation
- mission as being a witness in the world

Mission as holistically restoring all of creation overlaps with the theme of kingdom transformation. Missional authors come at *missio Dei* from two primary directions:

⁵⁰⁵ Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, Colo: Group Publishing, 2004). Steve Addison, *What Jesus Started : Joining the Movement, Changing the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

⁵⁰⁶ Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Frost and Hirsch. Guder. Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*.

a biblical exposition of what God's mission is and the church commissioned for it, and the application of the concept for the church in contemporary society. The section below will consider examples of the theme of *missio Dei* in missional literature from both directions – first from the biblical exposition, and then from the application to the contemporary church in the West.

Missio Dei is the entire topic and title of Christopher Wright's substantial book *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*.⁵⁰⁷ Wright's concern is to lay out an approach to biblical hermeneutics that 'sees the mission of God (and the participation in it of God's people) as a framework within which we can read the whole Bible.'⁵⁰⁸ A key concept in the missional literature described by Wright is: mission is not just one aspect bolted on to the life of the church, but is the core of what God is doing and therefore what the church is about. *The Mission of God* seeks to describe the *missio Dei* by considering scripture as a cohesive narrative which points to God's redemptive activity in the world. Wright describes this through his book in four parts: The Bible and mission, the God of mission, the people of mission, and the arena of mission. In Part 1, Wright argues that it is a missional hermeneutic of the Bible which makes sense of the whole of the biblical narrative. Additionally, it can tie together a global church with differing cultural contexts, along with contextual approaches and advocacy readings of scripture where diversity and plurality is recognized, even celebrated. Indeed, from Wright's perspective, the Bible puts forth its assertions on the particular, on local events, in a relational context through stories – before postmodernity was a recognized concept.⁵⁰⁹ It is the grand narrative of scripture understood through the *missio Dei* which answers the worldview questions of: where are we/nature of the world, who are we/nature of humanity, what has gone wrong and what is the solution?⁵¹⁰ He says, 'The whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation.'⁵¹¹ Wright engages in consideration of each aspect of mission through from Old Testament to New Testament, making connections for an overall narrative of God's mission in scripture. The same God who created the world has been at work throughout

⁵⁰⁷ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God : Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006).

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. Page 17.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. Page 47.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. Page 55.

⁵¹¹ Ibid. Page 51.

history to accomplish his purpose in creation, 'to restore creation to its full original purpose of bringing all glory to God himself and thereby to enable all creation to enjoy the fullness of blessing that he desires for it...'⁵¹² God's overarching purpose to restore all of creation to himself is a thread through the theme of the *missio Dei*.

The Mission of God outlines the God of mission known through the scripture in Part II. First God makes himself known to Israel, and indeed to the surrounding nations, as the unique King, sovereign over history and all creation.⁵¹³ God also makes himself known in Jesus of Nazareth, the self-revelation of God in human person. Jesus shares the identity of the Divine Being, along with his mission to be known to the ends of the earth as the unique creator, ruler, judge and saviour over all.⁵¹⁴ Wright helpfully outlines several paradigm shifts around *missio Dei* which run through missional literature. They are to move from:

- our human agency to the ultimate purposes of God himself
- mission as missions that we undertake, to mission as that which God has been purposing and accomplishing from eternity to eternity
- an anthropocentric (or ecclesiocentric) conception to a radically theocentric worldview⁵¹⁵

This shift in agency centring around God and his proactive mission is particularly considered in *The Missional Church in Perspective* below. Wright turns his attention in Part III to *missio Dei* and the people of God as seen throughout the biblical narrative. In a carefully exegeted walk from the Old Testament through the New Testament, Wright considers how the people of God are created and commissioned for the mission of God, to be a witness to the world. The author is not content to start with the day of Pentecost and the commissioning of the New Testament church but rather roots Christian mission in the people of God traced particularly from God's election of Abraham. 'Arguably God's covenant with Abraham is the single most important biblical tradition within a biblical theology of mission and a missional hermeneutic of the Bible.'⁵¹⁶ Two chapters are given to the Abrahamic commission and the missional implications derived from it.

⁵¹² Ibid. Page 188.

⁵¹³ Ibid. Chapter 3.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. Chapter 4.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. Page 62.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. Page 189.

Wright argues that the text of Genesis 12:1-3 is pivotal in the whole of the biblical narrative.

The whole Bible could be portrayed as a very long answer to a very simple question: What can God do about the sin and rebellion of the human race? Genesis 12 through to Revelation 22 is God's answer to the question posed by the bleak narratives of Genesis 3-11. Or in terms of the overall argument of this book, Genesis 3-11 sets the problem that the mission of God addresses from Genesis 12 to Revelation 22.⁵¹⁷

Few authors do the detailed exegetical work Wright does in *The Mission of God*. He details the language of the Abrahamic covenant, the missional implications of "go, bless and blessing" in relational, creational, historic, ethical, multinational, and Christological dimensions.⁵¹⁸ The mission of the universal God elects a particular people in Israel not because they are special in themselves, but because of God's love for his whole world. Israel is to be the instrument of God's blessing and salvation to all the nations and to all people. The tension between 'the universality of the goal (all nations) and the particularity of the means (through you)' is a theme which Wright holds throughout book.⁵¹⁹ This mission to the nations, bringing all people to himself, is the subject of the last two chapters in *The Mission of God*. Wright says it is indeed the nations which are the reason Israel exists – the *missio Dei* to bring the nations to Himself. 'It is God's mission in relation to the nations, arguably more than any other single theme, that provides the key that unlocks the biblical grand narrative.'⁵²⁰ The Old Testament sets out the expectation that Israel would be a light and blessing to the nations which would draw them towards God. Israel and then the church is to be a witness to the world. The New Testament then moves from 'a missionary *idea* into energetic missionary *praxis*.'⁵²¹ The Bible's grand narrative ends with the eschatological vision of people drawn from every tribe, nation and people worshipping God in a new creation.

God's mission to restore all creation is not only universal in outreach but has significant ethical dimensions for God's people. Wright explores a few of these in Chapters 11, 12 and 13. A more thorough account of *missio Dei* and the arenas of God's redemption can be found in J. Andrew Kirk's book *What is*

⁵¹⁷ Ibid. Page 195.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid. Chapter 6.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid. Chapter 7. See also for example pages 47, 64, 252-264, 370-374, 421-428.

⁵²⁰ Ibid. Page 455.

⁵²¹ Ibid. Page 505.

*Mission?*⁵²² Kirk's stated objective is to present a theology of mission along the lines of David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*, but in an abbreviated, more accessible form.⁵²³ The bulk of Kirk's book is given to seven contemporary issues in mission: evangelism, justice, culture, overcoming violence/building peace, care for the environment, and mission partnership. Each of these themes is related to the church in mission, explored in brief both biblically and in practice. The expanse of God's mission into all parts of creation is a significant subtheme within the *missio Dei* and is considered more in the section below on kingdom transformation.

The Mission of God uses extensive exegesis to trace the *missio Dei* through scripture as a foundation for a missional hermeneutic for the church today. This is Wright's "why mission" story. He turns to the "so what?" question in his follow up book *The Mission of God's People*, asking the foundational questions: who are we and what are we here for?⁵²⁴ Here the biblical exegesis is turned to the application of working out God's mission in the world. Many of the same themes come through: a God who sends, into the whole world, to redeem all of creation.⁵²⁵ But throughout this book, Wright makes the explicit connection between a God who sends and a people who are sent, and sent into all areas of the world.⁵²⁶ Wright discusses the grand narrative of mission from the perspective of a church which knows the story they are living out their part in today, and a people who are participating in God's mission, Abraham's mission, and our mission to be a blessing to the nations and to draw all people to him.⁵²⁷ The care for creation is examined as a part of the mission of God's people, as is a call to actively seek to bless the nations, and have lives demonstrating God's ways in ethics, compassion, justice and holiness.⁵²⁸ The author challenges the people of God to demonstrate the kingdom ways in good deeds, and in a way which proclaims the gospel of Christ.⁵²⁹ There is a lot of overlapping content between

⁵²² J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999).

⁵²³ Ibid. Page 1-2.

⁵²⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People : A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010).

⁵²⁵ Ibid. Pages 23-31.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. People who are sent, pages 210-222. People who live and work in the public square, pages 222-241.

⁵²⁷ Ibid. Pages 35-47, 63-80.

⁵²⁸ Ibid. Creation care: pages 48-62. Blessing the nations: pages 63-80. Walking in ethics, compassion and justice are discussed in pages 82-111.

⁵²⁹ Ibid. Representing God to the world: pages 114-128. People who witness to the living God and proclaim the gospel of Christ, pages 163-198.

Wright's two books, but *The Mission of God's People* seeks to make explicit the connection between the biblical theology of mission and the expression of that in the lived witness of the church. As he sums up in his introduction, 'No theology without missional impact; no mission without theological foundations.'⁵³⁰ Both of Wright's book are foundational for a biblical exegesis of the *missio Dei* in the church today.

Two key authors in bringing the concept of *missio Dei* to prominence to a Western church context are Darrell Guder and Craig Van Gelder. Both are associated with the Gospel and Our Culture Network discussed above in section 2.4.3 on the history and importance of the concept of *missio Dei*. The Gospel and Our Culture Network published the collaboratively written *Missional Church* in 1998, edited by Darrell Guder.⁵³¹ While primarily an academic book, it was widely circulated amongst church leaders in both mainline and evangelical churches where it became a foundational text of the missional church movement.⁵³² Guder and the team wrote *Missional Church* to explore Lesslie Newbigin's analysis of a post-Christian Western society and the theological concept of the *missio Dei*.⁵³³ The church-centred understanding of mission has been replaced with a theocentric mission, says *Missional Church*. 'We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. "Mission" means "sending," and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history.'⁵³⁴ *Missio Dei* resonates with the ideas of a God centred mission and a sent church. The objective of the book is to lay out what a missional ecclesiology might look like for North America. The authors emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people.⁵³⁵ They lay out a set of affirmations as a vision for a missional ecclesiology which is biblical, historical, contextual, eschatological, and practiced.⁵³⁶ Guder and the team consider the missional context of North American culture, then further context to mission is given around the church in North America. Here a functional Christendom model is explored, in both the US and Canadian versions.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁰ Ibid. Page 20.

⁵³¹ Guder.

⁵³² Roxburgh, *Missional : Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Page 53. See also Sine. Page 41.

⁵³³ Guder. Pages 3-4.

⁵³⁴ Ibid. Page 4.

⁵³⁵ Ibid. Page 11.

⁵³⁶ Ibid. Page 11.

⁵³⁷ Ibid. Chapter 3.

The authors then set the context for a new vision of mission which is theocentric and stresses the mission of God as the foundation for the mission of the church. The church is to be a people of God, called and sent to represent the reign of God on earth.⁵³⁸ They explore the connection between the reign of God and the church, where the church is a sign and foretaste, agent and instrument of the divine reign.⁵³⁹ The church is sent into the world with intention and missional identity, to be a contrast community and to both demonstrate and announce the reign of God, calling people to new life. A substantial chapter is given to discussion on the creation of missional communities through the work of the Holy Spirit through worship, baptism, communion, service, prayer, hospitality, and reconciliation.⁵⁴⁰ It is in the final chapters of the book where the authors draw out more practical principles for how a people of God participating in God's mission might organize themselves. Some implications are considered for the North American church structures around the principles of biblical authority, cultural diversity and the local particular community as the basic missional structure of the church.⁵⁴¹ *Missional Church* is a key text seeking to re-envision a church in North America for proactive mission, driven by a sense of identity as God's people participating in God's mission.⁵⁴²

Missional Church was followed up in 2011 by *The Missional Church in Perspective*. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile⁵⁴³ wrote *Missional Church in Perspective* to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of *Missional Church*, and further explores theological themes in the missional conversation. *Missio Dei* is the foundational concept in both books. The book unfolds in two parts. Part one examines the history and development of the missional conversation, the strengths and weaknesses of *Missional Church*, and how those concepts have developed since its writing. Part two examines an idea similar to this research in exploring the 'theological imagination, or more specifically, a theologically informed social imagination'⁵⁴⁴ of different approaches to "missional" found in the

⁵³⁸ Ibid. Pages 79-83.

⁵³⁹ Ibid. pages 97-101.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid. Chapter 6.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid. Page 222.

⁵⁴² Ed Stetzer says about Guder, 'it seems obvious to me that he is the most influential and, in many ways, foundational to the missional conversation.... *Missional Church*... would be considered by many as the beginning of the missional church conversation.' Stetzer, "Monday Is for Missiology: Missional Voices". Accessed 31 Jan 2013.

⁵⁴³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 67.

literature. Van Gelder and Zscheile specifically map branches of the missional conversation in terms of agency in church life: to what extent one starts with the mission of the church and human agency, or to what extent one starts with the mission of God and God's agency.

The historical and theological developments which contributed to the missional church movement are outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, including Trinitarian missiology, the reign of God, the development of *missio Dei*, the work of Lesslie Newbigin and the Gospel and Culture programme.⁵⁴⁵ The authors explore more nuanced aspects of some theological themes. They consider how a Western emphasis on the three persons of the Trinity within the single divine substance can lead to a modal view of God – one subject who acts in three different functional modes.⁵⁴⁶ This can lead to a missional church with under integrated views of the work of God in relation to the *missio Dei*. Also considered is the different approaches of the relationship between the *missio Dei* and the reign of God. Three approaches are used in *Missional Church*: a specialized view where the church embodies or witnesses to the reign of God, a generalized view where God's mission unfolds through secular history or in the midst of secular history, and a more integrated approach where the church participates in God's continuing creation and redemptive mission.⁵⁴⁷

The second half of *The Missional Church in Perspective* maps the missional literature to date around the theological ideas informing it. The range of literature moves across a continuum from those who are using missional language to promote a more traditional understanding of church and mission as separate-but-related realities, to those who are developing the biblical and theological frameworks that can undergird a missional understanding.⁵⁴⁸ The mapping of missional literature can become bogged down in defining branches and sub-branches; however, their teasing out of the theological nuances of a wide range of missional literature is done in a clear and gracious manner. *The Missional Church* and *The Missional Church in Perspective* are foundational pieces of literature for the movement. They outline deeper issues of theology driving the missional church movement as well as providing a substantive history of it. The theme of *missio Dei* is foundational to both books. Van Gelder and

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid. Pages 17-40. See also section 2.43.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid. Pages 52-55.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid. Pages 55-57.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. For a summative view of the missional 'tree', see page 10.

Guder emphasizes God's agency in the work of mission, and the church as sent, as well as connecting many other theological themes such as the reign of God, the incarnation, the work of the Spirit, and the formation of the church for mission. Two other noteworthy books by these authors which also extend the theme of the *missio Dei* are *Called to Witness* by Darrell Guder⁵⁴⁹ and *The Essence of the Church* by Craig Van Gelder.⁵⁵⁰ Guder's book is a collection of his essays and lectures which include further exploration of *missio Dei*, Christology in mission, the church and the *missio Dei*, scripture in missional formation, a post-Christendom context, and missional community life. Van Gelder's text thoroughly explores the essential nature of the church in relation to God's mission, ministry and the reign of God.

In addition to the biblical grounding of *missio Dei* and the importance of *missio Dei* in the calling and sending of the church, missional authors explore the impact of this foundational concept in different ways. As discussed in section 2.3.2, Wilbert Shenk considers the impact of Christendom and the Enlightenment. His plea in *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* is for the church to be called back to serve the *missio Dei*, a focus he sees was lost in the Christendom model of church. He proposes a threefold vision for the church: the church finds hope in times of crisis by turning to God and his *missio Dei*; the church reads the times through God's eyes and heart for the world; and the church renews its covenant to God and to his mission.⁵⁵¹ Ed Stetzer considers *missio Dei* in relation to church planting in *Planting Missional Churches*.⁵⁵² Those who are missional are both intentionally reaching others with the gospel and are aware of the *missio Dei* – what God is doing around them.⁵⁵³ Stetzer roots church planting and all mission in the triune, sending God seen in the theme *missio Dei*.⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren in *Introducing the Missional Church* start their discussion of missional church by saying: the missional church is not about the church. Rather, the missional imagination is focused on God's work to redeem

⁵⁴⁹ Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*, Gospel and Our Culture Series (2015).

⁵⁵⁰ Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Bk House, 2000).

⁵⁵¹ Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Page 80.

⁵⁵² Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006). For another perspective on *missio Dei* and church planting, see Mary Sue Dehmlow Dreier, *Created and Led by the Spirit: Planting Missional Congregations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013).

⁵⁵³ Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*. Page 20.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Pages 27-28.

creation and for the church to be sign, witness and foretaste of God's purposes in the world.⁵⁵⁵ They dedicate Chapter 6 to the critical importance of thinking through the theology of *missio Dei* and a sending God: 'God sent himself; he is his own missionary. He came to open the door for restoration of all creation.'⁵⁵⁶ *Creating a Missional Culture* by JR Woodward notes that a missional culture starts with the heart and identity of God in the *missio Dei*. He states, 'God's mission is to redeem the world and restore it to its intended purpose. The church exists to fulfil God's mission, and when we participate in God's mission, we become living signs of God's intended future for the world, bringing glory to God.'⁵⁵⁷ Mission as rooted in the *missio Dei* is even noted in a book as specific as mission and engaging culture through the built environment.⁵⁵⁸

Ross Hastings writes a thorough picture of the missional church living out *missio Dei* in his 2012 book *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-evangelizing the West*.⁵⁵⁹ He writes to bring a vision of the church that is both centrifugal and centripetal, sending and gathering, which challenges and encourages both the emerging and traditional church to be a church which is both deep and wide.⁵⁶⁰ Through an in-depth study of John 20, Hastings focuses on a Trinitarian view of a missional God, who both sends and gathers the church, and the church sent to participate in God's mission. Hastings reiterates *missio Dei*, saying 'And now, this is the crucial point that gives hope for mission, *mission is God's mission first*, and we participate by grace in who he is and what he is doing.'⁵⁶¹ The author sets the scene by looking at the challenging setting of mission in the West, and how to break fear around mission, based in the implications of a risen Christ and a Trinitarian God. Both mission and community life are considered in light of what it means for the church to participate in the fullness of God's mission to restore all creation. Included for consideration is how the church can appropriately contextualize, seeking to avoid cultural disconnection on one hand, and indiscriminate enculturation on the other.⁵⁶² A detailed theological

⁵⁵⁵ Roxburgh and Boren. Page 20.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. Page 94.

⁵⁵⁷ J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture : Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012). Page 28.

⁵⁵⁸ William R. McAlpine, *Sacred Space for the Missional Church : Engaging Culture through the Built Environment* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2011). Page 29-31.

⁵⁵⁹ Hastings.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 12.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. Page 81.

⁵⁶² Ibid. Pages 37-79.

reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity prepares for the second part of the book where the author grounds mission and Trinity in John 20:21: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” This is the Greatest Commission because it is a “co-mission,” the “supreme passing on” of Jesus’ “sentness” and therefore, authority.⁵⁶³

Missional God, Missional Church applies the theology of various aspects of the Trinity and the Commission to the church in John 20, working out the implications for the church in mission. A church in mission in the West is united to both an incarnational and a risen Christ, guiding the church to be fully creational, holistically engaged in mission, and fully relational with each other, with God and with all humanity.⁵⁶⁴ The church participating with God will seek to be a joyful community, which worships and shares deeply from its common life which overflows in witness to all those around.⁵⁶⁵ In the final chapters of the book, Hasting considers again the bidirectional nature of the mission of God and the church, as both sending out and gathering in. The church is sent, as Jesus was sent, in our union with Christ through the Spirit. This outward impetus is at one with that of gathering, bringing all people and all creation into the overflowing life of the relational Trinity.⁵⁶⁶ Hasting concludes with examining the work of the Spirit indwelling the church and the continuation of Christ’s mission. Throughout *Missional Church, Missional God*, Hastings goes between the doctrine of the Trinity, the mission of God and the implications for the church participating with such a Triune God in his mission. His work is both theological and missiological, and is an excellent exegesis of Trinitarian *missio Dei* worked out in real terms in the church in the West.

The theme of the *missio Dei* is at the very heart of missional texts. It is the compelling reason both for the existence of the church and the activity of the church. Missional authors contend that *missio Dei* is a theme deeply rooted in scripture and a guiding foundation for the church’s understanding of mission. *Missio Dei* shifts the locus of agency in mission from church centred to God centred. It includes an emphasis on a holistic view of God’s work in the world. It is the *missio Dei* which sends the church into mission, a church which gathers all people to God. A renewed vision of the church on mission is particularly important

⁵⁶³ Ibid. Page 82.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. Pages 147–189.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. Pages 190-239.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. Pages 240-265.

to missional authors who see contemporary Western culture as a mission field. The church as missional in its very essence is a significant part of the theme of *missio Dei*.

3.2.3 The Need for Contextualization in Mission

This thesis is proposing that the missional and emerging church movements are in large part responses to the two-fold change the church is experiencing in culture (postmodernity) and in position (post-Christendom). A significant opinion expressed in the literature is the need for the church in mission to be responsive to the changing context. Within the overall need for contextualization in mission, sub-themes include:

The need for contextualization in mission

- the need for the church to be contextualized for a changing culture
- the need for contextualization for a specific locality
- the need for contextualization for mission in a post-Christendom context
- frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized

Contextualization has been the subject of mission studies for many decades, if only more recently applied to the Western context, particularly highlighted by Lesslie Newbigin.⁵⁶⁷ Almost every book in the literature addresses contextualization in some way but it can be a contested theme with different approaches to culture. The texts highlighted below consider contextualization in two ways: mission to and from a postmodern culture, and mission in a post-Christendom context. Texts on contextualization have the most varied content of the themes as there is a diversity of suggestions as to *how* the church is to contextualize. Contextualization sometimes comes from a place of protest, often described in “moving from X to Y” in a subtle or not-so-subtle rebuke to perceived failings of the church. Contextualization as a theme is discussed by some from theological perspectives, but is perhaps more frequently discussed from missiological perspectives.

Tony Jones is an emerging church author, and one of the founders of Emergent Village.⁵⁶⁸ He was instrumental in the formation of the American

⁵⁶⁷ For a collection of essays on church, gospel and culture inspired by Newbigin see: Hunsberger and Van Gelder. See also Thomas F. Foust, *A Scandalous Prophet : The Way of Mission after Newbigin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁵⁶⁸ For a history of Emergent Village, see section 2.44, and Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. Pages 41-44.

emerging church movement. In *The New Christians*, Jones makes the case for emergent Christianity using the analogy of geology, with postmodernism having a star role in shaking the ground. Likening the radical message of Jesus to hot lava which changed the world, Jones goes on to say that ‘the beautiful, scary, messy lava-gospel has again become crusted over by layers of bureaucracy, institutionalism, and dogma.’⁵⁶⁹ Jones sees American Christian politics, individualism, and consumerism as all contributing to crusts which hinder the gospel. But emerging Christianity ‘is an effort by a particular people in a particular time and place to respond to the gospel as it (once again) breaks through the age-old crusts.’⁵⁷⁰ Jones says the shift towards postmodern culture has brought about a movement of people rethinking theology and rethinking church.⁵⁷¹ He characterizes emergent, postmodern Christians as those with a high desire for inclusion and a hope filled orientation.⁵⁷² Emergents are those who see God’s activity in all aspects of culture, rejecting the sacred-secular divide.⁵⁷³ Emergents embrace friendship and reconciliation across divides, and seek community engagement over individual rights.⁵⁷⁴ Throughout Jones’ images of emergent Christians is the counterfoil of a failed American church. Stark statements illuminate Jones’ picture of the church today: ‘In the twenty-first century, it’s not God who’s dead. It’s the church. Or at least conventional forms of church.’⁵⁷⁵ American emergent people are largely those ‘who feel great disappointment with modern American Christianity.’⁵⁷⁶ Whether it is the left-verses-right politics, the way the gospel is expressed, lack of inclusion, or a market driven church, those who join the emergent movement are searching for a faith which is contextualized in a way they do not experience in the modern, contemporary church in America.

The New Christians proposes profound changes in the way both methods of Christianity and the message of Christianity is enculturated for a postmodern, globalized, pluralized world of the 21st century.⁵⁷⁷ Jones tells his own story of disillusionment and hurt in different ministry contexts which started his journey of exploration into what a postmodern theology would look like. Here he found a

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 36.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 37.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. page XIX.

⁵⁷² Ibid. Pages 70-72.

⁵⁷³ Ibid. Pages 72-76.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid. Pages 76-84.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 4.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. Page 70.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. Page 96.

way of faith not rooted on philosophical foundationalism.⁵⁷⁸ Theology and epistemology both come to the table for consideration, with a call for profound change in the way faith is practiced and spread in today's context.⁵⁷⁹ For Jones and other emergents, theology is local, conversational and temporary, characterized by question, doubt, and openness.⁵⁸⁰ A 'hermeneutic of humility' around questions of truth is a common emphasis for emergents – appreciation of the limits of what one knows and how one knows it.⁵⁸¹ Jones wants to hold on to the tension between being humble in interpretation, being committed to faith positions yet being authentically open to and respectful of the other.⁵⁸² This is in opposition to the modern faith of the contemporary church, where Jones sees a Christian faith with a need for all the answers, even characterized by legalism, which cannot embrace paradox. An emergent faith is one which is relational and eschatological, connecting people in diverse settings, filled with hope for the future. The ways in which emergent Christians form communities is likened to Wikipedia. Similar to Wikipedia, emergent communities are ones of open access, participation, questioning, subverting and even disposing of the leadership structures common in churches. It is built on trust and mutual accountability. Emergent communities are agile, able to respond rapidly to the changing world, being local and relatively small. Connectivity is important, both within groups and across ecumenical lines. Lastly, emergent communities embrace the messiness of life and relationship with God.⁵⁸³ The direction of the emergent movement Tony Jones writes about grows from new media, disillusionment with both politics and the contemporary evangelical church, and the postmodern turn in philosophy.⁵⁸⁴ Jones' drive is for a contextualized church suited to the postmodern context. It is rooted in protest and often framed in contrast to the contemporary American evangelical church.

The need for a contextualized church coupled with frustration with the existing evangelical church also comes through in some UK writings. One of the earliest and most influential UK texts on contextualizing for postmodernity came in Dave Tomlinson's book *The Post-Evangelical*. It crystalized frustrations for

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 103.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. Page 104.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. Pages 95-132.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid. Pages 140-169.

⁵⁸² Ibid. Page 156.

⁵⁸³ Ibid. Pages 180-192.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. Page XVIII

those in the UK who felt betrayed by their tradition or irritated with evangelical culture; those who felt impacted by cultural shifts but did not want to leave the church.⁵⁸⁵ Tomlinson recognizes the underlying layer of frustration in his book, writing it for those who struggle with 'the restrictions in evangelical theology, spirituality, and church culture—yet who still want to journey with the Christian faith.'⁵⁸⁶ Tomlinson looks at how the church can contextualize for postmodern culture, but equally looks at the shortfalls or frustrations with evangelical church culture. His critique of evangelicalism includes where middle class values and Christian values are confused, and an inability to allow personal and intellectual development.⁵⁸⁷ Like Jones, Tomlinson suggests that cultural change is a meaningful factor for post-evangelicals. He says, 'My thesis is simple: that post-evangelicals tend to be people who identify culturally more with postmodernity (the culture of the postmodern) than with modernity, and that this has a significant bearing on the way they approach and understand the Christian faith.'⁵⁸⁸ Tomlinson suggests the significant change in culture at the end of the 20th century requires a rethink in the way the gospel and the evangelical church is thought about.⁵⁸⁹ He suggests that evangelicalism's gospel needs to have a less systematized "big story" approach, that it needs to have less dogmatic claims and more journey language, and that the church should divest itself of power structures reminiscent of prevailing Western culture.⁵⁹⁰

Not all calls for contextualization come from significant protest and disillusionment; some come from the urgent need for the church to engage with the changing culture. Brian McLaren's 1998 *The Church on the Other Side* boldly states, 'The point is, if you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world.'⁵⁹¹ As one of the most prolific and high profile authors in the emerging church movement, McLaren's early work is a straightforward consideration of doing ministry in the postmodern matrix. He offers strategies for ministry to address the "new world" we live in. McLaren's writings will be

⁵⁸⁵ Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Drane. Page 31. Gibbs and Bolger. Page 34-39.

⁵⁸⁶ Dave Tomlinson, "Post Evangelical," Dave Tomlinson, <http://www.davetomlinson.co.uk/post-evangelical/>. Accessed 13 March 2013.

⁵⁸⁷ *The Post Evangelical*. Pages 32-44, pages 45-59,

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. Page 76.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid. Page 26.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. Pages 142-145.

⁵⁹¹ Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). Page 15.

considered in more detail on the theme around transforming culture below, but the important note for the theme of contextualization is McLaren's urgent call for the church to grapple with the change of culture. Another early book of a similar theme is *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* by Dan Kimball.⁵⁹² Published in 2003, it reflects some of the early movement's focus on generational ministry, considering how church can connect to post-Christian, post-seeker, postmodern generations. Like McLaren, Kimball gives practical suggestions on ministry issues to meet the needs of the emerging postmodern culture. Both consider the new cultural context positively, as an opportunity to change for effective mission.⁵⁹³

A positive take on contextualization for postmodern culture is found in Pete Ward's *Liquid Church*.⁵⁹⁴ A practical theologian and youth specialist, Ward envisions postmodern ecclesiology in a unique manner. He takes the term "liquid" from Zygmunt Bauman's description of liquid modernity, characterized amongst other things as privileging consumption over production: I am what I buy rather than what I do.⁵⁹⁵ He then goes on to describe solid church as a product of solid modernity, in contrast to his proposal for liquid church which is essential 'because it takes the present culture seriously and seeks to express the fullness of the Christian gospel within that culture.'⁵⁹⁶ The theological grounding for conceiving such a church comes from several sources. First, the church being "in Christ" allows one to imagine a body of Christ apart from buildings and institution, joined into community through one's connection to Christ.⁵⁹⁷ Second, Ward explores the theology of the Trinity, particularly perichoresis or mutual participation where the flow of relationships among Father, Son and Holy Spirit underpin a relational, fluid kind of church.⁵⁹⁸ Lastly, Ward describes biblical and spiritual boundaries through an emphasis on the authentic communication of the Word and the sacraments.⁵⁹⁹ He addresses concerns for maintaining the orthodoxy of a liquid church through a consideration of Moltmann's theology of the Spirit of God working outside of the

⁵⁹² Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church : Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003).

⁵⁹³ Ibid. Page 17-18. McLaren. Page 15 and pages 203-207.

⁵⁹⁴ Ward, *Liquid Church*.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. Page 17.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. Page 30.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. Page 33-48.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 54.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. Page 65-71.

institution of the church and through Kuyper's categories of common grace and special grace.⁶⁰⁰

Ward proposes liquid church as a part of the ongoing renewal of the church in response to the changes in culture that have negatively affected the life and witness of the church in being an effective agent for mission. Liquid church is based on a series of relationships and communications, a network of people motivated informally to communicate Christ and see the Holy Spirit at work. This life would be sustained through the consumption of spiritual commodities such as festivals, worship music, and evangelism courses.⁶⁰¹ Ward argues that shopping in contemporary culture is not about the material, but about what commodities represent, the hopes and desires and search for meaning. Liquid church involves 'a fundamental change to embrace the sensibilities of consumption.... The church must change its emphasis from meeting people's spiritual needs to stimulating their desires.'⁶⁰² Liquid church forms around the assumption that people desire an encounter with God, then finding appropriate channels through which it can flow.

Ward's book takes a very positive tack towards consumer culture and contextualization, but there are divergent views on Ward's proposal. In an opinion sympathetic to Ward, Spencer Burke, former megachurch pastor and host to one of the largest emerging church online communities theOOZE likens the inflexibility of traditional 'come to us' church structures to banking: where people now access banking services in many ways and many locations to fit their lifestyle. Burke says, 'When congregants complain about pastors and churches not fitting their lifestyle, the church cries foul in the form of 'consumer!' But does anyone ask whether the church is delivering what the market needs?'⁶⁰³ Some have questioned Ward's positive view of consumerism (and indeed of the emerging church movement as a whole)⁶⁰⁴ noting consumerism is not, 'a well-functioning and morally neutral network: it is generally, a one-way trip from natural

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. Pages 78-86.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. Pages 87-98.

⁶⁰² Ibid. Page 72.

⁶⁰³ Marshall Shelley, "Spencer Burke on the Church That Consumerism Built--and Why I Fled," Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2006/may-online-only/spencer-burke-on-church-that-consumerism-built-and-why-i.html>. Accessed 9 September 2013.

⁶⁰⁴ For a critique of the emerging church and consumer sensibilities, see: Martyn Percy, *Shaping the Church the Promise of Implicit Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). Pages 67-79. Vincent Jude Miller, *Consuming Religion : Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

resource to land fill site, in which our addictive search for meaning is fed by the exploitation of people and land too far away to concern us.”⁶⁰⁵ Emerging church author Andrew Perriman sees the positive missional urge for Ward’s liquid church to be responsive to the search for meaning through the consumption of products, but also questions if commodification of spiritual resources in the liquid church differs from the market-driven mentality of solid church. He also wonders if Ward’s jump from consumerism as a search for meaning to consumerism as a search for God can be justified.⁶⁰⁶ Even with these critiques, Ward’s book is recognized as a visionary and genuine attempt to engage missionally with postmodern culture.

The changing cultural waters are the impetus for the church to contextualize. Two missional authors utilize the work of James Fowler’s *Stages of Faith* to explore how postmodern culture impacts believers and the church.⁶⁰⁷ Alan Jamieson considers the impact of postmodernity on individuals leaving churches in *A Churchless Faith*.⁶⁰⁸ Jamieson’s New Zealand based study considers those who leave evangelical, Pentecostal or charismatic churches (EPC) – why they leave and how their faith has changed after leaving. His book is not about contextualization per se but reflects on the conditions in churches and the wider culture which influence their leaving process. The change to postmodern culture strongly features in the process. The three interrelated factors Jamieson presents to help understand leavers are: a changing societal structure between a waning modernity and increasing postmodernity; the structures, beliefs and faith practices of EPC churches; the faith development of individuals influenced by the transition to an increasingly postmodernist society.⁶⁰⁹ Fowler suggests that many elements of the emerging postmodern culture encourage people engaged in transitioning from earlier to later faith stages.⁶¹⁰ Postmodern culture’s ‘openness to doubt and questions, willingness to critique and ability to see truth as a complex paradox... focus on relational networks rather than impersonal institutions and the emerging culture’s emphasis on a desire to learn through participation, experiences and dialogue’ all provide

⁶⁰⁵ Eleanor M. Todd, "Liquid Church (Book)," *Expository Times* 115, no. 11 (2004). Page 377.

⁶⁰⁶ Andrew Perriman, "Liquid Church," <http://www.opensourcetheology.net/node/992>. Accessed 9 September 2013.

⁶⁰⁷ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith : The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 1st HarperCollins pbk. ed. ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1995).

⁶⁰⁸ Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: SPCK, 2002).

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Page 16.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.* Page 122.

an environment which promotes moving stages of faith.⁶¹¹ Jamieson continues that as the influence of postmodern culture grows, leave-taking due to the perceived limitations of EPC churches is likely to increase.⁶¹² Jamieson offers suggestions along the lines of contextualization for churches to become leaver-sensitive. A church which provides a place for people to explore, question and doubt provides a safe environment for leavers or a place where those who are struggling can reflect. Churches can provide a theology of journey. Leaders can discuss both spiritual high points and low points, as well as stories from scripture and from history of those who have gone through complex journeys of faith.⁶¹³ Leaver-sensitive churches can provide resources for those who are struggling. Jamieson suggests that spiritual direction, counselling, prayer journaling, and theological study can be helpful for those who are in a hard place.⁶¹⁴ A church can provide a diversity of theological understandings of the life of faith and model an honest Christian life, rather than only focus on the ideal “shoulds” of the Christian life. Finally, churches who want to be leaver-sensitive can provide room for emotion and intuition for people to process their journey in different ways.⁶¹⁵

Emerging church author Kester Brewin also uses Fowler’s stages of faith in *Signs of Emergence* to show how the Enlightenment/modern era suits a Stage 3 faith context (loyalists who hold deep convictions), but a post-Enlightenment culture encourages people towards Stage 4 (critical reflection on beliefs) and 5 faith (able to hold tensions and ambiguity in faith).⁶¹⁶ Brewin is concerned that the church today is afraid to face fundamental change in order to impact the post-Enlightenment consciousness. Even more, Brewin’s book is a plea ‘that the means must fit the ends: the route to change must not be through the exercise of power but through an exercise in empowerment.’⁶¹⁷ Brewin takes Fowler’s term for the Conjunctive church and uses the term Emergent Church. Fowler’s Conjunctive Stage 5 is a church which can hold the complexities of life together and where hierarchies have given way to networks of organization.⁶¹⁸ *Signs of*

⁶¹¹ Ibid. Page 122.

⁶¹² Ibid. Page 122.

⁶¹³ Ibid. Pages 146-147.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. Page 148.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. Pages 149-150.

⁶¹⁶ Kester Brewin, *Signs of Emergence: A Vision for Church That Is Organic/Networked/Decentralized/Bottom-up/Communal/Flexible/Always Evolving* (Grand Rapids: Baker Bks, 2007). Pages 19-37.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid. Page 34.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. Page 32-34.

Emergence puts forth a process of change in four reflexive stages which he believes is appropriate in an emergent culture to become a church for the emergent culture.⁶¹⁹ The more scientific middle section of *Signs of Emergence* examines the character of a contextualized emergent church based on the study of emergent systems. Here he describes not what shape the emergent church might have, but some of the characteristics it might display: an open system, a learning system, distributed knowledge, and servant leadership.⁶²⁰ *Signs of Emergence* ends with chapters on urbanization (Cities), a critique of consumerism (Gift) and ecology (Dirt). Brewin concludes with a summary of his thesis: that the church needs to move from an Enlightenment faith into the unknown and be reincarnated as Christ was into specific places and cultures. Only then can it become a post-Enlightenment incarnation, holding together divergent points of view without abuse of power.⁶²¹ *Signs of Emergence* has a unique perspective on contextualization – one that is both stark about the about the challenges and hopeful for the potential future of the church.

Practical theologian Doug Gay also writes about the process of reflection and change for the emerging church in *Remixing the Church*.⁶²² He suggests that the emerging church conversation is a potentially fruitful example of hermeneutical ecclesiology – a hermeneutical and ecclesial spiral – with common ground between the emerging sensibility and the ecumenical sensibility.⁶²³ The church is always reflecting on how to be the Church, always in the process of reforming and contextualizing. Here Gay outlines a hermeneutical spiral of five moves of reflection within the emerging church: auditing, retrieval, unbundling, supplementing and remixing. Auditing is a reflexive move to examine where one has come from, to articulate a sense of loss and lack, and to look beyond one's tradition.⁶²⁴ Gay contends that there are major contextual shifts which must be noted as impetus for auditing in the emerging church: First is the influence of the ecumenical movement and World Council of Churches ecumenical studies. The second shift is that of the Second Vatican Council

⁶¹⁹ Brewin's process is: advent – or stopping and waiting; incarnation – where new ideas must be nurtured like a new-born and must be specific to the culture and place like the incarnation; the state of emergence with complex, bottom-up organizations with multiple variables integrated into a whole system. Ibid. Pages 41-84.

⁶²⁰ Ibid. Pages 100-116.

⁶²¹ Ibid. Page 187.

⁶²² Gay.

⁶²³ Ibid. Pages xiii-xiv.

⁶²⁴ Ibid. Page 2.

opening the liturgical traditions of the Roman Catholic Church to low church Protestantism. The third contextual influence of the auditing movement is a new wave of missiological thinking.⁶²⁵

The second move of the cycle of reflection is retrieval: the need to go back and explore what has been lost or abandoned, particularly in tradition and ritual.⁶²⁶ Low church protestants especially have retrieved worship and liturgy expressions from high church traditions. The third move critical to the emerging project is that of unbundling. Unbundling is connected to retrieval, but raises questions about tradition, authority, and freedom to take in practices.⁶²⁷ Supplementing is adding or innovating existing church practice as the fourth move in the hermeneutical cycle.⁶²⁸ Explorations in the areas of ecumenism, the ministries of women, a focus on the laity, politics, missiology, and technology are all layers of supplementing while not unique or equally distributed across all emerging groups, still forms a set of foci which can be considered characteristic of supplementing in the emerging conversation.⁶²⁹ Gay's final stage of the reflexive spiral is that of remixing. 'Remixing both formally completes one hermeneutical spiral and propels another one into being, as practical theology reflects again (*semper reformada*) on how the new constellation of ideas and practices should itself be audited.'⁶³⁰ Gay ventures a definition of the emerging church, which 'can perhaps best be understood (and defended) as an irreverent new wave of grassroots ecumenism, propelled from within low church Protestantism by a mix of longing, curiosity and discontent.'⁶³¹ It is a church always remixing, learning how to be the Church in its context and time.

John Drane looks at cultural change and the church through the framework of sociologist George Ritzer and the 'McDonaldization' of society.⁶³² In his first book on the topic, *The McDonaldization of the Church*, Drane considers how the four traits of Ritzer's theory (efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control) can be seen in, and are sometimes detrimental to, the church. Drane sees that a primary missiological issue for the church today is the cultural shift from modernity

⁶²⁵ Ibid. Page 16

⁶²⁶ Ibid. Pages 19-20.

⁶²⁷ Ibid. Page 48.

⁶²⁸ Ibid. Page 72.

⁶²⁹ Ibid. Pages 72-91.

⁶³⁰ Ibid. Page 92.

⁶³¹ Ibid. Page 93.

⁶³² John William Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000).

to post-modernity and notes that while McDonaldization tendencies are not exclusively located or limited in that shift (and in some ways are much older) it is a useful framework as it fits so many people's lived experiences both inside and outside the church.⁶³³ In Drane's follow-up book, *After McDonaldization*, he explores in more depth how faithful discipleship might be worked out in the present culture.⁶³⁴ Drane reiterates that while the over-rationalized systems of McDonaldization are underpinned in Christendom history, the systems still have been particularly effective in the 20th century. A McDonaldized form of church was clearly well contextualized to a highly rationalized society, although Drane contends it might lack as a full expression of the gospel.⁶³⁵ *After McDonaldization* considers what a contextualized faith could look like in terms of community, mission, ministry and theology.

Stuart Murray considers the second large contextual factor of the change in position of the church in great detail in his two books *Post-Christendom* and *Church After Christendom*.⁶³⁶ Murray submits that the church is experiencing cultural turbulence as the era of Christendom comes to an end. He suggests to negotiate the transition, the church needs to understand what Christendom is, why it is ending, and how to move forward into a new era.⁶³⁷ Murray's works are both discussed in some detail in section 2.3.2 Survey of Missional Texts on *Post-Christendom*. For this section, it is important to note that Murray is glad to see the end of the Christendom era, which he sees as having distorting influences of power, wealth and status on the church.⁶³⁸ When looking at contextualization, Murray has six pages listing the vestiges of Christendom realities, practices, and mind-sets in Chapter 7: The Christendom Legacy. As noted above, these are both very broad statements such as 'Leadership structures in many newer denominations mirror Christendom arrangements,' mixed with very specific elements like 'Special clothes continue to designate a clerical caste with special powers and privileges.'⁶³⁹ Murray asks a set of questions about how one looks at these vestiges, which sets an agenda for contextualization. Are they an

⁶³³ Ibid. Pages 52-53.

⁶³⁴ John Drane, *After McDonaldization: Mission, Ministry and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008). Page vii.

⁶³⁵ Ibid. Page 6.

⁶³⁶ Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World. Church after Christendom*.

⁶³⁷ *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Page xv.

⁶³⁸ Ibid. Page 21.

⁶³⁹ Ibid. Pages 189-193.

anachronistic issue or a matter of justice? Is there a biblical challenge to the practice? Does it offend? How does it affect mission? What would be gained or lost if the vestige was removed?⁶⁴⁰ Murray notes that the variety of Christendom vestiges are from different origins, of different consequence, and can be more or less easily dealt with.

Church After Christendom considers the shape and ethos of the church in the waning context of Christendom. Murray sees two phenomena at the end of Christendom which shape the mission practice and priorities for church after Christendom. These are the relationship between believing and belonging, and the reasons why people join and leave church.⁶⁴¹ The connection between believing and belonging has been a matter of discussion in research and missional writings. Some “believe without belonging” and others “belong before believing” with yet other permutations of these elements. The cultural context contributes to this phenomenon, as the suspicion of institutions and empirical experience of belief point towards people being more likely to belong before believing. In post-Christendom, since knowledge of Christianity is less, people need more time to understand faith.⁶⁴² Sociologist of religion Grace Davie has done extensive work in this area, and coined the phrase ‘believing without belonging.’⁶⁴³ Davie differentiates between the decline in church attendance and the decline in Christian belief. She notes that the disparity between markers of religious belief remaining higher while the statistics of declining church membership and practice severely declining make Britain a society where there is significant ‘believing without belonging.’⁶⁴⁴ Murray considers how these post-Christendom contextual factors connect to models of church focused around either centred-set or bounded set inclusion and investigates why people join and leave churches.⁶⁴⁵ He considers if new forms of church are needed for the new contextual situation in the second half of *Church After Christendom*. His conclusion is that both inherited and emerging churches are needed: evolution and emergence.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid. Page 194.

⁶⁴¹ *Church after Christendom*. Page 8.

⁶⁴² Ibid. Pages 10-12.

⁶⁴³ Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging*.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid. Page 43.

⁶⁴⁵ Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Pages 26-31, 39-66.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid. Pages 107-126.

Like Michael Frost, Murray uses the biblical imagination of God's people in exile as a framework for considering what aspects of church life were distorted or marginalized in Christendom that can be re-imagined in post-Christendom. The shift to move away from a Christendom mode of church includes moving from maintenance to missional thinking, from institution to movement, and from being placed in the centre of culture to the margins. To move from maintenance to mission is not simply programmatic but requires a paradigm shift to embed and sustain the church's essential nature as missional. Networks, agencies and denominations also need to move from institutional thinking to missional imagination and identity. The church after Christendom will be one which acknowledges and welcomes the reality of working from the margins, embracing new opportunities to see God at work.⁶⁴⁷ The church after Christendom will need to be one which fosters deep, healthy community life.⁶⁴⁸ It will also be one which keeps worship at the heart of mission and community life. Murray points out that worship in a post-Christendom context can embrace diversity and unity in both gathered and dispersed contexts. It can be both centred and decentred with leadership and participation, as well as be in tune with culture and counter-cultural. Learning lessons from the Christendom church, the church after Christendom can be creative in using historic resources as it seeks a balance of mission, community, and worship.⁶⁴⁹ Murray writes passionately about new opportunities for the church after Christendom. He notes there are more issues to consider as the church seeks ways forward which are sustainable and outward facing but he is hopeful about the church adjusting to life on the margins.

Other missional authors write about the effect of Christendom on the mission of the church. *The Shaping of Things to Come* by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch is an important and often referenced text in the missional and emerging church literature.⁶⁵⁰ Frost and Hirsch's work includes other significant themes in missional literature: participation in the *missio Dei*, the need for paradigm shifts in the church to address the changed cultural context referenced to postmodernity and post-Christendom, and an activist faith. Frost and Hirsch focus their critique in *The Shaping of Things to Come* on the Christendom-mode of church. They note that while the wider culture is "over" Christendom, the Western

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid. Pages 136-164. For an early view on the church and Christendom, see Clapp.

⁶⁴⁸ Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Pages 165-194.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid. Pages 195-216.

⁶⁵⁰ Frost and Hirsch.

church itself is still largely thinking in Christendom paradigms.⁶⁵¹ Frost and Hirsch see three flaws in the Christendom church: it is attractational, dualistic and hierarchical. An attractational church is one which settles in a place and expects people will come to them to find God and fellowship. Being attractive is one thing, but the stance of a church thinking “if we can get our features right, people will come” takes away from the missional impulse to go out in witness.⁶⁵² Dualistic for Frost and Hirsch is the separation of life into sacred and secular, thinking of the “world out there,” and the church “in here.” This leads to a the disconnect between interior faith and exterior practice, belief and life.⁶⁵³ Finally, the Christendom mode of church is hierarchical. It is reliant on an ‘overly religious, bureaucratic, top-down model of leadership’ which ignores the apostle Paul’s emphasis on the priesthood of all believers.⁶⁵⁴

Hirsch and Frost strongly express their opinion of Christendom. ‘Christendom is not the biblical mode of the church. It was/is merely one way in which the church has conceived of itself. In enshrining it as the sole form of the church, we have made it into an idol that has captivated our imaginations and enslaved us to a historical-cultural expression of the church.’⁶⁵⁵ Instead the authors propose a missional church which is incarnational, messianic, and apostolic.⁶⁵⁶ Section 3.2.4 below focuses on their view of an incarnational church. Frost and Hirsch see a messianic spirituality as one which is modelled on the life, actions and person of Jesus, and on a Hebraic spirituality. This includes a holistic spirituality and one which is intentionally active in lived out obedience.⁶⁵⁷ The church with an apostolic leadership embraces the fivefold gifting model from Ephesians 4 of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. It will have a more inclusive leadership community which emphasizes empowering people in creative expressions of church.⁶⁵⁸

A contextualized church is a key focus for missional and emerging church authors. It is at the heart of both movements as responses to the changing context of mission in the Western world. For some authors the shift towards postmodernity is important. Opinions diverge on whether the church should be

⁶⁵¹ Ibid. Pages 8-9.

⁶⁵² Ibid. Pages 18-19. See also Chapters 3-6.

⁶⁵³ Ibid. Pages 19-20. See also Chapters 7-9.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 21. See also Chapters 10-12.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 15

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid. Page 12.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid. Pages 111-145.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid. Page 12, see also pages 165-200.

contextualized within postmodernity or for postmodernity – and how all-encompassing this change might be. Different strands of the shifting culture come to the fore for different authors: epistemology, community, relationship patterns, use of media, leadership, and organization are but some of the topics considered. Like postmodern culture, missional authors suggest that a contextualized church will be seen in many forms. The impact of the changing context in postmodernity and post-Christendom carry significant implications: how people see institutions, truth, doubt, and power. The long history of Christendom is deeply rooted in the Western church from very simple things to entire paradigms of self-understanding. The theme of contextualization sometimes comes from disappointment and frustration with the contemporary/institutional churches failure to recognize and adapt to the changing context, and for individuals who are changing with it. How contextualization works out in the church is a matter of great challenge, diversity and creativity, but the need for contextualization comes through strongly in missional literature.

3.2.4 Being Incarnational in Mission

The theme of incarnation comes out in a variety of ways within the missional literature. Incarnation is framed as the method of mission, the message of mission and the example of mission. Sometimes “incarnational” is a foil against the Christendom mode of “attractional” church. An incarnational understanding of mission has gone hand in hand with new discussions on Christology in the missional church, as well as discussions on ecclesiology. In a time when many in the church are looking for new direction, there is also a new focus on the person of Jesus. Sub-themes within the missional literature on the incarnational church include:

Being incarnational in mission

- the church embodies and represents God to others
- the incarnation models mission
- the incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus

The incarnational model of a church sent to a time and place overlaps with a contextualized church. An incarnation leading to a church living out kingdom life overlaps with the theme of kingdom transformation. The incarnation and mission is a deeply theological theme, rooted in Christian faith throughout the history of the church. So while the theme of the incarnation is not new, there is a new focus

on it from those considering mission in the Western context. The incarnation also brings with it thinking on the shape of the gospel in contextualization and participation in God's mission, overlapping with *missio Dei*.

A church which is incarnational is a major theme for missional church authors Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, including two of their co-authored publications *The Shaping of Things to Come*⁶⁵⁹ and *ReJesus*.⁶⁶⁰ As noted above in section 2.3.2, these authors critique the Christendom mode of church which is attractational, dualistic, and hierarchical. Their recommendation is a church which is incarnational, messianic, and apostolic.⁶⁶¹ This section focuses on their view of an incarnational church. A missional church for Frost and Hirsch is one which is incarnational. Christology is vital to the authors and informs their vision of discipleship for the postmodern world. It is their starting point for the shape of mission and church. 'For us the Incarnation is an absolutely fundamental doctrine, not just as an irreducible part of the Christian confession, but also as a theological prism through which we view our entire missional task in the world.'⁶⁶² There are numerous theological implications for Frost and Hirsch from the incarnation:

- Identification: Here the medium is the message as Christ comes in human form, showing the depth of love and identification God has for humanity.
- Locality: The "dwelling" of God in the incarnation took place among real people in a specific place and society in which Jesus was rooted.
- The Beyond-in-the-midst: The eternal God was right in the midst of humans, not above humanity but meeting people personally.
- The human image of God: To know who God is and what God is like people can look to the person of Jesus.⁶⁶³

These theological implications have profound consequences for how mission is done in any context. The gospel can and must become a genuine part of the host culture, and the church must always fully enter into the context it is placed. Those entering a people group with the gospel need to identify with them as much as possible without compromising the gospel itself. Incarnational mission means a

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ *ReJesus : A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009).

⁶⁶¹ *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Page 12.

⁶⁶² Ibid. Page 35.

⁶⁶³ Ibid. Pages 36-37.

real and abiding presence among a people group, with deep identification with that people. Incarnation presents a sending impulse in mission rather than an extracting impulse: being called into mission is to go to others, not seek to bring them out of their contexts. Finally, incarnational mission means people experience Jesus within their culture as embodied good news.⁶⁶⁴ Frost and Hirsch conclude that the incarnation 'was the missional mode in which God himself engaged the world; it should be no less ours!'⁶⁶⁵

One of the dichotomies presented in missional literature is that of attractational verse incarnational.⁶⁶⁶ It is a theme that runs through Frost and Hirsch's works. They see the traditional Christendom church as one which asks people to come and hear the gospel, to encounter God within the church community. Not only does that limit an understanding of God's work in the world, but it limits access to the gospel where people either do not have a desire to attend or have access to church. Rather, the incarnational model is that of going to people.⁶⁶⁷ Frost and Hirsch envision the going principle using missiological concepts. They describe an incarnational church as one which uses centred sets rather than bounded sets. The bounded set which focuses on clear markings of who is in and who is out gives way to a centred set defined by its core values, drawing people further into the centre.⁶⁶⁸ The authors also embrace the homogeneous unit principle in their endeavour to reach particular subcultures with the gospel, even while they note that heterogeneity is the goal of a mature Christian community.⁶⁶⁹ In starting culturally specific groups, the cultural gap between a person and the gospel news can be overcome more readily. Frost and Hirsch write passionately about the need for mission to be incarnational. Their plea is for mission which makes connection with the host community so they see that Jesus has their best interests at heart. A community needs to see a real demonstration of the life of Jesus, marked by humility, mercy, and justice. Incarnational mission works towards indigenous leadership development and

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid. Pages 36-40.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. Page 41.

⁶⁶⁶ For example, see: Rusaw and Swanson. Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*. Page 165-166. McNeal and Leadership. Pages 41-66. Gibbs and Coffey. Pages 167-186. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church : Gospel Communications on Mission*. Pages 28-40. Minatrea. Pages 77-88.

⁶⁶⁷ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Pages 41-45.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid. Pages 47-51.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 51-53.

inculturation such that people come to see Jesus is 'naturalized' among the community.⁶⁷⁰ Mission is always done from within a community, embodying the good news.

Frost and Hirsch approach Christology for the missional church in a slightly different way in *ReJesus*. They propose a 'rediscovery of Christology that includes a preoccupation with the example and teaching of Jesus for the purposes of emulation by his followers.'⁶⁷¹ They continue their emphasis on Christology as the determining factor for missiology, which in turn determines ecclesiology, but focus significantly on their portrait of Jesus as a radical messiah.⁶⁷² In language given to hyperbole, Frost and Hirsch emphasize the importance of 'recovering Jesus in thought, imagination, action of the church. Radicalizing the church by recovering the ethos, teachings, lifestyle of the Founder.'⁶⁷³ In a chapter describing pictures of Jesus, literal and figurative, the authors note how our understanding of Jesus can be shaped by our own psychospiritual needs.⁶⁷⁴ They caricaturize images of Jesus from classic pictures of Jesus including 'Bearded lady Jesus' who is blond and slightly feminized, 'Spooky Jesus' who is ethereal and otherworldly, 'Ordinary Galilean Jesus' who is a simple religious teacher, and 'Revolutionary Jesus' who is a subversive radical.⁶⁷⁵ They note that images of Jesus do capture something of Jesus, as well as the spirit of the age in which they were made, but that to limit Jesus to but one image is to limit who the Messiah is. Throughout *ReJesus*, Frost and Hirsch have their own descriptors for Jesus. Many are of these are included in this one sentence: 'we need to go back to the daring, radical, strange, wonderful, inexplicable, unstoppable, marvellous, unsettling, disturbing, caring, powerful God-Man.'⁶⁷⁶ The authors encourage their readers to encounter Jesus afresh. They want their readers to engage with the Bible not only in intellectual ways but in ways of the heart, of obedience and action.⁶⁷⁷ While a fresh encounter with Jesus is something most missional authors would encourage, not all have the

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid. Pages 74-75.

⁶⁷¹ *ReJesus : A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*. Page 15. See also Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006).

⁶⁷² Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus : A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*. Page 43.

⁶⁷³ Ed Stetzer, "Church Leadership Book Interview: Alan Hirsch " Edstetzer.com,

<http://www.edstetzer.com/2009/01/interview-with-alan-hirsch.html>. Accessed 30 January 2013.

⁶⁷⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus : A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*. Page 88.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid. Pages 92-103.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid. Page 111.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid. Pages 142-150.

same perspective on the image of Jesus as presented by Frost and Hirsch. Missional author Andrew Perriman critiques *ReJesus* for presenting Jesus without his historical and narrative context, and for being subject to the same interpretive bias they critique. He says, 'But I did not hear Frost and Hirsch consider the possibility that their 'loving, wildly passionate, dangerous, radically merciful, and always surprising' Jesus is largely a projection of the 'psychospiritual needs' of a couple of passionate, radical, postmodern (in some respects) missiologists.'⁶⁷⁸

Despite some mild critique of *ReJesus*, the theme of incarnation and looking to Jesus' life in a new, radical way is one championed by other missional authors.⁶⁷⁹ In a model similar to Frost and Hirsch, a new consideration of Jesus is found in George Barna's *Revolution*.⁶⁸⁰ Barna makes the case that there is a "new breed" of disciple of Jesus Christ, whom he calls Revolutionaries. Descriptive phrases for Barna's Revolutionaries include those who are 'not willing to play religious games,' 'doing whatever it takes,' 'repudiating tepid systems and practices of the Christian faith and introducing a wholesale shift in how faith is understood, integrated, and influencing the world.'⁶⁸¹ Barna outlines seven spiritual passions that fuel Revolutionaries. One of the seven is that Jesus Christ is the focal point for faith. As Revolutionaries who are seeking to be imitators of Christ, Barna lists several pages of Jesus' priorities, character and demeanour which set the example for all to follow.⁶⁸² Theologian Ray Anderson writes *An Emergent Theology for the Emerging Church*.⁶⁸³ He suggests themes for an emergent theology based on an exposition of the church that emerged out of Antioch from the Jerusalem church. One of the themes he considers is the need for an emerging church to not only have a creedal Christology, but the contemporary presence of the historical Jesus.⁶⁸⁴ Anderson discusses the

⁶⁷⁸ Andrew Perriman, "Review of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus*," P.OST, <http://www.postost.net/2009/03/review-michael-frost-alan-hirsch-rejesus>. Accessed 4 March 2018. Tim Chester, "Thursday Review: *ReJesus* by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch," Tim Chester, <https://timchester.wordpress.com/2010/03/11/thursday-review-rejesus-by-michael-frost-and-alan-hirsch/> Accessed 4 March 2018.

⁶⁷⁹ See Gibbs, *Leadershipnext : Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture*. Page 212-213. Huckins and Yackley. Page 9. Kimball. Page 17, 79-89.

⁶⁸⁰ George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary* (Vereeniging: Christian Art Pubs, 2006).

⁶⁸¹ Ibid. Pages 13, 7, 11.

⁶⁸² Ibid. Pages 72-78.

⁶⁸³ Ray Sherman Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007).

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. Page 47.

presence of Christ through the Spirit given at Pentecost – the empowering presence to the disciples as they witness to him in the world. It is the Spirit which reveals the inner being of God to the church, and it is this living relationship which is needed. ‘The eschatological reality of the risen Christ as the Parousia (emergent one), empowering each contemporary event of faith and ministry, often tends to be replaced by historical theology on the one hand and pragmatic principles for institutional life and growth on the other.’⁶⁸⁵ Anderson sees a desire in contemporary culture for a deeper ecclesiology and spirituality, a connection with truth and experience. He suggests that a relationship with the incarnate Christ fulfils those needs.⁶⁸⁶

‘Identifying with the life of Jesus’ is one of the 3 core themes in the groundbreaking research by Gibbs and Bolger in *Emerging Churches*.⁶⁸⁷ As discussed above in section 1.4, Gibbs and Bolger’s research is a key piece of writing on the emerging church. From case studies and interviews, the research aims to identify key practices in the emerging church to explain the concerns which motivate those who are re-envisioning mission in the Western cultural context.⁶⁸⁸ They identify nine key practices, three of which they identify as core practices. One of the three core practices is identifying with the life of Jesus, alongside transforming secular space and living highly communal lives.⁶⁸⁹ From these three core practices, six other practices flow: welcoming the stranger, serving with generosity, participating as producers, creating as created beings, leading as a body, and merging ancient and contemporary spiritual activities.⁶⁹⁰ They note that emerging church leaders point to Jesus as the one who focused on the work of the kingdom. In their research, Gibbs and Bolger find that emerging churches focus on the life of Jesus, seeking a fresh view of the gospel.⁶⁹¹ For emerging church leaders, Jesus serves as a model through the way of life he lived with his followers, practicing service, forgiveness, and hospitality.⁶⁹² In Jesus, they see an invitation to participate with God’s redemptive activity in the *missio Dei*. Jesus announces the good news of the kingdom, a significant theme in the emerging

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. Page 50.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid. Pages 56-59.

⁶⁸⁷ Gibbs and Bolger. Page 43, 47-64.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. Page 29.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid. Page 45.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid. Pages 42-44.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid. Pages 48-49.

⁶⁹² Ibid. Pages 49-50.

church.⁶⁹³ ‘However difficult and complex, there is no better model for missionary activity than the way of Jesus, and it is the life of Jesus, the gospel, and the kingdom that emerging churches received their blueprint for mission.’⁶⁹⁴ Gibbs and Bolger state well the renewed focus on Jesus well when they say,

In summary, when a crisis of confidence hit the church, emerging churches retrieved the life of Jesus as a reference point. In Jesus, they discovered a long-forgotten gospel, the idea that we have an invitation to participate with God in the redemption of the world....Jesus announced the kingdom of God, and this is the message emerging churches seek to proclaim in the newly formed missional communities.⁶⁹⁵

Alongside *missio Dei*, incarnation is a significant theological theme in its own right. Incarnation as considered in the context of contemporary mission to Western culture is explored in a deeper theological way in several missional texts. *Mission-shaped Church* is a seminal publication coming from the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council.⁶⁹⁶ *Mission-shaped Church* looks concisely at the current cultural context in England, both the history and current array of “fresh expressions of church” emerging as a response to the changing setting before moving on to offer a theological framework for the Church of England in mission. The report lays out brief theological principles on which fresh expression churches may rest in Chapter 5. The work of Christ in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection are principles included in the chapter. The incarnation demonstrates God entering into a specific cultural identity in order to bring the revelation of God to all cultures. While identification is critical, Jesus was also prophetically critical of his own culture. The incarnational church ‘is called to loving identification with those to whom it is sent, and to exemplify the way of life to which those who repent turn.’⁶⁹⁷ Thus the incarnation provides a model of exchange, where Christ came to another culture and gave up his glory in order to save. ‘The church is most true to itself when it gives itself up, in current cultural form, to be re-formed among those who do not know God’s Son.’⁶⁹⁸

The chapter on theology, including the incarnation, is brief in *Mission Shaped Church*, but a more focused and sustained theology of the incarnation for mission is found in missional theologian Darrell Guder’s *The Incarnation and*

⁶⁹³ Ibid. Pages 53-61.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid. Page 62.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. Page 64.

⁶⁹⁶ Cray et al.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid. Pages 87-88.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 89.

the Church's Witness.⁶⁹⁹ Although it is a small book, it is thorough, systematic, and entirely focused on understanding mission incarnationally. Guder sees the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the defining event for the message and mission of the church.⁷⁰⁰ Throughout his book, Guder lays out in more detail the theological grounding behind many of the applications of the incarnation to mission used in other texts. The incarnation of Jesus summarizes the “what” of the gospel and at the same time defines the “how” of gospel witness. Guder says, ‘The way in which God acts is itself an essential dimension of God’s mission.’⁷⁰¹ So the term incarnational helps to express the congruence between God’s message and its communication – the what and the how. Guder notes this is not to be put down to a system, as there remains mystery in God’s actions to save. Incarnational mission keeps two things together: the salvation found in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and his sending of his people in mission witness to all the world.⁷⁰² The church is called to witness to the reality of the incarnation of Jesus, in ways which are shaped by his coming to earth: ‘Jesus Christ as the messenger, the message, and the model for all who follow after him.’⁷⁰³ This is what Guder sees defining incarnational mission, but he also takes pains to say what incarnational mission is not. The term ‘incarnational’ should not be used in a reductionistic manner, whether to separate the moral lifestyle and teachings of Jesus from the atoning actions in his death, or to divide Creation Theology of taking care of the earth from Cross Theology which addresses sin.⁷⁰⁴ All of these threads must be held together for a full understanding of incarnational witness.

The incarnation also speaks of God’s actions in calling forth a community, as he began with Abraham, who will be an embodied witness.⁷⁰⁵ This challenges the institutional forms of Christendom, as institutional maintenance is not the priority. Incarnational witness through a community also challenges the individualism of Western culture.⁷⁰⁶ ‘Jesus Christ’s discipleship defines every dimension of the Christian’s life: incarnational witness is comprehensive.’⁷⁰⁷

⁶⁹⁹ Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* (Harrisburg, Penn: Trinity Pr International, 1999).

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid. Pages xii-xiii.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid. Page 3.

⁷⁰² Ibid. Page 5.

⁷⁰³ Ibid. Page 9.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid. Pages 12-14.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. Pages 22-23.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid. Pages 24-26.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid. Page 31.

Guder makes the point that the biblical message of Lordship of Jesus is completely holistic. It is individual and corporate, includes doctrine and ethics and all constituencies of the world.⁷⁰⁸ The author sees some largely neglected issues which the comprehensive nature of the incarnation addresses: the gospel healing every area of human brokenness (mind, body, spirit); Jesus' rejection of all forms of violence; Jesus' inversion of all human structures of power and authority.⁷⁰⁹ For Guder, incarnational witness also addresses the heart. As God's love sent Christ, so God's love incarnates in the Christian community – the visible demonstration of his love.⁷¹⁰ There is an inclusive nature to the incarnational witness, where Word became flesh, so that flesh might encounter and respond to God's love in every culture.⁷¹¹ Finally, Guder discusses the place of the Spirit as the power of continuing discipleship and witness in the world. God is faithful to continue in the church the ongoing conversion process through the work of the Spirit forming us into the image of Christ for his service.⁷¹² Guder's book gives a strong theological grounding for the theme of the incarnation and mission.

A more applied vision of incarnational mission is found in numerous missional texts.⁷¹³ The principle of incarnation is the starting point for Hugh Halter and Matt Smay in *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*.⁷¹⁴ They discuss the challenges of a changing culture, challenges of a Christendom heritage, challenges of a reductionistic gospel, and practices of missional living. Halter and Smay discuss how all mission starts somewhere – for them, it starts with the incarnation. In discussing mission and the incarnation, they say, '...missional sentness is focused on leaving and everything related to going, but incarnational represents how we go and what we do as we go'.⁷¹⁵ They see a primary activity of the faith community 'is to actively go into the culture to embody and en flesh the good news into every nook and cranny of this world'.⁷¹⁶ Missional people are those who 'live out' incarnationally – who seek to make a habit of

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid. Pages 32-36.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid. Pages 36-37.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid. Pages 39-46.

⁷¹¹ Ibid. Pages 47-55.

⁷¹² Ibid. Pages 57-60.

⁷¹³ For other examples see: Cole. Smith and Wilson-Hartgrove.

⁷¹⁴ Halter and Smay.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid. Page 38.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid. Page 108.

leaving their comfort zones to go out to others, living among people, listening to the life and stories of others, and loving with no strings attached.⁷¹⁷

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk write about the incarnation and leadership principles in *The Missional Leader*.⁷¹⁸ The incarnation gives shape and direction for leaders today, as it did for leaders in the early church. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ formed the early church in an understanding of mission as participation with God in the full scope of the world in which they lived. Roxburgh and Romanuk encourage leaders to follow the example of the incarnation with a holistic vision for God's activity in the world.⁷¹⁹ Like Jesus, leaders should focus on the formation of a people of God who demonstrate the kingdom in relational ways.⁷²⁰ Roxburgh also writes about missional engagement from an applied incarnational perspective in *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*.⁷²¹ Roxburgh focuses on Luke 10:1-12, the sending of the seventy, to foster a missional imagination. He points out God's faithfulness, the Spirit's work of breaking boundaries of conceptions of where God is at work, the need to leave the baggage of methods, models, and control behind, and seeing the ordinary people of God as those who are called and sent.⁷²² Roxburgh finds in Luke's writings a call to find out what God is doing by going into the neighbourhood, by following where the Spirit is breaking down old boundaries, by sitting, eating, drinking and listening with people where we live. Roxburgh does not use the term incarnational much in *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* but the spirit of his writings is filled with incarnational theology applied to mission.

The incarnation and its implications for mission in contemporary Western culture are themes which fill missional texts. The incarnation informs the ways in which mission is done – seeking to have embodied presence in communities. Going to the other and being sent are aspects of the incarnation seen as critical for mission today. It is a basis for contextualization and identification with one's culture. The very message of the gospel is found in the incarnation and person of Jesus Christ. For those in the missional movement, a refreshed examination

⁷¹⁷ Ibid. Pages 123-145.

⁷¹⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

⁷¹⁹ Ibid. Pages 120-122.

⁷²⁰ Ibid. Pages 122-123.

⁷²¹ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*.

⁷²² Ibid. Pages 130-131.

of Jesus has been foundational for mission in the current context. Consideration of the life of Jesus as a model for ministry today is found throughout missional writings.

3.2.5 Seeking Kingdom Transformation in Society

A significant area of concern with the emerging and missional church movements is the expression of a faith which transforms culture. The theme of kingdom transformation includes the sub-themes of:

Seeking kingdom transformation in society

- transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide)
- eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now
- church as having an activist faith which is serving society

When the kingdom is considered in missional texts, it is often around a lived out faith which sees God's reign here and now, thus transforming culture. This theme covers a diversity of expressions. The kingdom aspect of transforming culture is sometimes discussed in eschatological motivation, of the kingdom here and now, as well as redeeming all things. Of concern connected to the theme of kingdom transformation is a holistic faith which overlaps with the theme of *missio Dei*. For some missional authors, political involvement is a necessary activity for the church, while for others the emphasis is on grass-roots small acts of kindness. Transformation of culture overlaps with the theme of community, as often there is discussion of the church deeply involved with change in the locality and as a lived, example community. This theme also sometimes comes from a position of protest at a Christianity which has been too spiritualized and separate from the challenges of real life. Missional and emerging authors are concerned with a faith which is active and embodied, rooted in an understanding of the kingdom of God which therefore transforms culture.

Brian McLaren's book *Everything Must Change* typifies the emerging activist faith.⁷²³ The book maps McLaren's journey with reference to two questions: what are the biggest problems in the world and what does Jesus have

⁷²³ Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

to say about these global questions?⁷²⁴ McLaren starts with the fundamental message of Jesus being news of the kingdom of God – how God’s will could be done on earth, in history. And if indeed this was true, McLaren says ‘Everything must change.’⁷²⁵ Set against McLaren’s travels, speaking and thinking around the “unhealthy framing stories” of colonialism and the failures of a Christendom church, he considers if Jesus message was an attempt to challenge and replace the unhealthy framing stories of his own day. Here he asks the two big questions – what are the biggest problems in the world today, and what do the life and teaching of Jesus have to say to these global problems?⁷²⁶ He identifies three interlocking systems that form a ‘suicide machine’ which is driven by a framing story of destruction and global crisis.⁷²⁷ His three systems of dysfunction are: the prosperity system – which feeds products and services for people to consume to be happy; the security system – all the public and private systems to keep people secure and guard prosperity; the equity system – seeks to fairly distribute the cost of security and expand prosperity in equitable ways.⁷²⁸ These global issues are not only a crisis for the wider world, but they are a crisis for the church. McLaren gives the narrative of his own dissatisfaction and of the suggested millions of young adults who have left their churches in recent decades because the traditional forms of Christian faith have ‘specialized in people’s destination in the afterlife but has failed to address significant social injustices in this life.’⁷²⁹

McLaren offers an understanding of Jesus and his framing message of the kingdom of God as an alternative to the current destructive practices and perspectives, or as McLaren says, ‘an alternative to empire.’⁷³⁰ He notes that many read the Bible as a way to explain how to go to heaven or legitimize religion or explain universal truths. His alternative hypothesis: ‘That the Bible instead is the story of the partnership between God and humanity to save and transform all of human society and avert global self-destruction.’⁷³¹ McLaren considers the life of Jesus against this hypothesis – his interaction with political, business and religious leaders, his rebuke to hypocrites, his prophetic words and parables about ethical living which all highlight Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God.

⁷²⁴ Ibid. Pages 11-15.

⁷²⁵ Ibid. Pages 21-23.

⁷²⁶ Ibid. Page 39, 45.

⁷²⁷ Ibid. Pages 53-58, 65-73.

⁷²⁸ Ibid. Pages 54-57.

⁷²⁹ Ibid. Page 33.

⁷³⁰ Ibid. Page 90.

⁷³¹ Ibid. Page 94.

Here Jesus proclaims a radical new kind of empire. Jesus is King, but of a different kingdom, which is not of this world.⁷³² McLaren's alternative vision to the suicide machine is a 'sacred ecosystem of God,' which when planted would grow to be 'a transforming framing story'⁷³³ To specifically address the security system, McLaren proposes following Jesus by forming communities of peace, generosity and caring, to maintain hope over despair and to desire justice. A life of peace is one filled with the life of the kingdom of God, dedicated to peace-making and building reconciled communities.⁷³⁴ Transforming the prosperity system, followers of Jesus must turn away from the belief that consuming more solves all problems, and live a life of good deeds for the common good, characterized by gratitude and generosity.⁷³⁵ People who live in the promises of Jesus live in hope of God's promised future, and can reject the false fear of inequity. Jesus' invitation to his disciples then, and to his followers now, is to live out his kingdom ways now, leading to action on four levels: Personal action in inner and outer practices; community action where faith groups practice spiritual formation and faith based community action; public action including education, art, rallies, and political involvement; global action, where faith acting across the world can change the global crisis.⁷³⁶ McLaren's activist faith builds on an understanding of Jesus' message of the kingdom of God transforming society at every level.

Emerging churches are ones which value transforming secular space, according to research by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger in *Emerging Churches*.⁷³⁷ As discussed above in section 1.4, Gibbs and Bolger's research aims to identify key practices in the emerging church to explain the concerns which motivate those who are re-envisioning mission in the Western cultural context.⁷³⁸ One of the three core practices is transforming secular space, alongside identifying with the life of Jesus and living highly communal lives.⁷³⁹ Gibbs and Bolger see the emphasis on transforming secular space in part coming from the vacuum created

⁷³² Ibid. Page 99, 114.

⁷³³ Ibid. Page 134.

⁷³⁴ Ibid. Pages 159-185.

⁷³⁵ Ibid. Pages 189-224.

⁷³⁶ Ibid. Pages 292-301. In a similar theme of an activist faith, but from a broader faith perspective, see Jim Wallis, *Faith Works: Lessons on Spirituality and Social Action* (London: SPCK, 2002).

⁷³⁷ Gibbs and Bolger.

⁷³⁸ Ibid. Page 29.

⁷³⁹ Ibid. Page 45. From these three core practices, six other practices flow: welcoming the stranger, serving with generosity, participating as producers, creating as created beings, leading as a body, and merging ancient and contemporary spiritual activities. Pages 42-45.

by secularization and the desire for integration which ends modernity's sacred/secular divide. Rather than secularization, emerging communities are focused on sacralisation – the process of making all life sacred. The destruction of the sacred/secular divide brings an emphasis on a holistic approach to life. In overcoming the dualisms of modernity, the desire is to remove secular space.⁷⁴⁰ This includes embracing a nonlinear way of worship, hearing many different people's stories and input, and engaging with an image-based culture.⁷⁴¹ Another aspect of overcoming the sacred/secular divide is embracing a whole life spirituality which holds God as both transcendent (God beyond human experience and understanding) and immanent (God actively participates in creation).⁷⁴² In seeking to integrate life, emerging believers seek to overcome the division between faith and culture. Gibbs and Bolger say, 'Ending the fragmentation and offering integrity to the lifelong Christian is only part of a deeper issue at work here. We are commanded by Christ as his followers to live incarnationally, to overcome boundaries, to express the God-life, and to recognize where God is at work in every realm.'⁷⁴³ Seeking a holistic faith includes bringing embodied expressions back to worship, and understanding evangelism as a way of life, not a one-time event.⁷⁴⁴ These processes are all a part of transforming secular space, so that there is no longer a divide between what is sacred and what is secular.

Missiologist Scot McKnight writes about the kingdom of God, transformation and the church in both *The Jesus Creed*⁷⁴⁵ and *Kingdom Conspiracy*.⁷⁴⁶ McKnight is passionate about kingdom theology and its lived dimension transforming life. To understand McKnight's vision of what this looks like, we will look first at his concepts in *The Jesus Creed*, and then consider further working out of this theme in *Kingdom Conspiracy*. McKnight's concepts of the kingdom begin with the building block of Jesus' teaching on what a spiritually formed person looks like. McKnight traces the foundational importance of the Jewish Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which begins with 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid. Pages 67-68.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid. Pages 68-71.

⁷⁴² See also: Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. Page 75.

⁷⁴³ Gibbs and Bolger. Page 75. See also McNeal. Pages 20-24.

⁷⁴⁴ Gibbs and Bolger. Pages 75-79.

⁷⁴⁵ Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed : Loving God, Loving Others* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2004).

⁷⁴⁶ *Kingdom Conspiracy : Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (2016).

with all your soul and with all your strength.’ Jesus adds this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ This formulation is what McKnight calls the “Jesus Creed.”⁷⁴⁷ This Jesus Creed expands the focus from a Love-God Shema, to a Love-God-and-Others Shema. ‘Making the love of others part of his own version of the Shema shows that he sees love of others as central to spiritual formation.’⁷⁴⁸ McKnight also discusses the Lord’s Prayer as a framework to understand God’s priorities, and to align one’s priorities with God’s desires. In the Lord’s prayer, McKnight sees that we learn to love God as Father, and to love others as God loves, thus it is intimately connected to Jesus’ instruction in the amended Shema.⁷⁴⁹ Finally, McKnight discusses how loving God is done by following Jesus. To love God is to have a personal relationship with the Messiah Jesus, and to follow him. McKnight’s summary statement of Jesus’ instructions are ‘Love God and love others, and love God by following me.’⁷⁵⁰

The goal of Jesus’ vision is to see the kingdom of God, which McKnight understands as the society of people who love God and love others by following Jesus, which transforms life.⁷⁵¹ Jesus did not just come for individuals to follow God, but for his followers to be a society that is transforming life in the now. It is a society of ordinary people, doing ordinary acts of love which changes those around them. It is a society of people who love justice, who work to restore people, and who experience joy and fellowship.⁷⁵² McKnight describes in historical and contemporary examples how these practices by the society of Jesus can and do transform society into the eschatological coming of God’s kingdom. Communities are transformed as individuals and groups of believers show God’s love on the ground where they are rooted. The kingdom of God then comes in the here and now, as it will eventually be in heaven. A similar argument is made by John Hull in “Mission-shaped and kingdom focused?” in *Mission Shaped Questions*.⁷⁵³ Hull makes the case that the focus should be on the kingdom of God – that heavenly and earthly reality in which the purposes of God are realized, rather than the focus on the interests and concerns of the Church. Hull states, ‘Christian faith is best understood in its messianic aspect as an agent

⁷⁴⁷ *The Jesus Creed : Loving God, Loving Others*. Page 8-9. From Matthew 22:37-40, and Mark 12:33.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Page 9.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Pages 14-23.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Page 13.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.* Page 127.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.* Pages 134-177.

⁷⁵³ Croft. See Hull, pages 114-132.

of the now and future kingdom, and church as an agent of the Christian faith for the same ultimate purpose. In this sequence, only the kingdom of God, which is the object of the mission of God, is self-authenticating; both Christian faith and church are instrumental to kingdom.⁷⁵⁴ In a Church focused mission, Hull describes how the church is the place where heaven reaches earth, the vertical axis, which motivates outreach and mission. In a kingdom focused mission, the vertical is collapsed into the horizontal outreach to love others in the same way as one loves God. In loving God one will love their neighbour. To know God is to defend the oppressed and seek justice. In forgiving the other, we worship God. In all of this, Hull says the kingdom is declared.⁷⁵⁵

McKnight considers kingdom theology again in *Kingdom Conspiracy*. In this book he more explicitly reflects on different perspectives of the kingdom of God in the contemporary church dubbed “Skinny Jeans” and “Pleated Pants.” Skinny Jeans kingdom people are characterized by those who think ‘Kingdom means good deeds done by good people (Christian or not) in the public sector for the common good.’⁷⁵⁶ Those who take this approach often work for social justice, concern for the poor, and work for the oppressed. For some, the moral vision of Jesus can become a socio-political platform, and Christ can become a symbol of a way of life. Kingdom work is removed from the church. A Pleated Pants version of kingdom is focused on answering: When does the kingdom arrive? Where is the kingdom? And McKnight puts forward that the Pleated Pants answers can be summed up: the kingdom is both now and future, and the kingdom is both a rule and a realm but largely the rule of God.⁷⁵⁷ McKnight agrees with the kingdom already present and yet to come, but argues that Pleated Pants scholars make the kingdom so theoretical it does not answer the “what it looks like in reality or in the church life” question. For the Pleated Pants group, the location of the kingdom crowd ‘is nowhere and everywhere at the same time.’⁷⁵⁸ Instead, it is wherever “redemption is occurring” and “God’s reign breaks in to save, restore or heal” – but these terms can remain so abstract that they explain nothing.

After setting the scene with these two visions, McKnight makes a fairly complex, sustained exegetical argument that the kingdom is a complex of king,

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 114.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid. Pages 118 – 122.

⁷⁵⁶ McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy : Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*. Page 4.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid. Page 9.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid. Page 12.

rule, people, land and law, but that kingdom in scripture is primarily about a people. Both kingdom and church are eschatological: both present and future.⁷⁵⁹ He sees that while they are not exactly the same, church and kingdom are not as separate as many church leaders are suggesting. He argues that the church is the people where the kingdom is realized now – both are the people of God governed by Jesus as king. ‘The kingdom is the people who are redeemed and ruled by King Jesus in such a way that they live as a fellowship under King Jesus. That is, there is a king (Jesus), a rule (by Jesus as Lord), a people (the church), a land (wherever Jesus’ kingdom people are present), and a law (following Jesus through the power of the Spirit).’⁷⁶⁰ The emphasis on linking the kingdom to the people of God can also be seen in an essay by Bishop Graham Cray entitled “Communities of the Kingdom.”⁷⁶¹ Cray outlines the more traditional view that church and kingdom are similar but not the same, and an inclination towards kingdom as God’s rule. However, he also notes that the kingdom of God and the people of God are linked in the kingdom being the fulfilment of Israel, which was to be the means through which the world is saved.⁷⁶² Cray sees that when the church is understood as a ‘foretaste’ of the kingdom helps it define the missionary task of the church. The church is to be a ‘imperfect pilot plant’ of God’s future, local anticipations of the future kingdom of God.⁷⁶³

So too for McKnight, kingdom mission is church mission and vice versa.⁷⁶⁴ McKnight goes on to describe what kingdom mission looks like in nine observations. Some of these are summarized above, but along the theme of kingdom transformation, McKnight holds that the church is the embodiment of the kingdom vision Jesus lays out, and tells in its life the story of the good news of Jesus as King. Every local church ‘mediates the presence of God to people of God as a gift to the local community.’⁷⁶⁵ This people of God will themselves be transformed in following Jesus, and be a witness to and against the world’s systems where they clash with the kingdom ways. Kingdom mission for God’s

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid. Summary statements of his conclusions are on pages 205-208. For the full treatment, see pages 21-98.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 99.

⁷⁶¹ Graham Bp Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy, *Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God*, Ancient Faith, Future Mission 3 (London, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012).

⁷⁶² Ibid. Pages 14-16.

⁷⁶³ Ibid. Page 18.

⁷⁶⁴ McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy : Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*. Page 96.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid. Page 100.

people includes being compelled by love to do good deeds in the public sector. Kingdom mission also means that social justice and activism are important paths for Christians to express love to those in need.⁷⁶⁶ McKnight's vision of kingdom transformation seeks to bring a church-centred outworking of God's love through people who are themselves transformed by living with Jesus as King.

Eschatology features significantly in missional literature, which overlaps with an activist faith and is also tied to kingdom transformation. Kevin Corcoran summarizes, 'Emerging folk are, it seems, an eschatological lot, people who seek to make God's future a present reality, as best they can.'⁷⁶⁷ Corcoran sketches a model of the kingdom as come and still coming, here but not fully actualized. While emerging Christians see the critical issues in today's society, they believe an alternative reality is possible.⁷⁶⁸ It is this alternative reality which is heaven that Corcoran suggests emerging Christians are not only excited about – but that Jesus spoke of, and that is here and now while not fully actualized. He then outlines an alternative eschatology held by some emerging individuals including John Caputo and Peter Rollins based on the work of Jacques Derrida. This view sees the kingdom of God as never fully present, but a reality yet to come, a hope eternally deferred, because words and worldly structures are limited, finite and thus inhospitable for the Wholly Other.⁷⁶⁹ At best there are "traces" of the event that is God which call us into a transformed way of being in the world. But Corcoran rejects this model of a largely deferred kingdom as discarnational, seeing instead that God incarnates himself in the particular and contingent, most especially in Jesus.⁷⁷⁰

Other authors echo the idea that eschatology and kingdom theology is important. James Bielo's research on Emerging Evangelicals in America concludes that kingdom theology is central to the outworking of an emerging faith.⁷⁷¹ Bielo notes how different kingdom theologies lead to perspectives and models of time and subjectivity, as well as thought and action about the presence or absence of hope.⁷⁷² Those advocating a kingdom "now and not yet" perspective understand that the kingdom reality was introduced with the life,

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid. Pages 104-119.

⁷⁶⁷ McKnight et al. Page 59.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid. Page 62.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid. Pages 69-70.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid. Pages 69-71.

⁷⁷¹ Bielo. Pages 138-139.

⁷⁷² Ibid. Page 140.

death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit, but will not be fully realized until the Second Coming. The perspective on time is not one which is entirely for the future, but one which looks for the future of God's kingdom to break into the present. This hope-filled orientation is shared by other emergent authors like Tony Jones, who notes this as a trait of emergent Christians.⁷⁷³ Bielo says this creates a space for limited human agency, where believers seek to reveal or model the kingdom here and now, while knowing it will never be full or perfect.⁷⁷⁴ This is one understanding of the relationship between eschatology and kingdom transformation. Another minority understanding among emerging evangelicals in Bielo's research is that of Preterism, or a kingdom now/fulfilled eschatology. Preterism is based on the understanding that the second coming of Jesus is not a future event, but happened with the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The kingdom of God referred to in scripture is not separate from the earth, and is fully here and now.⁷⁷⁵ As a consequence, those who hold this position are fully engaged in making the kingdom known to all, partnering with God in a kingdom which is fully realizable. Bielo states that kingdom theology and eschatology have far reaching consequences. 'As modes of temporality, kingdom theologies inform Evangelical subjectivity, conceptions of human agency, and the potential for social engagement.'⁷⁷⁶ Bielo then relates different kingdom theologies to tensions of a utopia/dystopia. 'Whether it is present, visible, deferred, or awaiting, the kingdom signifies perfection.'⁷⁷⁷ One's vision of the kingdom leads to more or less active involvement in seeking to transform the world, and more or less optimistic perceptions of the world.

Graham Tomlin discusses transformation and the church in an essay entitled "Can we develop churches that can transform the culture?"⁷⁷⁸ He addresses the question: are fresh expressions of church so contextualized they lose their ability to transform culture? But first, he addresses the prior question – should churches be trying to transform the culture? Tomlin references Richard Niebuhr's seminal book *Christ and Culture*, which advocated a position of "Christ transforming culture," and the critiques of this position by subsequent ethicists like John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. He notes that for Hauerwas

⁷⁷³ Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. Page 72.

⁷⁷⁴ Bielo. Page 144.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 151.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid. Page 153.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid. Page 154.

⁷⁷⁸ Croft.

and Yoder, the church is not here to transform culture but to build the church. The church bears witness to the kingdom but lies outside the structures of human society.⁷⁷⁹ Tomlin concludes that the church is called to bear witness to Jesus, and that the church does have a future orientation as a sign to the new heaven and earth. 'Church is intended to be a place in which we can catch an echo, a glimpse of the kingdom of God, in which God really gets his way.'⁷⁸⁰ But this then begs the question as to what it looks like – what are the practices and values that express a culture of the kingdom? The main characteristics, Tomlin says, are moral – a new way of living, relating and behaving. This is a culture that reflects the nature and character of God seen in Jesus Christ, informing the church how it goes about transforming of culture.⁷⁸¹ Tomlin notes examples in history of individuals who had great impact on society like William Wilberforce, Hannah More, Henry Venn and others who fought slavery. It is through the lives of Christians shaped by their faith, living their daily lives in shops, schools, businesses, and neighbourhoods that society is influenced. And it is up to the church to be the kind of place where “people of virtue” are shaped. Through identifying kingdom virtues, introducing disciplines, encouraging expectations of godly behaviour, and teaching the actual practices of kingdom virtues that a culture of the kingdom transforms the surrounding culture.⁷⁸²

Kingdom transformation is a theme which includes the missional church as a force for change in society. This comes from varying perspectives on the kingdom of God – how and when this is realized and how Christians live out the kingdom of God here and now. Those who see God's purposes as including a redemption of all of life have a very broad brief to participate with God in the world. No area of life is to be untouched by God's activity, overcoming the sacred-secular divide. Eschatology is a guiding force in missional understandings of transforming culture. An understanding of God's kingdom breaking in here and now gives rise to action. This action might be local, small in scale or national and political. Emerging and missional authors encourage an activist faith which is lived out in communities and in embodied ways which sees individuals, communities, nations and systems changed.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid. Page 67.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid. Page 69.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid. Pages 70-71.

⁷⁸² Ibid. Pages 72-77.

3.2.6 Summary of Themes in Literature

The five themes considered above are key topics discussed across missional and emerging church texts. These themes are primarily theological in orientation and may be driving the theological imaginary of missionaries doing new church work. These themes will form the base-line for comparison against themes arising from the interview data with practitioners in the following chapters. Discussions around being a community, participating in the *missio Dei*, being a contextualized church, being incarnational, and seeking kingdom transformation permeate missional texts. The purpose of this research is to identify what inspires missionaries in their new church works, and seek to correlate the themes in the literature in the missional and emerging church movements with that of the theological imaginaries of church planting practitioners. Have the themes identified been influential in practice? Are they the themes nurturing the theological imaginaries of those seeking to work in the context of contemporary British society? Chapter 4 will consider the themes arising with interview data from church planters.

CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGICAL IMAGINARY IN PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Introduction and Research Questions

Missional and emerging church literature discusses a variety of theological themes, aimed at encouraging the theological imaginary of those in church work. The literature is particularly set out to inspire and resource those in the postmodern and post-Christendom context to consider new ways of thinking about and practicing church life. Texts can come from a theoretical or idealist perspective. But what is the shape of the theological imaginary of those who are on the ground, in mission today in the UK? Is the theological content of the literature influential to practitioners, present in the imaginary of those involved in new church work? What is the relationship of those books that might be lining church planters' shelves to the theological ideas which guide their daily ministry and motivate their image of church? To address these questions, the researcher interviewed church planters to gather their reflections around the theological ideas that inspire and motivate them. Participants reflected on their theological perspectives on church planting and what has contributed to the formation of their perspectives. These interviews give insight into the theological imaginary of contemporary church planting. It gives voice to this part of the church in mission.

The focus of the research is to explore church planters' theological imaginary, a concept taken from Charles Taylor's social imaginary. The "theological imaginary" is, to rephrase Taylor's words above in section 1.2.3, about "how church planters imagine their ecclesial existence, the expectations of church and church planting which are met, and the deeper theological notions and images which underlie these expectations."⁷⁸³ The research questions focus on ideas which may be guiding mission and understandings of church. This research seeks to understand the lived experiences of missionaries through interviews seeking the theological imaginary. Chapter 3 outlined five primary themes found in the literature: the importance of being a community, participating in the *missio Dei*, the need for contextualization in mission, being incarnational in mission, and seeking kingdom transformation in society. This chapter will examine data from 18 interviews to uncover the theological imaginary at work in the 21 participants, and how this relates to the primary themes found in the

⁷⁸³ Adapted from text in Taylor, C. Taylor. Page 171.

literature above. Consideration will be given in Chapter 5 to how the interview results relate to the literature, and the shape of the theological imaginary outlined in the data compared to that outlined in the literature. The interview data was examined for themes using thematic analysis (TA) as a method, as presented by Braun and Clarke.⁷⁸⁴ TA provides an excellent method for the purposes of this research, which is focused on drawing out themes both in a body of texts and in interview data.⁷⁸⁵ As a data driven, descriptive method, it functions well to discover the theological themes in the imaginary of participants in new church work, allowing for comparison to the themes in the literature. This section overviews the empirical research process. It will outline the participant sample selection, recruiting and interviewing process, and finally detail the method of data analysis. The rest of Chapter 4 will focus on the theological themes from interview data, leading to conclusions on the theological imaginary in Chapter 5.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Participants

Requests for church planting contacts were made from various professional contacts in different church settings. As this research is specifically focused, the sample is also specifically focused or purposive.⁷⁸⁶ The initial list of referred potential participants was reviewed to select those who reflect the most diversity as can be determined from the information to hand in: setting (socio-economic, and rural or urban, different parts of the country), gender, church stream, and ministry type (house church/simple church/special interest groups/programme based church). Risks for this process include sample selection from known colleges, friends or those whom I know share a certain perspective on church planting and theology. To avoid this risk, I did not take referrals from colleagues or close friends, and the sample selection did not include any colleagues or friends with whom the researcher has a personal or professional relationship. A broad selection of church tradition was sought.

This research is investigating the theological imagination specifically of church planters or missionaries— those who are involved in starting new churches,

⁷⁸⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research : A Practical Guide for Beginners* (London: SAGE, 2013). See also Punch. Page 187.

⁷⁸⁵ Braun and Clarke. Page 174.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid. Page 56.

which may represent a wide variety of ecclesiological models. They represent a wide variety of styles of ministry: Cafe churches, more traditional programme based churches, churches for a particular geography and those for a network, churches which are run from a community centre and those who meet in homes. In Table 1 below, a description of the type of church plant is given, either in their terms if given in the interview, or a descriptor from the researcher. Also given is a categorization from the Church Army's Research Unit, *Church Growth Research Project, The Day of Small Things* which is a large study of over 1,100 fresh expressions of church in 20 dioceses.⁷⁸⁷ That research team used a categorization of kinds of fresh expressions of church taken from *Mission-shaped Church*, which is also reflected in Table 1. Both categories of types of ministry below are given simply as an indication of the variety of new church work in this research.⁷⁸⁸ The objective of the research is to seek the theological imaginary of church planters, but not expressly those who are involved in self-described "emerging churches" or "fresh expressions of church." This is research into the theological motivations, images, and visions of those who are church planting, which will then be correlated to the wide body of missional and emerging church themes, but it is not specifically into the theological imaginary of a specific subset of those church planting.

These church planters are from across England, both from cities and from rural locations, from a variety of church affiliations. The 21 participants are from the Church of England, the Baptist Church, the Vineyard Church, the Salvation Army, New Frontiers International, the Churches of Christ, the Elim Pentecostal church, the Salt and Light Network, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches and independent missionaries, some of whom are associated with mission organizations, and some of whom are not.⁷⁸⁹ Of the 18 church plants highlighted, there is a maximum of three ministries from any one church stream. Some are full-time and others part-time in ministry. The missionaries are generally working with church plants not more than seven years old. This research will not investigate theological imagination in those doing ethnic based church plants due

⁷⁸⁷ Lings, "The Day of Small Things".

⁷⁸⁸ Other typologies for missional and churches can be found in Murray, *Church after Christendom*. Pages 95-97.

⁷⁸⁹ Two other interviews were conducted but were not transcribed or analyzed because they were outside of the research criteria. One was a church plant which was significantly older than 7 years, and the other was with a person who was not currently actively church planting. In both cases, the information given regarding the research criteria was misunderstood.

to the specialized cultural information which might needed. 21 participants across 18 church plants seeks to provide a picture of the theological imaginary in a meaningful scale which is also appropriate for the scale of the thesis. Braun and Clarke suggest for a small TA project 6-10 interviews are normal, and that within research which aims to identify patterns across data, between 15-30 interviews tends to be common.⁷⁹⁰ Having participants interviewed from a wide variety of church streams will gather sufficient evidence for the purposes of this research in finding the themes around the theological imaginary, and the ideas which have been impactful on those church planters.

Table 1. List of participant's characteristics

| Letter designation | Gender | Full or Part-time, paid status | Context | Church affiliation | Description – their words or researcher summary | Category - Church Army Research Index |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| A | F | Part-Time supported | Suburban | Lay pioneer with CMS | Fresh Expression for spiritual seekers | Alternative worship/ special interest group |
| B | M | Full-Time employed | Urban | Vineyard | Traditional church plant | Traditional church plant |
| C | M | Full-Time employed | Suburban | FIEC/ Acts 29 Network | Sister church plant off larger church | Traditional church plant |
| D1 | F | Full-Time employed | Inner City | Salvation Army | Café Church/ community service | Café church/ community development plant |
| D2 | F | Full-Time employed | Inner City | Salvation Army | Café Church/ community service | Café church/ community development plant |

⁷⁹⁰ Braun and Clarke. Page 55.

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| E1 | M | Part-Time employed | Suburban | Vineyard | Traditional church plant | Traditional church plant |
| E2 | F | Part-time Volunteer | Suburban | Vineyard | Traditional church plant | Traditional church plant |
| F1 | F | Full-Time employed | Rural | Salvation Army | Community centre/Messy Church/Traditional | Community development plant/ traditional church plant |
| F2 | M | Full-Time employed | Rural | Salvation Army | Community centre/Messy Church/Traditional | Community development plant/ traditional church plant |
| G | M | Full-Time Self-funded/ supported | Urban | Baptist Church/ Urban Expressions | Network Church based in the workplace | Network church |
| H | M | Full-Time employed | Urban | Salt and Light Network | Student Work, family support charity | Network church |
| I | F | Part time supported | Inner City | Independent | Missional Community | Community development plant |
| J | M | Full-Time employed | Suburban/ Rural | Non-denominational/ CPI | Café Church/ community service | Café church/ community development plant |
| K | M | Part-time Volunteer | Urban | Fellowship of Churches of Christ | House Church/ missional community | Cell church |
| L | M | Full-time - Volunteer | Urban | Elim Pentecostal | Fresh Expression for council estate | Traditional church plant |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| M | M | Full-Time employed | Suburban | C of E | Fresh Expression, community work | Network Church/Special interest group |
| N | F | Full-Time employed | Suburban | C of E | Fresh Expression of church | Special interest group |
| O | M | Full-Time employed | Suburban | C of E | Fresh Expression of church/social enterprise/missional community | Special interest group/Clusters |
| P | M | Full-Time employed | Suburban/ Rural | New Frontiers International | Traditional church plant/ special needs plant | Traditional church plant/Special interest group |
| Q | M | Full-Time employed | Urban | New Frontiers International | Multi-Site Church | Multiple Sunday congregations |
| R | M | Full-Time employed | Suburban/ Rural | New Frontiers International | Traditional church plant | Traditional church plant |

4.2.2 Interview Procedure

The interview process sought to draw out the theological imaginary: how church planters imagine the church and mission work, their expectations and hopes for mission, ideas that underlie these expectations, and the theological images that guide and nourish their work. The interviews were semi-structured, with an interview guide used, but also allowed for the process of the interview to bring up other relevant questions to be asked. Interviews were either face-to-face or via Skype, and audio was recorded with permission given by the interviewee. The interview questions focused on gathering their inspirations for their new church work including: what they hoped would be the outcome of their ministry, the initial steps they took in their new church work, what inspires them in their ministry, if their expectations of church have changed over time, if they have tried new approaches, and what ideas and resources have been helpful to them. In this respect, the interview process is for theory generation rather than theory

validation – seeking to find a theory, or in this case to generate the shape of the imaginary from the data.⁷⁹¹

Participants are anonymous in the research. Each participant has been assigned a letter designation.⁷⁹² It is hoped that in having anonymity, participants were open and honest with their response, so that the data reflects the reality amongst the sample. One risk inherent in the research process is not finding that the very specific aspect of theological imagination is a significant motivating factor for church planters. It may be a driving force for some, and not for others. Other motivational factors may be as, or more, influential in ministry such as personality qualities, contextual or situational aspects of their ministry setting or denominational constraints. While this is a risk, it would be a valid research result to find that the missional concepts were only partially, or not significantly, influential in church planter's ministry. Additionally, as the themes in the literature are known, it is a risk of this research to only find those themes in the interviews or lead the participants to these themes. To avoid this risk, the interview process had a significant focus on open-ended interview questions and flexibility which allowed new themes to emerge, and care was taken to frame interview questions so as not to lead to any specific themes.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

To answer the research question – the shape of the theological imaginary amongst church planters, and if or how the theology of the missional and emerging church is influencing church planting imaginary in the UK – it is necessary to identify the powerful influences in the theological imagination. Thematic analysis (TA) is a straightforward method whose strength includes finding themes, thus it suits the nature of the research question. TA was used as a method of data analysis to take the raw interview data, go through a coding process, and refine the data for themes present. It offers flexibility in terms of theoretical framework, thus can fit comfortably within theological research. The guiding philosophy for this research is critical realism, or naturalism.⁷⁹³ In terms of this research, it will be understood that participants both perceive an existing

⁷⁹¹ Punch. Page 16.

⁷⁹² In the data analysis following, to continue to preserve anonymity, individual participants are referenced in the gender neutral plural – they, their, etc.

⁷⁹³ It is understood there is a real world out there independent of our perceptions, while accepting that our view of the world is inevitably influenced by our own perspectives.

reality in their settings, and that participants will also interpret that reality. Critical realism or naturalism as a perspective pairs well with the semi-structured interviews of this research. For naturalism, ‘...the primary issue is to generate data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences; the main ways to achieve this are unstructured, open-ended interviews.’⁷⁹⁴ TA enables this research to move from interview data to themes to be analysed, to look for patterns in the theological themes used by church planters for their ministry, and the sources of those themes. TA prioritising the meanings, views, and perspectives on the participant’s theological imagination, then from that data, will seek to find and interpret the patterns that might emerge. One significant aspect of the research is to emphasize the participants’ perspectives as key in revealing their theological imaginary.

Braun and Clarke established the parameters of thematic analysis as a discreet qualitative method.⁷⁹⁵ They note that the use of TA can help the researcher to have a ‘window to the world’ and ‘map the experience’ of the participants.⁷⁹⁶ As noted above, both ethnographic research and practical theology emphasize contextual, specific, experientially based enquiries. Using TA for analysis can not only give a picture of the theological imagination of missionaries but can point to potential transformative action in the future for training.⁷⁹⁷ Other methods of research were considered. A single ethnographic study would produce excellent depth of data on the theological themes in one setting, but would not provide a view across a number of church planters to gather any sense of a pattern. Similarly, case studies would give more depth of data, but gathering enough case studies exploring the specific information on theological imagination to make any preliminary conclusions across a large enough sample is unrealistic in the timeframe of the thesis. Grounded theory also often works from interview material in a way similar to thematic analysis, and can also be used to look for themes. However, grounded theory is an approach which takes a much broader examination of a context and large data sets, which is beyond

⁷⁹⁴ David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data : Methods for Analysing Talk, Text, and Interaction* (London: Sage Publications, 1993). Page 173.

⁷⁹⁵ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006). *Successful Qualitative Research : A Practical Guide for Beginners*.

⁷⁹⁶ *Successful Qualitative Research : A Practical Guide for Beginners*. Page 13. See also Silverman. Page 178.

⁷⁹⁷ Braun and Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research : A Practical Guide for Beginners*. Page 24.

the limits of this research seeking the particular element of theological imagination from a limited but appropriate sample of church planters.

For this research, the process of TA followed the general outline put forward by Braun and Clarke for the analysis process. An overview of the process includes reading the interview material after transcription from a printed copy for familiarization, making initial hand written notes of items which might indicate a theological theme. The active, analytical reading in the familiarization stage required asking a variety of questions of the data. This process led to a first stage of coding.⁷⁹⁸ Codes are both data-driven and researcher-derived, looking for participant given language and concepts as well as more theoretical implicit meanings underpinning what has been said in the interview on theological imagination. Potential themes were evaluated in relation to the research questions around the theological imaginary, both against the five themes identified from the literature and for any additional theological theme in the data. Data were analysed for patterns, looking not only at frequency but meaningful elements around potential themes. From these potential themes the researcher looked for relationships between themes and organizing patterns, checked against the data for fit, and revised against the whole dataset in relation to the research question addressing theological imagination motivating church planters and the sources of those themes.⁷⁹⁹

Each interview has been coded for themes, both against the five themes from the literature in Chapter 3 and for other theological concepts and is thus both theoretically driven from the literature and researcher driven. The data analysis considers everything of interest to the research question around the theological imaginary. The process included coding the written transcripts, looking for all data relevant to a theological theme. As with separating out themes in the literature, it is recognized that theological themes do overlap and connect with each other as parts of a whole. Missioners comments are sometimes complex and layered, so assigning data to a theme at times is not clear-cut. Where there were questions about assigning data to a theme, the choice was to be generous in coding to a theme rather than not. If the content of the data fitted one of the five themes in the literature, it was coded for that theme. If the data fit into more than one theme, it was coded for both themes. Subsequently, the data

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 205.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid. Pages 223-226.

was placed into the sub-themes within each wider theme. If it was a theological theme which did not seem to fit those from the literature, it was given its own name fitting the theme as close to the language of the participant but also shaped by the experience of the researcher. Also collated were any supporting texts or other resources which the interviewees discussed as supporting their ideas and practice in mission. Multiple rounds of coding and refining the data resulted in the themes presented below from the interview participants. While the researcher has made decisions about the content of the data and the themes that they might represent, there has been an effort to prioritise the meanings, views, and perspectives of the participants “voice” in order to have a “window to the world” and “map the experience” of the participants.⁸⁰⁰ The chapter begins with examining the five themes from the literature as seen in the interviews. All themes and sub-themes in this chapter are listed from most present to least present in the interview data. Additional themes arising from the data are discussed within each theme and are noted at the end of the sub-theme listing.

A complete list of the themes and sub-themes are as follows:

The importance of being a community

- church as prioritizing being a caring community
- church as being rooted with and active in a location
- church as needing deep, authentic relationships
- church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside)
- church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel
- community is inclusive (additional sub-theme)

The need for contextualization in mission

- the need for contextualization for a specific locality
- the need for the church to be contextualized for a changing culture
- frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized
- the need for contextualization for mission in a post-Christendom context
- creativity in contextualization (additional sub-theme)

Participating in the *missio Dei*

- mission as being a witness in the world
- the essential nature of the church as sent
- mission as emerging from God’s activity and agency

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid. Pages 13, 174-175.

- mission as restoring all of creation

Seeking kingdom transformation in society

- church as having an activist faith which is serving society
- eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now
- transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide)

Being incarnational in mission

- the incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus
- the incarnation models mission
- the church embodies and represents God to others

4.3 The Importance of Being a Community

Missioners expressed community as a concept key in their theological imaginary, referencing it time and time again in the interview data. Phrases such as ‘the church is a family’⁸⁰¹ ‘our church centres around fellowship, relationships’⁸⁰² and ‘to share proper life together’⁸⁰³ echoed throughout the interviews. As will be shown, being a community includes for participants the sense of the priority for relationships within the fellowship of the church which require a time and emotional investment. This community is characterized by a quality of relationships which are caring, authentic, supportive and intimate, like a family. This overall theme is very broad in that it encompasses both internal relationships which make up community and relationships to the wider location where the church is based which make up the broader community. Both are important as community life is something that is both internal and external. Internally there is the priority and quality of relationships as described, but this sense of community also extends to the wider community in which the church is located. Investment in relationships with that wider community is also important through activities which bring a sense of belonging and serving as a church. This brings with it a sense of direction, of moving from the inside community to the outside community, united together in mission. Phrases which give a sense of this wider aspect of community and service include ‘to love and serve the

⁸⁰¹ Interview B

⁸⁰² Interview G

⁸⁰³ Interview J

community,⁸⁰⁴ 'commitment to place and relationships,'⁸⁰⁵ 'starting up a youth club on the estate,'⁸⁰⁶ and 'activities to make the church known and to make connections.'⁸⁰⁷

18 out of 18 interviews referenced being a community as a priority. Additionally, themes around being a community are the most frequently noted theme in the data, with 163 expressions. All 18 interviews mentioned the importance of being a community multiple times in different ways. Not all sub-themes from the literature came through the interviews with equal strength. The priority of being a caring community, and being rooted and active in a location were the most frequently mentioned sub-themes, while having deep, authentic relationships, being sent and being a contrast community had less frequent references. An additional theme is added about community being inclusive. A full breakdown and discussion of the sub-themes is below.

The importance of being a community

- church as prioritizing being a caring community
- church as being rooted with and active in a location
- church as needing deep, authentic relationships
- church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside)
- church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel
- community is inclusive (additional theme)

4.3.1 Church as Prioritizing Being a Caring Community

The most general sub-theme expressing the importance of being a community is church as prioritizing being a caring community. Whilst being a community might seem to be just part and parcel with involvement in a church, missionaries expressed the priority that they were a community, and a community with particular qualities. All 18 interviews expressed the priority of community life, being the most frequently mentioned sub-theme with 69 of the 163 mentions within the theme. Missioners expressed a desired, important outcome within their imaginary of a caring community. They recognized that community did not just happen, but that it required time, attention and effort. Participant C said of their

⁸⁰⁴ Interview B

⁸⁰⁵ Interview G

⁸⁰⁶ Interview H

⁸⁰⁷ Interview R

congregation, 'I said at the beginning – I want you to commit to two things a week: a Sunday morning service and commit to a life group.'

Community as intentional. Participants conveyed that the relationships within church life had significance. These relationships were intentionally developed with time and effort. When describing a once-a-month, less traditional service where the focus is on a meal and time spent in relationship building, participant E2 said, 'I really felt like I got to know "so and so" and I've never really chatted with them before. Because that's our DNA, it's part of who we are. It's creating community and building a love for one another, not just a racking-up on a Sunday.' This expression of a quality of life together coupled with intentionality is a part of the whole theme of the importance of being a community. It is not simply showing up to an event on a Sunday, but participation in relationships which is key. Time spent together might be over a meal, playing games or just hanging out, but they prioritized that time in the community life, both within the congregation and with those around them. Missioner O said they wanted to focus on their neighbours and build relationships with them.⁸⁰⁸ That commitment to community life was noted in an interview with G, who said they had a 'commitment to place and relationships' and by R who notes, 'Connect means we build-in community, we value community.'

Community as a quality of life together. For some, community is not simply being together, but having a quality of life together. It is not simply showing up for an event, but having quality relationships with one another. 'Our church centres around fellowship, relationships' says interviewee G. This is echoed by participant J, '...really based around relationship, hugely relational, hanging out together. A little bit like what we'd read in Acts 2:42, the whole thing of sharing life in fullness together.' For missioner F1, their community craft group, parent and baby group and community choir all expressed a caring, connected group where they shared life in its ups and downs.⁸⁰⁹ 'Caring' was chosen by the researcher for the broad, qualitative descriptor for community, but equally it could have been 'loving,' 'genuine,' or 'close.' Several participants mentioned being friends, as exemplified by participant A, who said, 'I suppose my vision is about, and I think it still is, about friendship.... Discipleship as friendship.'

⁸⁰⁸ Interview O

⁸⁰⁹ Interview F

The quality of a family. For some participants, the quality is expressed as the desire for the church to function as the biblical ideal of a family. Six participants particularly used the term ‘family’ to describe the type of community relationships they wanted in their church. ‘We didn’t really want to come and I suppose, build something that wasn’t centred on family really. A family in terms of wanting to be completely for one another, to calling one another up, and loving one another well, and challenging one another, and actually doing the stuff of the Kingdom.’ Family denotes close, committed connections. Interviewee C specifically noted that being just a group which meets is not enough: it is being a family together which is the goal.⁸¹⁰ The intensity of a family connection brought out the kind of community they wished to be. ‘Body, a family, flock – they’re all pretty biblical. ...I think it is the family in particular, the community turning up the volume on that,’ this was the comment from participant C on how they wanted their church to feel. ‘Come home, find family, love others, be the church’ is the vision for ministry for Participant B.⁸¹¹ A particularly poignant comment came from the interview with D1.

What’s really good at both places is people create family for themselves when they’ve got no family. So you take Nina with Isabel who’s got no family. It’s Nanny Pat who’s one of our volunteers. Pat is her nanny. Isabel said when she draws pictures of her family at school, it’s Nanny Pat there instead of the grandma.

Being a caring community is a priority for missional participants. The motivation for participants revealed a desire to be intentional to form communities which were close and caring.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as prioritizing being a caring community is in Table 2.

4.3.2 Church as Being Rooted with and Active in a Location

Being a community in a specific location is a key missional concept also evidenced by missionaries interviewed. It was the second most mentioned element of community, with 46 mentions amongst 16 interviews. This sub-theme covers the elements of connection with a location – knowing its history and culture, as well as being active in that location. Connection with a location can come both through a geographic sense of place or through a network of relationships which may or may not be rooted in a place.

⁸¹⁰ Interview C

⁸¹¹ Interview B

The importance of place. The church as being located in a specific place has a priority for some missionaries. The importance of place and geography comes through in comments like those by participant I saying, 'In terms of ministry, I needed something where I could see the physical boundaries of where I was ministering.'⁸¹² Participant I goes on to explain how the long term rootedness, commitment to the neighbourhood was vital as an example of the life of faith. On one housing estate, the interviewee noted that their work is very local, with virtually everyone involved coming from within a mile radius of the church.⁸¹³ The church as a community which belongs to a sense of place is a common theme. Various phrases such as 'to love and serve the community of Bath and beyond,'⁸¹⁴ 'if we weren't there, would Mansfield miss us? And that's the our biggest question to ourselves,'⁸¹⁵ and 'so just serving that community really, with events, fun,'⁸¹⁶ express the connection to a place. Missioners generally noted what type of communities they live in, in terms of size of population, socio-economic make up, deprivation indexes, schools, and history of the location.

Location and network. Participants noted both a sense of geographical connection as above and network relationship connection centring from a location. While participants spoke of their relational networks generally, only one participant spoke of it in terms of a geographical reality. Participant G said that initially in their new church work, they had marked out a half mile square around their home and place of work, did demographic research and built relationships there. However, as their church developed, they realized that the people they connected to within that geography were actually from a much wider area, thus they feel they are a network church, which also has a strong sense of place.⁸¹⁷

The church being with the local community. Being a church community does have a sense of internal cohesion, but that does not exclude the sense of connection to the place where the church community is located. The missionaries expressed that they wanted to identify with the wider community around them. This subtle difference of connecting *with* the wider community was noted by participants. This has the feeling of participation with neighbours, of belonging to the community where you live. 'So what would it look like if we would actually love

⁸¹² Interview I

⁸¹³ Interview L

⁸¹⁴ Interview B

⁸¹⁵ Interview E

⁸¹⁶ Interview R

⁸¹⁷ Interview G

our actual physical neighbours?’ asks interviewee E1. The connection with the wider community ties to both a geographical connection and being active in the community. The desire to know and be known in the wider community is a strong one. Participant F1 says, ‘...the agreement was for us to do something in this community here.... We just lived here for a while, didn’t we? Got to know the people, went in a lot of coffee shops, out and about, meeting and saying hello.’ The desire to be connected to the community takes various forms. Participant O notes, ‘I wanted to be really connected to the local community, to really be involved. We had a relationship with a coffee shop in the area.’ Another way to express solidarity with their community came from an interview with I. ‘It’s just being good neighbours, about receiving help as much as giving it.’

The church being active in their communities. Church planters worked to create connections and develop relationships in their communities through a variety of events large and small. Being active in a location is common amongst participants. Some started youth clubs, others gathered community service providers, while some ran community choirs, dementia clubs, lunchtime clubs, craft groups, community drop –in cafes and more. Participant J intentionally looked to be active as a church community in the local community through getting involved in existing groups with local resident’s. They remarked they wanted to ‘look at what was going on in the community, how can we help improve some of the areas?’⁸¹⁸ Missioners want to be active in their communities to build relationships with people and to serve. ‘The activities are to make the church known, and to make connections, so that we have built ongoing relationships really’ notes interviewee R. Missioner F1 noted, ‘We did as much as we could to be part of this community, to enable the community to flourish, to contribute to the world, being in people’s lives in this area.’ Being visible and active in a local community is another subtle aspect of both geographical connection and community in mission. This aspect of community has some overlap with the theme of kingdom transformation.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as being rooted with and active in a location is in Table 3.

⁸¹⁸ Interview J

4.3.3 Church as Needing Deep, Authentic Relationships

The desire for deep, authentic relationships within the church is a significant driving force for some of the missionaries. Seven participants explicitly hoped for a community characterized by deep, authentic relationships, which was noted 20 times. Interviewee J explained that a part of the process of development in their new church plant was God's work 'trying to create a much more vulnerable group of people that were willing to be open to each other, to share proper life together. Because that was the heart of it: to be quite raw and real with each other, to the point where we would be willing to give up anything to do whatever God asked.'⁸¹⁹ Although there are similarities with the more general idea of a caring community, the need for deep, authentic relationships is a very specific aspiration. The quality of relationship goes beyond caring into a deep, vulnerable, authentic relationship. It is also one which can be strongly expressed in emotional terms. The expression of deep relationships brought out stories of healing and hope from participants. In speaking about a community craft group they run, interviewee F1 said of the people in the group, 'They love each other to bits. They all come in, there's loads of hugs, there's lots of tears. They've all got issues of some sort going on. It's life.'

Authenticity contrasted with traditional church experience. The contrast to the experience in a traditional church was seen in comments by participant A. They describe how there was a 'massive disconnect' between their struggles in life, the hurting world, and the activities within the church of singing, praying and believing. They comment '...what would church be like where we actually were real? And we got down and dirty in the mess of life rather than pretend everything's fine and that God is great and we can just sing these songs every week and then just go back to normality.'⁸²⁰ Participant A goes on to note, 'My vision.... Not going to a meeting in a building, we're going to meet in people's homes. We're going to be genuinely community, so we're not going to do this whole kind of 'how are you?' 'I'm alright.' That actually we're going to be involved in our lives, we're going to share the deep stuff and we are going to do mission.' The desire for deep, authentic relationships is a part of the theological imaginary amongst participants.

⁸¹⁹ Interview J

⁸²⁰ Interview A

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as needing deep, authentic relationships is in Table 4.

4.3.4 Church as a Community Sent Together on Mission (Inside to Outside)

For some interviewees, the deep relationships with each other go hand-in-hand with mission in reaching out to others. The sub-theme of the church as a community sent together on mission, or an inward-to-outward community connection was expressed by eight participants, noted 13 times. This characteristic of community is one where the community relationships both support mission and give a sense of going together on mission. Thus, the shorthand description for this is “inside to outside” as there is a directional feel. Participant P acknowledged this saying, ‘the first phase will be that we encourage people to – is to establish a core team, and encourage people to enjoy the ride, enjoy the relationships, build a community that’s open to others. Then from there, begin to reach out to friends.’ In addressing what interviewee J wanted the church work to look like, the two aspects of inward connection which then turned outward came to the fore. Interviewee J said ‘...to just build authentic, vulnerable, real, raw relationships, that is about reaching out then too, that loves and cares for one another. But its mission is to reach out, not get entrenched looking within.’⁸²¹

Participants A, N, and O both expressed that they wanted a community that both came together and then shared their faith. Interviewee O noted that it was important for a missional community to support each other, be in relationship within the community, and support each other to get to know their colleagues and neighbours.⁸²² In an interview with participant C, they said the church vision wanted to ‘produce a community of people where “mission” is not something we say we do - it’s something that we actually live where we are.’ This type of being a community also illustrates the overlap with the theme of *missio Dei*, where the church is sent outwards in mission.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside) is in Table 5.

⁸²¹ Interview J

⁸²² Interview O

4.3.5 Church as a Contrast Community Which Demonstrates the Gospel

A church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel is a sub-theme which was the smallest in the theme, with nine participants mentioning it 13 times. This is a subtle theme which differs from the other sub-themes in the nuance of an understanding the community life, expressing a particular aspect of the purpose of the church community as an alternative to other ways of living. Within this sub-theme is the idea that the community is one which is an example or a demonstration of what the Christian faith life is about to those around it. In the literature this is discussed as a contrast or alternative community. Although participants did not use this term, it was noted in effect by some. Participant C talked about having a lived-out community, saying they wanted, 'a community of people where mission is not something we say we do – it's something that we actually live where we are.' In discussing the difference between outreach which just is an event or something that is more a lived expression of faith, interviewee M says, '...we need people to go and live in those communities and not to build a bridge but to inhabit where people are.' For participant M, this is around living life in such a way that it provokes questions about life from those their fellowship encounters. M hoped to encourage questions like, 'How do you want to live? Maybe you don't have to live as you are, maybe there is another way of living is possible. Do you want to join us in finding out what that is?' A similar question comes to missionary F, who described that within their church tradition, '...our legacy, our DNA is about going to people who've got nothing to do with church, nothing to do with God, whose lives are chaotic and going the wrong way, and being able to get close enough just to say there's another way to live.' Here the church community is showing ways of living which demonstrate something of God's ways in the world. The aspect of being a visible representation of a different way of living is an aspect of this sub-theme.

The idea of a contrast community comes through for participant K. They articulated aspects of being a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel in comments including, 'We're just really showing them what it is to walk as a Christian, to be a Christian. In 2016, what it looks like being as an example and we're not pushing people to hard.' Showing the way to a different kind of life, a life available through the Christian faith, is a part of how one missionary imagines their purpose. This vision is described by participant P, whose church used a particular Bible passage and image. 'We want to be a door of hope. We had a

verse from Hosea, "I'll give the people in the valley of despair and I'll make them into a door of hope." So that has really informed our mission.⁸²³ They went on to describe that they wanted how they lived as a church community to show others a different way of living was possible. Missioner B presented their vision for their church through thinking about the kingdom, being the presence of Jesus, and 'seeing our community transformed by demonstrating the compassion of God, to living lives, seeing the power of God at work, almost the tools of the kingdom being active in the church.'

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as being a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel is in Table 6.

4.3.6 Additional Sub-theme: Community is Inclusive

One additional sub-theme came through in the comments on community, which did not fit neatly into other sub-themes but was distinct and worth noting. I have called this sub-theme community is inclusive. Eight missionaries had 20 comments around a community that is inclusive. This inclusivity encompassed two aspects: wide participation and general inclusivity. Several participants mentioned inclusivity multiple times.

Inclusivity through wide participation. The first aspect of inclusivity is a community where there is inclusion through wide participation. Here is a community where everyone is welcome and gets to participate in various ways. In an interview with Q, they said they wanted to have a culture where everyone gets to 'have a go.' From being involved in a team which starts new ventures, to leading worship and preaching, Q wants there to be wide participation. They went on to say that through the format of having many small congregations, many people got to participate in roles like preaching, worship leading, meeting leading and so on.⁸²⁴ Participant D2 says, 'It's all about inclusive - you don't have to be anything to preach at church... Salvation Army would say that we believe in the priesthood of all believers... I am happy to facilitate that being lived out to the nth degree.' A similar feeling was voiced by K, who said they wanted to have all ages involved with no one elevated. 'We meet, we chat, we preach the word of God, and we stay away from uplifting anybody on a stage. We kind of see all the people

⁸²³ Interview P

⁸²⁴ Interview Q

as equal, and that was a real big decision for us.⁸²⁵ A similar sentiment was noted by participant M, around having activities where all ages can get involved.⁸²⁶

Community is inclusive. The second, similar element is a community which is generally inclusive. For several participants, this openness to all who come was a strongly felt value. Participant F1 noted that a key value for their community was that everyone was welcome and included – the elderly, isolated, homeless, drug addicted. In the interview with F1, they said, ‘I dislike anything that says to somebody that you can’t be a part of this. I don’t like it.... I don’t like it when it becomes a them and us.... It’s just the whole part and parcel of the idea of inclusivity really, is much more on my radar than it ever would have been.’ The perceived division of who was “in and out” was another aspect of an inclusive community which was key for missionary F2.⁸²⁷ Participant D1 noted something similar: ‘If you’re homeless and you come in for lunch, we’ll give it to you free, but you’ll sit next to a toddler mum who can afford to pay. You won’t be treated differently or separate.’ D2 went on to say later, ‘It’s really nice to be able to say to anybody – it’s all about inclusive. You don’t have to be anything to preach at church.’ Mutuality and equality was key for participant K. They comment, ‘We meet, we chat, we preach the word of God, and we stay away from uplifting anybody on a stage. We kind of see all the people as equal, and that was a real big decision for us. I think that we wanted to be more about a community and friendship and relationships rather than entertainment or performance.’ Inclusivity and wide participation are very similar and were expressed together by some participants. The idea that all are welcome, all are equal, all can participate and be included formed one aspect of the theological imaginary around the concept of community for several interviewed.

A selection of quotations from the additional sub-theme community is inclusive is in Table 8.

4.3.7 Summary of the Importance of Being a Community

As the most mentioned theological theme, being a community formed a foundation of the theological imaginary for the missionaries interviewed. They expressed the importance of creating a deeply connected, relational group as a

⁸²⁵ Interview K

⁸²⁶ Interview M

⁸²⁷ Interview F

part of the vision for their new works. Community life is a focus of intentional time and energy, a priority for those involved. Authentic relationships become like those of a family, and provide the launching point for mission together. Some expressed these relationships within the context of a geography, and others within the context of a network, but all were primarily focused on the quality of relationships. Being a community also is expressed in relation to the local, wider community, where engagement and expression of the faith life are lived out. The goal was to be outwardly focused, not insular. They wanted a church which is deeply connected within their local community, serving where they had the opportunity. Community as both a reflection of God's character and a representation of the good news to a watching world was present but less expressed amongst missionaries. Participation and inclusivity play a part for some as defining qualities of community. Here missionaries wanted to have many people, of all ages and types, taking part in community life. Missionaries wanted their communities to be welcoming and open to all who would come. Both the internal and external aspects of being a community came through the imaginaries of the participants as an underpinning concept for mission.

4.4 The Need for Contextualization in Mission

Contextualizing mission has long been a study of ministry, particularly cross-cultural ministry. What is a new topic for discussion is contextualizing mission for Western culture and within Western culture. For the church planters interviewed, all 18 interviews recognized this area, for a total of 154 comments. For some participants it was a significant area of concern. Missionaries expressed their concern for contextualization in a variety of ways: 'But was that sense of -- we were really aware of contextualization.'⁸²⁸ 'Yes, so Epsom is a town of 92,000 people, according to the last census. It is a predominantly white, middle to lower families, socially pretty monolithic, but increasing diversity...'⁸²⁹ 'People are different. One size does not fit all.'⁸³⁰ 'There's a real need, trying to really meet practical needs where people are at.'⁸³¹

⁸²⁸ Interview B

⁸²⁹ Interview C

⁸³⁰ Interview G

⁸³¹ Interview J

Contextualization covers a significant breadth of sub-topics. Demographic research, analysis of both the surrounding locality and wider community make up part of thinking around contextualization. Missioners are concerned about knowing the shape and needs of their communities so they can fit their ministries to those needs. Included in this theme are how ecclesial structures and forms meet the cultural shape that is perceived. Consideration is given to both internal factors within the church community and external factors in the location and wider culture. How these internal and external factors interact, the consideration and priority given to them is a large part of contextualization. A different external consideration is the change in the place of the church in culture, or contextualizing to a post-Christendom reality. Contextualization can be a contentious issue within the existing church, and for some, this is a frustration. Within the wider theme, there are four sub-themes, two of which were primary with the participants. First, there is the need for contextualization for the locality. This is the specific location and people with whom the missionary is working. Secondly, there is the need for contextualization for the wider changing culture, particularly named as postmodernity for some. These two sub-themes account for 122 of 154 mentions. Frustration with the existing church not being contextualized and a recognition of the need to contextualize for post-Christendom make up the other two sub-themes with nine mentions. An additional sub-theme is added around creativity in contextualization. Thus the theme and sub-themes are:

The need for contextualization in mission

- the need for contextualization for a specific locality
- the need for the church to be contextualized for a changing culture
- frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized
- the need for contextualization for mission in a post-Christendom context
- creativity in contextualization (additional sub-theme)

4.4.1 The Need for Contextualization for a Specific Locality

Thinking of the shape, needs, demographic, and appropriateness of ecclesial life for a specific location and people is the most mentioned sub-theme, with 78 references in all 18 interviews. With one exception, this was mentioned multiple times by participants. There is a genuine desire expressed amongst the church planters to make a relevant, authentic connection with the people and place where they minister. 'The mission statement is to engage local people who

won't set foot in a church building to be church in a way that's relevant and authentic to them.' says participant G. This is echoed by others, including J who says, 'We wanted it to be culturally relevant, to be able to connect with people where they were.'

Knowing a place. Contextualization for a specific locality includes getting to know that place. There is intentional effort in seeking to understand the history, specific culture, demographic make-up, and general feel for a location. Many missionaries put in time to know their location specifically. For many participants, connecting with culture included doing demographic research. Participants told of the population figures, the breakdown by social deprivation indices, the type of housing, or less formal data such as the type of people they met in their neighbourhoods, what their area was well known for, and the kind of activities which were popular. Missioner L said they had done a lot of research of the area. L says of the estate where they work, 'Multiple deprivation indices, has us down as the 201st most deprived estate in the UK, of 34,000 wards, I think it is. I think 52% of children live in poverty, and 50% of people don't work.' Knowing a place is important for mission connection to that place. Participant Q participates in a church which has multiple sites in Manchester. They note, 'Different suburbs of Manchester are very different - so we have one site which is in a very poor part of the city, another site which is in a very student-y part of the city. It's very transient. And a couple of sites in quite middle-class areas of the city.' They went on to describe that each area had quite different needs and a different feel.

Another missionary, participant R, is not in a city, but in a rural area. They said that within their outreach, going into small towns would require different approaches than if they were in a city. Instead of Sunday large group meetings, it would be made of small groups, possibly mid-week home groups fit for a village setting.⁸³² Knowing the place where the mission is located was key. 'We get to know a city, we get to know a people, we get to know a history. We get to see what God is already doing there and we get to join with that and we get to be part of that' stated B in their interview. Many other participants noted that knowing their named community was important to them. For participant B, knowing a place then also overlaps with joining in the *missio Dei*, seeing what God is doing. Being a witness in a place centred around a geographic location was important for

⁸³² Interview R

numerous participants, including participant D1 who said, 'The vision was literally: people need to access church, God, around the corner from where they live.' These skills and observations for contextualization also overlapped with some participants with the theme of *missio Dei*, watching for where God was working in the culture. 'It was part of those things, it was just contextualization to a city, a new location. Wow, what is God doing there? What are we joining?'⁸³³

Knowing a people. While having a sense of place is important, another element of contextualizing for a location is knowing a people. Here the focus is on the individual, or the community of people in a more specific sense. In an interview with P, they said, 'I think what we've done is more looked at the kind of people, get to know a community, look at the kind of community, what would they do?' Knowing the people included trying to understand the needs of those people in their locality. Participant D1 says, 'There was a difference between inner city and working in a city in the Midlands. The two are completely different because the level of deprivation and the level of need. Also the level of resources available.' Understanding the needs of the local residents is a big part of connecting with the local context. Participant I notes there was no community space, participant M noted that their community was quite financially well off, and participant J noted the need for a foodbank.⁸³⁴ Knowing a location includes seeking to understand the people who live there.

Partnering locally. Understanding the needs of people around them led participants G, J, L, F, D, and P to specifically partner with or start activities which met needs of people in their location, including youth and children's work, foodbanks, groups for those with life controlling needs, dementia support groups, care for the elderly, and more.⁸³⁵ Partnering locally is where knowing a location also overlaps with other themes, including being an active community which serves and wanting to see kingdom transformation. 'I think what we've done is more looked at the kind of people, get to know a community, look at the kind of community, what would they do? So we've helped another couple of churches start ministry with the poor, and get involved with food, and then a meeting, which is obviously a different style,' said missionary P. Local partnerships enabled missionaries to further contextualize for their location and meet local needs.

⁸³³ Interview B

⁸³⁴ Interviews I, M and J

⁸³⁵ Interviews G, J, L, F, D and P

Contextualizing forms of church. Knowing a location results in discussion on contextualized forms of church for that location for a few participants. This is very similar to the sub-theme below around contextualizing for culture but applied quite locally rather than in a wider understanding of contemporary culture. The connection between the specific place, people, and church comes through for G, who says, 'It comes back to this question of enabling local people to be church in a way that is relevant and authentic to them.' For G, this included having church activities on the premises where they worked, because of the strong resistance to splitting off to other locations being viewed as extracting them from that core community.⁸³⁶ This might be as simple as looking at existing church materials and contextualizing them, as missionary I noted.⁸³⁷ Participant L lives and works in a working-class estate. They feel strongly that their church must be shaped around the habits, language, and other cultural expressions of the estate. They wanted to have church which has a working class feel and working class etiquette. L notes that they use colloquial language, secular music, a very loud sound system and lighting, and don't have a dress code at all. They go on to say, 'We use films for reference, we use songs for reference, that sort of stuff. It's really easy for people to understand.' Participant B in a different setting asks the same type of question, 'What would it look like for a bunch of followers of Jesus from that community, in that background, to gather together, to worship, to allow the Bible to inform them and shape them and apply it to their lives?' Contextualization is a critical question in the theological imaginary, felt deeply by some participants. In an interview with A, they expressed a deep desire for the church to come to birth within the culture of those involved.

What we need is we need fresh expressions of church in the culture that we're doing mission. So what does it mean to be a follower of Christ as a steampunk and what does church look like for steampunks? So I don't want you to come out of that world and then come into [A's church].... I want you to be a follower and disciple in that culture and I want you to create church in that culture.⁸³⁸

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme in the need for contextualization for a specific locality is in Table 9.

⁸³⁶ Interview G

⁸³⁷ Interview I

⁸³⁸ Interview A

4.4.2 The Need for the Church to be Contextualized for a Changing Culture

Culture is different now and the church in mission needs to contextualize for the culture. This is the sentiment expressed by missionaries of the need for the church to contextualize for a changing culture. Eleven participants mentioned this aspect of contextualizing for cultural change in 44 instances. The ever-changing culture requires the church in mission to adapt and change, to consider well how people think, believe and act in contemporary culture. There is a recognition that there have been changes in Western culture, in British culture, and these changes require new models for the church in mission. In an interview with participant B, they said, 'I'm going to have to as a leader, be willing to sit there to enable us to reach the communities that are yet unreached in our city, and some of that is contextualized to our time in history, and I haven't got a model of that...' Contextualization for here and now comes through with missionary G, who says in modelling their mission on Jesus, 'He pitched his tent among us, and he became a particular man, in a particular context, in a particular culture, in a particular place, in a particular country, at a particular time.'

Contextualizing for postmodernity. Some named the cultural change post-modernity and others did not, but participants recognized that the wider culture has changed and mission must reflect and act on this change. In speaking of cultural change, participant H noted, 'Obviously we are moving more to postmodernism.' Further to this comment on cultural change, they continued, 'Let's not get panicky about this. Let's find how we can contextualize the gospel into this culture so it makes that connection where people can understand and begin to be drawn to God.' While others did not name postmodernity, they did reflect on the changes needed for 'contextualizing to our time in history' and for changes in the wider culture.⁸³⁹ Participant F2 reflected on those changes in culture, and their new perspectives on church. They said, 'I could see what was needed: a church which is flexible and not rigid, a church which is open and not closed, a church which adapts and looks outside, a church which embraces mystery rather than imposing truth.'

Making faith understandable and relevant. Making faith understandable and relevant, especially within a culture which is changing, is a priority for some of those interviewed and an integral part of their theological imaginary. 'I want to

⁸³⁹ Interview B

be as accessible to non-Christians that you can be.⁸⁴⁰ As those above modified their ecclesial forms for the location, so others think about how to make faith understandable in more general cultural terms. Interviewee Q said they hope that their congregation realize that their activities are for non-Christian friends to come and be comfortable. They also discussed communication as a part of that. 'I think realizing that if you want young people in church, the kind of millennial age range, you need to talk to them much more differently than you do people over 40. Gen X people, you need... it's just a different conversation.'⁸⁴¹ The drive to make the church and the message relevant and understandable engages missionaries to try different things. Participant N discussed how different people in the church were asking questions, seeking 'just different ways of engaging with the ways in which culture has moved on. What might that look like?' For N, connecting with culture encouraged some seniors to do a tea tent at a music festival, some lads to coach football and some to pray at a Mind, Body, Spirit festival.

It also led to communicating in styles church planters felt would be relevant. This led participant J to modify their services -- 'We tried to make like very accessible to people, we do like snappy videos, really short sermons, and all this kind of stuff.' Equally, participant M noted that while they wanted those who came into their services to connect, they could see there was a significant mismatch between what they were doing and the relevance to those who started to come. 'They didn't know what was going on, and then we started to have questions: why are we expecting them to be like us?' This led M and their team to begin a new outreach with a very different style, all premised on the fact that it was their responsibility to go and change to meet the cultural needs. 'We won't expect them to come to us. We're going to them, we'll change our ways.' noted M, also echoing the *missio Dei* thread of going to the other. Contextualizing for a changing culture and seeking to be relevant brought out both creativity and flexibility in missionaries. This is discussed in detail below under additional sub-themes. It is illustrated by a participant D1, saying, 'We attempt to be relevant and that means we have no set formula. So it's whatever is needed and whatever will engage.'

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme in the need for the church to be contextualized for changing culture is in Table 10.

⁸⁴⁰ Interview G

⁸⁴¹ Interview Q

4.4.3 Frustration with the Existing Church for Not Being Contextualized

A smaller sub-theme in contextualization is around frustration with the existing church not being contextualized. This sub-theme was expressed only by six participants, each with one mention. Participant N discussed how they found in conversations with others that people were not rejecting faith for intellectual reasons or for spiritual reasons. 'They were rejecting church because it became irrelevant. I came to this wonderful revelation and I was like, if people can intellectually justify not being involved, if they can spiritually justify not being involved, but to just not see it as relevant – that's not good enough. Whose job is it to change that?' They then went on to describe their journey to exploring other ways of being, other ways of what church could be like.⁸⁴²

Other participants described a desire for church to be 'not like it was before,' indicating they wanted it to be less religious, more contemporary.⁸⁴³ For one pioneer missionary, the frustration with contextualization came from constraints expressed by the existing church. Participant A articulated the need for fresh expressions of church to go beyond superficial changes to some 'reframing of theology for the fact that we live in changed times.' They went on to say that one of the dangers of pioneering is only going part way. In response to that, A said, 'I don't think that you can do that, I think if you're serious about wanting a new thing, you've got to rethink everything. And at the moment, the church is saying like, "you're a pioneer, you can fit into the way that we do it." It's like, no, that's not going to work.'⁸⁴⁴

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme in frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized is in Table 11.

4.4.4 The Need for Contextualization for a Post-Christendom Context

The smallest sub-theme was that of contextualization specifically noting the post-Christendom context. Three participants spoke of it in three instances. This sub-theme is around contextualization, but speaks of the change in the church's position in culture rather than wider cultural change itself. Where in a Christendom context in Western culture, the church was a central, powerful institution, in a post-Christendom setting, the church has shifted to the margins

⁸⁴² Interview N

⁸⁴³ Interview P

⁸⁴⁴ Interview A

of culture. Only one, participant G, specifically mentioned the term “Christendom” saying, ‘Christendom is an anarchism.[sic] It’s getting smaller and smaller and smaller.’ Participant G went on to describe how both the inherited church and fresh expressions of church are needed, but that their focus was on reaching those who would not want to go to inherited church. Two others spoke of the change in the context of the church in the UK. In an interview with H, they noted that the UK is now a missionary context.⁸⁴⁵ Interviewee Q discussed the need for really examining how one shapes the church both in terms of content and gathering. They noted that fewer people attend church and attend with less consistency, ‘...the fact that less and less people go to church now in Britain, the fact that church is culturally, is beginning to take a different place in British culture.’

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme in the need for contextualization for a post-Christendom context is in Table 12.

4.4.5 Additional Sub-theme: Creativity in Contextualization

Creativity in contextualization came up as specifically mentioned by missionaries 23 times in 11 interviews. It came through strongly enough that it is appropriate to add it as an additional sub-theme within contextualization. In addition to the specific 23 mentions of this in words, there are many other examples of creativity in mission seen in the activities of missionaries interviewed. For some this was expressed as being imaginative: ‘I think we need to be more imaginative even, on the front end.’ And others wanted to ‘...try new things with openness.’⁸⁴⁶ Missioner B noted, ‘I guess I feel over time as a church planter, my job is to reimagine church for the next generation.’ Creativity is expressed as a value for missionaries as a way of expressing their life together, expressing the gospel and connecting to their communities. Missioners spent energy and time to be intentionally creative in their new church works, trying new ways of outreach. Creativity in pioneering new things is seen by some church planters as integral to their role. The purpose for creativity is to connect with people and communities, to make church and the gospel accessible, appealing and understandable. Thus, creativity and trying new things is a way of seeking to contextualize both the church community life and the message for the setting,

⁸⁴⁵ Interview H

⁸⁴⁶ Interview K

time and place. In one sense, all contextualization is creative – it seeks to read the culture and adapt the message. But for some missionaries, creativity was an expressed, clear priority.

Creativity in activities. Many missionaries interviewed expressed great creativity in their ministry activities to connect with people, to connect with God and to serve the community. Some set up prayer booths at spiritualist fairs, did dream interpretations, art exhibits, nature identification walks, barefoot walking in the park, *lectio divina*, pyjama parties, bird song walks, film nights, set up restaurants, cafes, and more.⁸⁴⁷ Some activities came out of recognition of very specific local opportunities like spiritualist fairs in their towns or being on the edge of countryside. Other creative activities are simply the invention of the missionaries involved. Interviewee C spoke of wanting to be creative with their premises, holding a variety of events.⁸⁴⁸ When asked to speak to what they wanted their church community to look like, participant M said, ‘A community of all ages, and a focus on this kind of creative, environmental work, so there are always environmental things, but a strong focus, also an emphasis as well on the arts and creativity and also learning about our environment.’

Thinking outside the box of traditional church activities can be seen frequently amongst missionaries. Q discussed how they wanted to encourage experimentation. ‘One of the cultures we talk about is a “have-a-go” culture. We’re keen for people who feel like they can try things and have a go at things. ... We’re saying, “We’re going to have a go. We’re going to see how this works. If it fails, that’s okay, we’ll just have another go.”’⁸⁴⁹ Creativity and trying new things are important parts of the imaginary for some missionaries. Participant D1 spoke at length about being creative. They described the creative activities they had engaged in, saying, ‘We try to be incredibly creative.’ For participants D1 and D2, being creative was about engagement and being relevant to the context. D2 discussed how people’s expectations were that church would be formal. ‘But I think the people coming are definitely experiencing the church in a new way for them.... I suppose because people’s perception of church is that it’s going to be formal, and it’s not really going to connect and be boring.’⁸⁵⁰ D2 goes on to say, ‘Yes, to be creative means we’re relevant, because we are engaging with the

⁸⁴⁷ For examples in Interviews C, N, D, A, M Q

⁸⁴⁸ Interview C

⁸⁴⁹ Interview Q

⁸⁵⁰ Interview D

culture that's happening around us all the time, and just bringing Jesus into that....⁸⁵¹

Pioneering new things. A few participants spoke specifically of pioneering and trying new things.⁸⁵² Pioneering mission often was spoken of in terms of a sense of calling. Interviewee J noted, 'As soon as we moved into Teignmouth, again I just knew that God wanted to start something new.' Missioner B said they initially didn't know where they fit in ministry and had not considered church planting. After exploring different things, B said, 'I was very good at vision. I was very good at concepts or new things. I hadn't really triggered that was pioneering.' Many missioners spoke about their sense of call to church plant or to engagement in their current church planting context. This sense of calling was a central part of how they came to be where they were and evidenced itself as inherent to those who strike out to do a new church work. As all interviewees were involved church plants, it is logical that they expressed both a sense of calling and wanting to in the general sense - pioneer new activities.

One interviewee spoke at length about the cost of pioneering, of going down untried roads within the church and pushing the boundaries. For missioner A, trying new things also comes with challenging the status quo and with dissent, which A understands to be necessary but painful for the life of an organization. Missioner A discussed how the role of pioneering new things in the church had been an experience of both affirmation and rejection. Others in the church wanted new things, but also wanted things to stay the same. Dissent – challenging the status quo – came with a cost.

'So therefore, the organization needs dissent, but it hates dissent. So it's this, and I think that's what pioneers -- that's the role of pioneers in the church. It's like "we want pioneers" and so all the time I'm asked to do things, and it's like, "Oh yes, come and do this. Oh yeah, we think what you're doing is fantastic." Then I say things and they say, "oh, we really didn't like what you did." It's like, well you wanted it, but not you don't want it like that. Yes, it's like, "Can you be edgy, but stop here?"'⁸⁵³

Being flexible. Flexibility and creativity were watch words for others in contextualizing for culture. 'We have to be a chameleon, change it readily if it is not working' says participant G. They went on to say that they been very flexible in their format, their approach, even their view of where they were going. They

⁸⁵¹ Interview D

⁸⁵² Interviews B, A, D, K, R

⁸⁵³ Interview A

note, 'Who we are today is quite radically different to who we were when we started out. We do change from season to season. We change from maybe half-year to half-year, maybe from year to year.' Interviewee D2 spoke at length about their desire to be creative for the purposes of adapting to changing contexts, and how they tried many different things to connect. 'Yes, to be creative means we're relevant, because we are engaging with the culture that's happening around us all the time, and just bringing Jesus into that.'⁸⁵⁴ D1 noted that one mission effort was a coffee shop, but they didn't know what it would look like in five years' time as they did not want to see things as static, but adaptive so as to remain relevant. Participant N also noted that the context changed every year, so they needed skills to observe and discern change.⁸⁵⁵ Creativity and flexibility went hand in hand for some missionaries.

Pioneering, experimentation, having-a-go, being creative were all expressions which resonated and were explicitly expressed in the imaginary of more than half of the missionaries interviewed. These values were applied to contextualize their ministries.

A selection of quotations from the additional sub-theme creativity in contextualization is in Table 13.

4.4.6 Summary of the Need for Contextualization

Church planters are concerned that their message is heard and received in a way that is culturally relevant. The need to contextualize is an important part of the theological imaginary of participants. They prioritize their understanding of their location and the broader culture in their words, actions, and ecclesial forms. Contextualization was discussed more frequently and by more participants in terms of outreach activities and service than of re-imagining church forms. Missioners expended significant effort in understanding their locations, the local needs and context so as to shape their ministry efforts appropriately. Over half of the participants spoke in some way to the wider change in culture. Some spoke in terms of postmodernity, but others engaged more generally with changes to culture or specifics of the change in the wider cultural context. On the whole, participants did not express a great deal of frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized, with only a few exceptions. Few participants spoke of

⁸⁵⁴ Interview D

⁸⁵⁵ Interview N

either Christendom or the change in the position of the church in culture. Within contextualization, the expression of creativity was a significant focus, creating an additional sub-theme. Both creativity expressed in action, and creativity expressed as a value came through for more than half of the missionaries. Creativity included pioneering new things, and being flexible in adapting ministry.

4.5 Participation in the *Missio Dei*

The theme of *missio Dei* communicates the church sent to join God in God's mission to restore all creation and bring every person into relationship with him. It is a foundational theme, in one sense the underpinning of all other themes. An understanding of *missio Dei* embraces that there would be no mission within the church without God's mission purposes in the world. While *missio Dei* is the term used to describe the whole of this theme in literature, only one participant actually used the term when speaking of aspects of their mission training which had been helpful.⁸⁵⁶ However, 18 out of 18 interviews spoke of the themes within *missio Dei*, in the third most referenced category with 123 instances. *Missio Dei* had slightly fewer mentions than community and contextualization but remained an important expression of theological imaginary. The mission as being a witness in the world is the most frequently mentioned sub-theme. In one respect, it seems to function as a generalized expression of *missio Dei*, but it is also one which has a bit narrower focus than the whole of what *missio Dei* expresses. One aspect of *missio Dei* is a holistic redemption and God's broader activity in the world, so a focus on individual salvation could be considered reductionistic. More on this will be discussed below and in Chapter 5. Another sub-theme is the essential nature of the church as sent – where going out in mission is not a programme or add on, but is seen as fundamental to the very nature of the church. The nuanced sub-theme is mission as emerging from God's activity and agency – where mission is God's activity first, which the church joins, thus moving agency from the church to God.

Participants expressed *missio Dei* in a variety of ways. Some think of being on mission outwards with their communities. Missioner Q notes, 'The vision is, ultimately, we want to start a church. Most churches want to do the same thing. They want to see people's lives change. They want to see the city they're in

⁸⁵⁶ Interview F

change in some way or another. 'We're not here for ourselves, we're here to spread the gospel.'⁸⁵⁷ Some see *missio Dei* in terms of God's activity: '...they encounter people, God sends people their way'⁸⁵⁸ and '...there's some dynamic work of God that goes on beyond what we conceived of.'⁸⁵⁹ For many participants, the simple goal of reaching those unreached – those who do not know Jesus – is a motivation. Phrases like 'to enable us to reach the communities that are yet unreached in our city,'⁸⁶⁰ 'The vision is to reach out to the unchurched'⁸⁶¹ and 'see people come to faith'⁸⁶² are heard throughout the interviews. The sub-themes within participating in the *missio Dei* are:

Participating in the *missio Dei*

- mission as being a witness in the world
- the essential nature of the church as sent
- mission as emerging from God's activity and agency
- mission as restoring all of creation

4.5.1 Mission as Being a Witness in the World

Reaching the unreached. Approximately half of the incidents of *missio Dei* are from the sub-theme of being a witness in the world with 17 interviews referencing this 62 times. For many participants, the phrase "reaching the unreached" acted as a short-hand for bringing people either into a faith relationship with God or bring them into contact with the witness of the church. This sense of being sent on mission to bring people into relationships with God is expressed as one of the core purposes for missionaries and thus a key motivation in their theological imaginary. There is a directional sense as well of an outward orientation. 'I sensed God saying to me, reach out to the unchurched' said participant G, while H said, 'We've got to see people come to Christ. It's just surely what it's about.' Interviewee B used the term 'reach the communities that are yet unreached' while others express it in slightly different ways. Nine missionaries used the term 'reach out' or 'reach,' some multiple times.⁸⁶³ Other

⁸⁵⁷ Interview R

⁸⁵⁸ Interview M

⁸⁵⁹ Interview A

⁸⁶⁰ Interview B

⁸⁶¹ Interview G

⁸⁶² Interview E

⁸⁶³ Interviews J, L, D, P, R, Q, B, G and H

missioners used similar phrases like 'seek the lost' or 'reach out to lost people'⁸⁶⁴ expressing that aspect of *missio Dei* of God's activity of bringing people into a reconciled relationship with himself. The aspect of being sent out then is coupled with the bringing in.

For some missionaries, reaching the unreached for God is at the heart of their purpose, articulating an aspect of the theological imaginary. 'Its mission is to reach out, not get entrenched looking within,' stated participant J when describing their hopes for their church. 'Our motivation is going to all the world and preach the Gospel, make disciples, as Matthew 28, really that's what we're trying to be a part of, along with many other groups.'⁸⁶⁵ This core sense of mission-need came up numerous times. Interviewee D1 said, 'I absolutely believe that people getting to know Jesus is the answer. Not that we should be ramming it down anybody's throat anyway. Our lives should just show that to people.' The statement by participant R reflected the sentiment of numerous church planters: 'I think, in the end, people need the gospel. It's not overcomplicated, really.'

As noted above, sent out to reach the unreached might be considered a narrower expression of the larger theme of *missio Dei*, reflecting God's purpose in the world to reunite all to himself. In one respect, reaching the unreached might be seen as a generalized expression of *missio Dei* – God's mission in the world to bring all people to know him as Lord, but it is also one which has a smaller focus than the whole of what *missio Dei* expresses. There is potential of a focus which is too narrow on individual salvation seen in the sub-theme reaching the unreached, but this is ameliorated to a degree with evidence in other categories including kingdom transformation and community activity. More will be considered on this in Chapter 5.

Joining in God's mission. Only one missionary (F1) mentioned the actual term *missio Dei*, when speaking about their mission training. However, three other missionaries used phrases like "joining Jesus' mission" or "joining God in his work." This is language which is more explicitly similar to the term *missio Dei*. Participant B spoke of this in several different ways. 'The vision is to be a people who are captivated by Jesus and abandoned to his mission.' B also used the phrases 'see what God is doing there and we are joining with him [God]' and 'surrendering our lives and our agenda to his agenda.' Participant E2 also used

⁸⁶⁴ Interviews K, C, and H

⁸⁶⁵ Interview P

the phrase 'abandoned to his mission.' Missioner N also said, 'You just work where you sense God is at work and go and join him.' While the term *missio Dei* was not used, there is a clear sense for these missionaries that they were joining God in his mission, which is a fundamental aspect of *missio Dei*.

Reaching out focuses activities. The purposes of reaching the unreached then focuses activities within the community. Participant A spoke of the variety of outreach activities they did, such as work in the arts, dance, at festivals, and clubs in town centre, to try to make connections with people. Then for A, the challenge was to further those relationships, through arts activities. They said, 'Right, how do we engage with the seekers when it's not a fair? How do we get this more ongoing type contact? We decided that the arts was the way to go.' This was a common theme threaded through conversations: activities within the church as outreach to make connections and share the gospel. As they spoke about using different approaches to mission, interviewee B noted that their practical service was directed towards sharing Jesus. 'We're placing ourselves among the people day in and day out, constantly filling the city with the story of who Jesus is and what he has done for us at the end. Doing that practically through serving the needs of the city.'⁸⁶⁶ Missioner L looked at their context, saw the need to reach out to particular groups of people, including single mums, and worked on activities directed to that need. L says, 'I think at one point I saw there's over 200 single mums on our estate, most of them probably teenagers, so I'm looking into that. I'm going, "Okay, well, how do we make sure to reach out to those first? What's our strategy to reaching to those guys?"' Meeting the needs of the community in specific ways which directs ministry activity is similar to contextualization, but coming from the motivation of *missio Dei*.

The basic principle of sharing the gospel message to those around them is an important aspect of the imaginary – being a witness in the world. In an interview with participant C, they said they had spoken to their congregation over a number of weeks, wanting their church to embrace the mission to bring others to faith. C said, 'And so I'd try every week to expose my heart and people's hearts to say, "We want things comfortable, we want things safe, we want people who look like us to be in our church. But Jesus came for all outsiders, to seek and

⁸⁶⁶ Interview B

save the lost and he turns it all upside down. Do we have a heart like this? A little bit?”

A selection of quotations from the additional sub-theme mission as sent out to bring people in to God is in Table 14.

4.5.2 The Essential Nature of the Church as Sent

The sub-theme around the essential nature of the church as sent is one which is subtle but important. Within the *missio Dei* concept is that of a church which is missional by its very nature. This is in contrast to an understanding of the church which has mission as a programme or as an add-on to a more internally focused life. Seeing the church as a sent group came out in 16 interviews with 38 references. Here the heart of the church is one of being sent on God’s mission, a part of the fundamental nature of what it is to be the church. Missioner C discussed their hope that their activities ‘...produces a community of people where mission is not something we say, we do, it’s something that we actually live where we are.’ They went on to emphasize the outward impulse connected with the inward understanding of the essence of the church, asking those in their congregation the question, ‘Do you have a heart to make relationships with non-Christians? That is the very reason that we exist. Not to have a cosy thing.’⁸⁶⁷ Understanding mission as fundamental to the nature of the church changes how one views not only church but life; it is an all-encompassing, rather than compartmentalized, understanding of mission. This was expressed by J, saying, ‘The mission field is every minute, every day, and how do we recognize what the Holy Spirit is doing so we can walk in step with that.’ In a similar sentiment, participant Q spoke of seeking to create a culture and identity of devotion which resulted in a community which was Jesus-centred and focused on mission.⁸⁶⁸

The church as going out. Some participants discussed how their church communities are sent as the directional aspect of the church in mission going out. Participant R said that when thinking of their larger church base, from which they planted, they said the emphasis was for them to go. ‘We’re not going to stay here and just build up numbers. We’re going to be sowing out, giving out, and we’ll

⁸⁶⁷ Interview C

⁸⁶⁸ Interview Q

have to believe God to provide for what we need in Hereford.⁸⁶⁹ *Missio Dei* includes being sent or going out to others. In an interview with participant G, they said, 'We're a "go-to-them" church.' They went on to discuss how their whole philosophy was that of going to where others were, in their setting, saying, 'They're not going to gather, they're not going to sign on the dotted line. That's why we have to go to them.' Participant M told the story of how their initial outreach was not connecting with those they wanted to reach. This caused them to reflect and change directions. M said, 'We won't expect them to come to us. We're going to them. We'll change our ways.' This same sentiment is echoed by participant L, who said, 'Let's take church to them. Out of that grew this desire to start Spirit-filled churches on housing estates.'

Being sent as following the biblical example. The impulse to go out arises in part for some missionaries from following the biblical example. There is some overlap with the incarnational theme, but with the emphasis on the church's nature as sent. When casting vision with their church plant, participant E2 encourages their fellowship to look to the example of the early church. 'I'll often say start in Acts, because actually that's what, you're part of a church plant. And that's what God's, Jesus' followers went out and did when they began to go to the nations.' Others discussed being 'abandoned to his [Jesus] mission' or of being 'devoted to Jesus, building community and mission together.'⁸⁷⁰ The example of Jesus also is a sending out impetus for interviewee F2, who says when speaking of Jesus, 'When he sent his disciples into the world, he sent them to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the good news, to bring good news to the poor, to feed the hungry - that is what we came to do. We came to go out.' Both biblical command and the divine example send missionaries out in mission, forming a part of the understanding in the theological imaginary.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme the essential nature of the church as sent is in Table 15.

4.5.3 Mission as Emerging from God's Activity and Agency

Another nuanced aspect of the *missio Dei* is that of mission as emerging from God's activity and agency. The emphasis here is on *God's* desire to be restoring all the earth, on God's mission, rather than the church being the active

⁸⁶⁹ Interview R

⁸⁷⁰ Interviews B and Q

agent in mission. The church joins God in *his* mission, rather than being the primary agent. Sentiments like this came up 20 times amongst 12 participants. Participant N noted that ‘You just work where you sense God is at work, and go and join him.’ N went on to describe this in detail, from a passage in Luke 10. This text functioned as a missional text for N, because ‘it’s also a text that tells us the responsibility of what happens isn’t ours. The responsibility is God’s. He calls us to go.’ A very similar thing was said by participant P and B.⁸⁷¹

Other missionaries evidenced a view that they were looking for God at work in the world. Watching for God’s work in the world shifts the agency from human activity to God’s activity. In an interview with C, they noted, ‘You want to be sensitive to what God is doing.’ Participant R noted they were watching for God’s activity in their new location, saying ‘Let’s just go up to Ross, and see what God will do. That was it. It’s all we had.’ Activities in ministry can be varied, and might also seem unimportant or simple on the face of things. However, church planters noted that the focus was not on the activity, but on God’s action in and through the activity and through the people. ‘So that, the vision was never massive, because God will build his church. It’s completely God’s to build’ says participant D1. In speaking of church activities, ‘It’s just a vehicle that God wants to use, and it’s his work in us and through us that’s going to make the difference.’⁸⁷² Only one participant spoke of God as having a missional nature, or being a missionary God. Participant H articulated this and several aspects of the *missio Dei*.

Well, God is primarily a missionary God. We are now in a missionary context, wake up and smell the coffee that things have got to be different. We’ve got to find ways in which we can reach out to lost people, because we are a minority group in a missionary context. We’ve got to change the way we think, change the way we do church or change the focus and the culture of the church to a missionary focus and culture, so that’s where we were coming from.⁸⁷³

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme mission as emerging from God’s activity and agency is in Table 16.

4.5.4 Mission as Restoring All of Creation

The least mentioned aspect of *missio Dei* amongst participants is mission as restoring all of creation. Only three people mentioned this one time each. This

⁸⁷¹ Interviews P and B.

⁸⁷² Interview J

⁸⁷³ Interview H

sub-theme expresses how every part of society, all the earth, is included in God's purview to restore and make right. This expansive understanding of the *missio Dei* then translates to the church in participation with that wide mission. When speaking of Jesus, missionary F noted the breadth of activity Jesus' ministry covered, and the call to participate in the same. 'When he sent his disciples into the world, he sent them to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the good news, to bring good news to the poor, to feed the hungry - that is what we came to do. We came to go out.' Participant J expressed this sub-theme well in explaining how they see their church reaching out. 'People are reaching out into all their spheres of influence, whatever part of society they're in, or work setting they're in, people are reaching out to colleagues and friends.' A similar comment came from missionary R, who said,

One thing that has changed over the last ten years is how the church can influence every area of society. ... people that are involved in the arts, as artists, as managers in theatres, we have people involved in politics, people in business, and to understand how the gospel can influence and infiltrate those areas, be salt and light and bring the kingdom to the whole earth.

While this sub-theme was only specifically spoken of three times, missionaries actions did express a wide variety of missional activities in many areas of the world as seen in kingdom transformation and an active community. However, motivations for these actions which express the *missio Dei* aspect of restoring all of creation did not come through frequently in words, so are unknown. More will be discussed in Chapter 5.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme mission as restoring all of creation is in Table 18.

4.5.5 Summary of Participation in the *Missio Dei*

Participating in the *missio Dei* is a central part of the theological imaginary of almost all missionaries interviewed. The straight forward missional purpose to share the gospel and see people come into relationship with God holds a core aspect of how participants imagine their ministry. This core purpose shapes their activities. To reach the unreached is an aspect of *missio Dei*, but might be considered either a short-hand for a larger expression of mission, or it might be considered to be a narrow expression of *missio Dei*. Missioners generally see themselves and their congregations as sent. This is not surprising as each are

people involved in new church work, often experimental and with the purpose of breaking new ground. Most but not all interviewees stated this in words. An understanding as sent to participate with God's missional purposes came through for some as a key ministry purpose of the church. The more nuanced aspects of recognizing God's agency come for some missionaries. Least articulated in words is God's purpose to restore all creation. As a whole, expressing an understanding and participation in God's mission in the world comes through as a part of the theological imaginary of missionaries interviewed.

4.6 Seeking Kingdom Transformation in Society

Transforming society through intentionally living out the ways of the kingdom of God is a theme which comes up 62 times for the church planters interviewed, with 16 out of 18 interviews giving at least one example of this. Seeing the kingdom of God expressed through the life of the church has a particularly outward orientation. It is both active and passive. It is primarily active in trying to influence society by bringing aspects of the kingdom of God into being through social action, pursuit of societal welfare and acts of common good. Missioner J's church worked as volunteers in an adult learning centre, and started a community café in an abandoned shopfront.⁸⁷⁴ One participant was 'finding ways to help people into work who wouldn't normally be able to work.'⁸⁷⁵ Participant F1 spoke passionately about investing in the life of their community saying, 'We did as much as we could to be a part of this community, to enable it to flourish, to contribute to the world being in people's lives in this area.' It is passive in the understanding that the church community is to live out in itself the ways of the kingdom of God here and now. 'Our mission focus...there isn't necessarily a strategy. You have to just live,' says participant I, speaking of wanting to see wholeness in their community and being an example of what God's kingdom is like.

Sub-themes include having an activist faith which is serving society towards positive change, and where the church is involved in every area of society. The activist faith sometimes is expressed in social justice involvement, or is sometimes seen more generally in a faith community active in a variety of

⁸⁷⁴ Interview J

⁸⁷⁵ Interview O

things which serve the wider society. Overcoming the sacred/secular divide is part of the vision of being involved in every area of society, demonstrating a holistic understanding of faith. Lastly, the church living out the kingdom of God as an example to the wider society sometimes expresses an eschatological understanding of mission, living out the kingdom of God here and now. The sub-themes for this category are:

Seeking kingdom transformation in society

- church as having an activist faith which is serving society
- eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now
- transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide)

4.6.1 Church as Having an Activist Faith Which is Serving Society

Church planters who were interviewed noted the importance of being active in serving their communities. In statements and in examples of their activities, there is an intentional effort to engage in activities which help bring positive change to various arenas of society. This was the most expressed sub-category amongst interviewees, noted 44 times by 15 participants. This sub-theme is articulating a general desire to see the world changed by the church being active and influencing society towards transformation. It has some similarities to the sub-theme below, around transforming all of creation, but is the bigger picture of the church as active in society to enact change. Several missionaries described their goal as seeing their community transformed. Participant B said they wanted to see change, 'seeing our community transformed by demonstrating the compassion of God, to living lives, seeing the power of God at work.' Q notes that, 'And in terms of vision, we talk about we want to see people's lives transformed and the city transformed.' The drive to see change was an integral part of their imaginary – the dreams and motivations which fuel their ministry. Missioners expressed the desire that their churches would have an impact where they worked. This was communicated well by participant E1. 'But just the fact that you can actually impact that town and have that impact, I think, that is the thing that started to excite me. That we're not just here to build a nice Sunday service for Christians. It's what impact we can have

on the town here.⁸⁷⁶ The overall impulse to be an active agent in the transformation of a community is one aspect of kingdom theology demonstrated by missionaries. Transformation of a place might be expressed generally: we want to see a community transformed by Jesus⁸⁷⁷ or through intentionally seeking ways to improve their area.⁸⁷⁸ Serving the community as a general purpose was echoed by G who says of their church, 'I want them to become servants, to serve.'

Activities to transform society. A wide variety of activities came under this banner. These are mission communities which are intentionally active in seeking change in their locations. The activities can be quite varied, partly due to the gifts and interests of the missionaries, and partly due to the needs of their communities. Participant A described how they had a passion for artists, and the work they had done to advocate for them in the town. A also described how it was someone else's passion and expertise which led them to facilitate this person to start a new ministry. 'The Town Centre Chaplaincy was born out of someone in the community who is a retired social worker. She wanted to set up a chaplaincy service.'⁸⁷⁹ In order to serve in their communities, missionaries worked to identify the needs around them. 'Our intention is to go out into the community, identify what the holes are, and ask yourself what you're going to do about those problems,' says participant F2.⁸⁸⁰ This led them to become involved in a wide variety of activities seeking to serve their community and see change. In their ministry, missionaries F1 and F2 spoke of serving meals to those who are isolated, homeless, elderly, or addicts; they ran a dementia club and a food bank; they started a parents and babies group.⁸⁸¹ Participant H noted, 'We set up a charity here for families. Mentoring kids, family support and also working with English as an additional language because Leeds is the most cosmopolitan city outside of London in the UK.' While the activities varied, the object of the activities focused on the church bringing about positive societal change.

Partnerships in service. Partnership to serve in the community and see transformation is also key for some participants. They want to serve, but as much as possible, do it alongside others already engaged locally. For participant P this meant working with another charity: 'Friday night meeting, it means we partner

⁸⁷⁶ Interview E

⁸⁷⁷ Interview K

⁸⁷⁸ Interview J

⁸⁷⁹ Interview A

⁸⁸⁰ Interview F

⁸⁸¹ Interview F

with another charity to protect our church trust which has allotments and keeps chickens. We can take people there; we can get alongside people there. They can get an idea of what work would be like.’ For participant O this means engaging with a local café in social projects.⁸⁸² In an interview with I, they described how their local engagement had been in partnership. ‘Most of, like, the work ... would look like some are kind of ministry social action, where it has been done through the tenants’ and residents’ association.’⁸⁸³ Missioner J sought to bring together partnerships with local services for their community. J said, ‘We’ve got involved in setting up a community group, I suppose it would be called. It’s based around residents and service providers. We got people from fire, police, council, adult learning, education, all of those kinds of things that are there. The whole point of it was to sit down, look at what was going on in the community, how can we help improve some of the areas.’ Partnerships enabled the participants to engage in different types of service in their communities towards change.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as having an activist faith which is serving society is in Table 19.

4.6.2 Eschatologically Focused on Living Out the Kingdom of God Here and Now

A church which is eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now came through for six participants, with 11 inclusions. The focus on this sub-theme is in part that of having an eschatological perspective, thinking of the living out kingdom to come in the current age. This sub-theme has similarities to being a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel, but the rationale is of a missional renewal of eschatology and the kingdom. The perspective in this sub-theme is that of seeing God’s kingdom come to earth now, in a theological understanding that bringing the kingdom is a part of the church’s call and ultimate end.

Interviewees B and E1 and E2 discussed this sub-theme more than other missionaries, demonstrating this aspect of kingdom transformation as a part of their theological imaginary. Participant B said they understood the tension of living in the ‘now and not yet’ of the kingdom. They went on to describe how they hoped

⁸⁸² Interview O

⁸⁸³ Interview I

to see the power of God at work, 'the tools of the kingdom being active in the church' and then in their community.⁸⁸⁴ It is the eschatological understanding of the kingdom which distinguishes this sub-theme. Participant E1 described how they wanted to participate in the "now and not yet of the kingdom," giving an example of praying for people when they were out and about. 'I pray for people. I expect God to move. He might not move every single time. That's been the big shift, the whole kingdom theology, I think that has been a big shift for me, and the fact that God can use us and work through us.'⁸⁸⁵ Participant E2 noted they wanted to see the church expressing the kingdom now, '...and actually doing the stuff of the kingdom, and that how we wanted to be a church that does the stuff of the kingdom.' This view of a kingdom which is active now comes through particularly in the imaginary of these two interviews.

Some missionaries didn't use the phrase "now and not yet" but spoke of wanting people to experience the kingdom life now. Participant D2 described some reflection they had done on 'transforming spaces into kingdom places' and the concept of safe space. D2 said, 'It's about safe space, so that you can then go back and face your lousy life in a little bit, knowing that next week, you'll be coming for some more safe space. It's just giving people these glimpses of the kingdom of God to them in the hope of what then happens is people then turn up for church service, and there find God for themselves.' One description of this sub-theme was with missionary F1, who spoke about being saved, and their change in perspective. 'And the whole idea about being saved. Saved for what? Saved for Heaven? Saved from Hell? Or saved from the life that you were living to a transformed life now? That would be more in my thinking. ... much more saved so that you understand the fullness of the kingdom of God in your life now.'⁸⁸⁶

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme a church which is eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now is in Table 20.

⁸⁸⁴ Interview B

⁸⁸⁵ Interview E

⁸⁸⁶ Interview F

4.6.3 Transforming Every Area of Society (Overcoming the Sacred/Secular Divide)

A ministry which is involved in transforming all parts of society, which then overcomes the sacred/secular divide, is the third and smallest sub-theme, with seven references amongst seven missionaries. This sub-theme is very similar to mission as restoring all creation in the *missio Dei* theme, but coming from the kingdom transforming *all* areas of life rather than from the perspective of God's broad purposes in the world. The sense of this sub-theme within the literature is that Christian faith extends to all parts of life and should not be relegated to "spiritual" aspects of life, separated from "secular" aspects of life. This aspect was conveyed well by missionary R:

One thing that has changed over there the last ten years is how the church can influence every area of society. ... people that are involved in the arts, as artists, as managers in theatres, we have people involved in politics, people in business, and to understand how the gospel can influence and infiltrate those areas, be salt and light and bring the kingdom to the whole earth.⁸⁸⁷

The church encourages a holistic discipleship in bringing the kingdom influence to all areas of society and of the world, in a way that overcomes seeing something as sacred and other things as secular. Missioner N discussed the holistic nature of God's work to all areas in life from a passage in scripture which inspired their ministry. 'God made everything. He saw it, he loved it, he created it. All of that, the whole image, right, and that particular work with people, working with people that have mental health issues, it was a transformational text.'⁸⁸⁸ Connecting faith and life is a part of this sub-theme, reflected by participant O who says, 'I suppose sometimes church, big church on a Sunday can feel a bit detached from the real world and real life. And working out how Christian faith is applied in the everyday, where I'm sort of at.' This same sense of connecting the sacred and secular or spiritual and every day comes out in a comment by M, who says, 'We gather people to do environmental work, creative work, making bird boxes, planting trees, bonfires and then use that as a vehicle to start talking about life and faith and that's in its very early stages.' This sub-theme is another where there are fewer who spoke of it directly in words, but it could be argued there is

⁸⁸⁷ Interview R

⁸⁸⁸ Interview N

evidence of this sub-theme in activities seen in other categories above, such as the church rooted and active in a location and contextualized for a locality.

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme church as involved in transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide) is in Table 21.

4.6.4 Summary of Seeking Kingdom Transformation

The church being involved in activities which transform society into the ways of the kingdom is a part of the theological imaginary in 16 out of 18 interviews. Its expressions are sometimes seen in actions rather than statements, and the more nuanced aspects tended not to be articulated very frequently. It is a very commonly shared part of the theological imaginary amongst participants that the church is active in serving society. The desire is to see society transformed by the activities of the church, bringing the ways of the kingdom to the world. This involves a wide variety of activities. Missioners are active in many types of service to their communities and neighbours. The aspect of overcoming the sacred/secular divide was not expressed frequently but did form part of the imaginary for a few missioners. The specifically eschatological aspect of kingdom transformation now came through for several participants. Activities of transforming society are evident in both actions and words for church planters who were interviewed.

4.7 Being Incarnational in Mission

Of the five themes seen in the literature, being incarnational in mission is the least referenced theme, with a total of 51 occurrences amongst 13 interviews. This theme includes a new focus on the person of Jesus in the life of the church and mission. The interview with participant B expressed this strongly, saying 'That came out of a sense of, we want to have a community that is really clear on its purposes of what we're about but most of all that it's been fuelled and founded and centred and grounded in Jesus.' Others used similar phrases like 'it had to really be Christ-centred' and 'follow Jesus.'⁸⁸⁹ The incarnation is a model for mission emphasizing the church following Jesus' example as sent to identify with a specific time in history, culture, and location. The person of Jesus provides both

⁸⁸⁹ Interview J and F

inspiration and a model for outreach for missionaries. Missioner E2 noted, 'I suppose we draw people back again and again to the Bible, but particularly the gospels and all that Jesus was doing when he was out in his own community and the communities around him.' The incarnation also brings into discussion a church which embodies a representation of God to others. The sub-themes within being incarnational in mission are:

Being incarnational in mission

- the incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus
- the incarnation models mission
- the church embodies and represents God to others

4.7.1 The Incarnational Church has a Renewed Focus on the Person of Jesus

The most frequently noted sub-theme around incarnational mission is the incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus. This solicited 30 out of the full category's 51 mentions from 11 church planters. The interview data for this sub-theme was expressed particularly by five participants, accounting for 23 of the 30 sub-theme occurrences. Participants B and E1/E2 had 7 notations, participant F2 had 5, and participant J had 4, with the remaining 7 occurrences shared between 6 participants. While the content of the renewed focus on the person of Jesus is fairly consistent across the participants, there are some directional nuances seen across a number of occurrences: an inward focus on Jesus and an outward focus on Jesus, or both together.

Inward focus on Jesus. Participants expressed a focus on Jesus within their faith and within their congregations. This inward orientation of the focus on Jesus in the incarnation points to the person of Jesus as the centre of their faith. Missioners expressed this in several ways. Participant F1 expressed their faith: 'For me, it's less of an instant "say this prayer" and you're saved, but more of a wanting to follow Jesus idea.' Missioner B also used a similar phrase, saying 'How do we just remain as faithful followers of Jesus who have got a call to lead a people?' In an interview with G, they said, 'We really do need to start with Christ...' while missioner J used the term 'Christ-centred.' The inward focus on the person of Jesus as central to the life of the congregation comes through clearly for several missioners. 'And I know we say this in church, it's a quite cheesy saying, but it's true, it had to really be Christ-centred, so that everything

flows out of our relationship with Him, and not out of a clever idea or a programme we can put on, if that makes sense,' communicates participant J.

Outward focus on Jesus. For some church planters, a focus on Jesus is towards mission and outreach, giving this focus an outward orientation. The focus on Jesus is for others to know him. This aspect of an outward focus on Jesus can be seen in numerous statements in the interview with E1 and E2. Speaking of the vision of their church, E1 states, 'All about Jesus and that people are in either a journey towards it or away. ...we constantly try to point people to Jesus.' Participant E2 also said they wanted their church to 'share Jesus,' which was similar to terms used by participant J who says they hoped people would 'find Jesus' and participant F1 who said they wanted people to come to 'follow Jesus.' The outward orientation of the focus on Jesus came through for participant B. 'We're placing ourselves among the people day in and day out, constantly filling the city with the story of who Jesus is and what he has done for us at the end. Doing that practically through serving the needs of the city.'⁸⁹⁰

Inward and outward focus on Jesus. Some participants combined both inward and outward orientations of a focus on Jesus. It was a focus on Jesus and their relationship with Jesus which also sent them on mission. Missioner B had several comments about the connection for their church between a focus on Jesus and his mission. 'The vision for our – the thread through our vision, is to be a people who are captivated by Jesus, and abandoned to his mission.' As they explain vision to their congregation, 'And we say well then, if we met Jesus, if Jesus is at the centre of our lives, if we now are a part of a family and we're surrendering our life and our agenda to his agenda, and to the agenda of the corporate expression of the church, and we're learning what it is to love him and love one another and love those around us, we're then being the church....'⁸⁹¹ It was not only missioner B who expressed something of an inward and outward focus on Jesus. Interviews with Q, K and F1/F2 evidenced both an inward focus on Jesus and sharing Jesus with their communities.⁸⁹² Participant E2 expressed an understanding of the mission of the church as one they were called by Jesus to do. 'We are here to make an impact for Jesus, not only being Mansfield's best

⁸⁹⁰ Interview B

⁸⁹¹ Interview B

⁸⁹² Interviews Q, K and F

friend doing all these nice things, we're doing it because Jesus is calling us to do it.⁸⁹³

Strong emotional response. The focus on the person of Jesus provoked strong responses at times. In reflecting on their mission training, and encounter with one particular missional literature book, church planter F2 said it had revolutionized their image of Jesus. They said, 'The tears came because I could hold onto Jesus far more easily. This was the kind of Jesus I wanted to hold on to. That was a real kind of awakening.'⁸⁹⁴ Also passionate was a response from J, saying 'I'm passionate to see people find Jesus.' Emotionally provocative language came through as demonstrated above by mission B, who used phrases including, 'fuelled and founded and centred and grounded in Jesus,' and 'captivated by Jesus and abandoned to his mission.'⁸⁹⁵ Participant Q spoke of devotion, remarking 'We talk about everything that we do to be about devotion, devotion to Jesus, building community and mission together.'

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme the incarnational church has a renewed focus on Jesus is in Table 22.

4.7.2 The Incarnation Models Mission

The incarnation is particularly highlighted as a model for mission in contemporary Western culture. Jesus' incarnation models and thus motivates being sent to identify with people at a deep level. The incarnation models a church which identifies with people in a time and place, as well as ways in which Jesus lived on earth. This sub-theme is mentioned 13 times by nine of those interviewed. This sub-theme has the particular emphasis of Jesus and the incarnation as a model which inspires people in mission in some way. Participants find different pathways and encouragement for their ministries in observing Jesus coming to the world.

General incarnational theology. Only two church planters used the term "incarnational" in relationship to being a model for mission. In an interview with D2, they noted they had originally wanted to go to a different city and live incarnationally. They said,

Being in Clapton was really similar to that but it was more, you know, rather than having church in your homes, we were just there everyday in a coffee

⁸⁹³ Interview E

⁸⁹⁴ Interview F

⁸⁹⁵ Interview B

shop or charity shop. ...It is incarnational because, like what you'd find inside Clapton is just an overflow from the street, isn't it? Whoever's walking around in Clapton, in Hackney, you find in here in Clapton.

Missioner F1 talked about learning how to be incarnational in their training, and this is an aspect of what they wanted to do in their community.⁸⁹⁶ The most explicit explanation of a theology of incarnation was articulated by church planter G. When asked what inspired their model for mission, G said of Jesus, quoting the beginning of the book of John, 'He pitched his tent among us, and he became a particular man, in a particular context, in a particular culture, in a particular place, in a particular country, at a particular time. I decided to model my church planting and mission on Jesus.' Jesus in the incarnation provided the model for this church planter in their ministry. Being the presence of Jesus, and identifying with the location was also important to missionary B. They asked, 'What would it look like for a bunch of followers of Jesus from that community, in that background, to gather together, to worship, to allow the Bible to inform them and shape them and apply it to their lives... to be Jesus' hands and feet where they are?'

Specific aspects of the incarnation provide a model. Church planter Q spoke of being sent, modelled on Jesus' example. Q noted that, 'If you look at the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was starting a church planting movement.' This emphasis of being sent as Jesus was sent, and going, modelled after Jesus was also an emphasis for participant R. For R it was Jesus' example of moving from place to place to bring the gospel, rather than settling in just one location.⁸⁹⁷ Participant A reflected they saw Jesus doing discipleship by living in community, and they sought to emulate that.⁸⁹⁸ Similarly, in an interview with K, they spoke of example of Jesus and how that shaped their ministry activities and shaped their imagination. 'How did Jesus disciple? Did he just hold a Bible study? No. Did he ever go into people's homes? He moved into people's houses and he sat with them. He ate with them, had parties, he lived life with them and that's really kind of affected our church.'⁸⁹⁹ In an interview with A, they spoke of Jesus inspiring their living in community, and missionary M spoke of Jesus' example of being a guest, which had inspired their ministry. The example of Jesus is woven into the imaginary for several missionaries in different ways.

⁸⁹⁶ Interview F

⁸⁹⁷ Interview R

⁸⁹⁸ Interview A

⁸⁹⁹ Interview K

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme the incarnational models mission is in Table 23.

4.7.3 The Church Embodies and Represents God to Others

The third sub-theme within being incarnational in mission is the church embodies and representation God to others. This sub-theme was seen in 8 comments by 6 missionaries. Here the church as a community is the living embodiment of God, which represents God to those around. It is the church demonstrating what God is like in the same way that Jesus in the incarnation embodied the divine. As Jesus came to show people what God is like, so the church is to show people what God is like. Participant G has the clearest expression of this sub-theme when explaining that in their ministry they wanted to *be* the witness and presence of Christ to others before undertaking other activities. Their reasoning for this approach was explained in this comment. 'I didn't do anything. I didn't do any church planting for the first 18 months. And here's the theology, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."⁹⁰⁰ More generalized comments about being the presence of God modelled on Jesus' example come in the interview with F1/F2.⁹⁰¹ Another more generalized example of embodying God to others comes from missionary B, who wondered what it would look like for the church '...to be Jesus' hands and feet where they are?'

The community itself is a reflection of God to the world, pointing to the divine nature. Participant A expressed this clearly when they said of their church community, 'I see very much that we're trying to be an outflow of the Trinity.' They noted that this idea had been very significant for them in the development of their community life. Participant B spoke of how they wanted to see their church being the person of God in their wider community. Participant K, who spoke most strongly of the church as a demonstration of the gospel also notes the difference between church as an event or church as a people who reflect God. 'To change that view of the church is, where we turn up on a Sunday: "that's the church" to

⁹⁰⁰ Interview G

⁹⁰¹ Interviews F and K.

“we are the church.” We are the called out ones. We are God's people. We are the ones that are supposed to be reflecting who God is to our neighbour.⁹⁰²

A selection of quotations from the sub-theme the church embodies and represents God to others is in Table 24.

4.7.4 Summary of Being Incarnational in Mission

Incarnational mission is the fifth most referenced theme with missionaries. Two-thirds of those interviewed referenced some part of the theme. The aspect that engaged the theological imaginary most significantly was a renewed focus on the person of Jesus. Church planters want their faith communities to be centred on the person of Jesus. One aspect of this is simply in having a living faith relationship with Jesus. This extends to his example in mission. To a much lesser extent, the incarnation as an embodied representation of God to others comes out as part of the imaginary. The renewed focus on Jesus was clearly expressed, but since the majority of the references came from four sources, it was still for the majority of participants a small part of the imaginary. More than half of missionaries had comments expressing the incarnation, but this was a limited aspect of the imaginary.

4.8 Summary of the Theological Imaginary in Participants

This chapter outlines the results of the interviews with missionaries. The five key themes and sub-themes from the missional literature are clearly evidenced in the theological imaginary undergirding expectations of church life for missionaries. They guide practice and fire the imagination for what church can be. As is seen in the results in this chapter, some concepts are highly operative with missionaries, and others are not. The importance of being a community, the need for contextualization, and participation in the *missio Dei* are all significantly present in some aspects for all missionaries. Less evident are the themes of seeking kingdom transformation in society and being incarnational in mission. The next task for this thesis is to compare the content from the missional literature in Chapter 3 to the data from themes evidenced above in Chapter 4 to detail a picture of the theological imaginary at work for missionaries, and outline the resources which are supporting practice and those which are being overlooked.

⁹⁰² Interview K

Chapter 5 gives an overview of the patterns of data seen in Chapter 4 and gives an integrative picture of the theological imaginary, including those ideas which are highly functional as inspiring mission and those which are overlooked.

CHAPTER 5: THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINARY

5.1 Introduction

The theological imaginary of practitioners and the resources offered by the missional church are at the centre of this research. The imaginary uncovers ideas and images which guide how missionaries expect their church life to be. The missional literature offers materials to equip the church in mission. How are practitioners interacting with the themes found in the missional literature? Chapter 5 has two primary aims: to summarize the shape of the theological imaginary of church planters and to determine if the theological resources in the missional movement are being used as resources in practice by missionaries. In Chapters 1 and 2, research goals 1-3 of the thesis are achieved: to describe relevant research to date; to describe postmodernity and post-Christendom as contextual factors of mission; and to give the background of the missional and emerging church movements as responses to the contextual factors. In Chapter 3, research goal 4 is completed: to determine from representative literature the primary themes and sub-themes in the missional dialogue. In Chapter 4 research goal 5 is completed: to present the data on the theological imaginary from the empirical research with church planting practitioners. This chapter will address research goal 6: to compare the results from the empirical data to the themes in the literature to determine what themes are being influential to missionaries and what is being overlooked.

To this end, this chapter details below the results from the research indicating that some but not all of the theological ideas in the missional conversation are functioning in the imaginaries of missionaries interviewed. It will become apparent that while each of the five major themes are evidenced to some degree, some themes are only partially functional or largely absent. The themes which are not as functional are those which could connect activity in ministry to a deeper theological rationale for ministry activity. These overlooked aspects of theology can potentially enrich the theological imaginaries of both missionaries and the congregations they lead.

In order to describe the theological imaginary motivating church planters in mission, each theme identified in the literature in Chapter 3 and analysed in the interview data in Chapter 4 is considered in turn, outlining the over-arching patterns seen in the interview data and in the missional literature for themes

present and themes absent. This chapter sets out to answer several questions. What theological ideas are missionaries drawing from to support their new church work? The themes in the theological imaginary evidenced in church planters are compared to the themes offered in the missional literature to see what themes are functional and what themes are overlooked. Are the theological ideas in the missional movement, which are intended to renew the church in mission, being incorporated by missionaries in practice? This results in an integrated picture of the theological imaginary, outlining the theological resources feeding the expectations of church and guiding practice. The themes from the literature which are not evidenced in the missionaries' practice are also considered to draw a picture of the potential impact of these on the theological imaginary in mission.

5.2 Community in the Theological Imaginary

The importance of being a community is the most referenced theme in the interview data, with 161 occurrences in all 18 interviews. The sub-themes of being a community are:

The importance of being a community

- church as prioritizing being a caring community
- church as being rooted with and active in a location
- church as needing deep, authentic relationships
- church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside)
- church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel
- community is inclusive (additional sub-theme)

Community for missionaries has two directions – internal and external. The internal quality of community relationships is one significant element of the theological imaginary – that these relationships are central and of a particular type. The most referenced sub-theme is around being a caring community and the third around having deep authentic relationships. The quality of relationships within the body is important. Some used biblically referenced images like body, flock and family. Others used terms like raw, authentic, real, and vulnerable. More than half of missionaries particularly described a vision for close, deeply connected life together, while all missionaries referenced the priority of being a caring community. Four participants focused almost exclusively on the internal relationships, not referencing external relationships. Structures are put in place

so that caring relationships happen through meeting schedules and prioritizing time together – meals, leisure time, worship in large and small groups. There is a purposefulness and intentionality to enabling the group to be more than an occasional gathering of people in a location, but to form together a community who live their lives together in caring, connected ways. Church as a community surpasses just attending a Sunday morning worship meeting but carries with it a hope of deep, purposeful relationality. The internal quality and priority of being a community was an expectation of church life for most participants.

The second most referenced sub-theme is how relationships also extend outward to the community around the church, rooted and active in a location. The external relationship has different aspects, but is broadly about the church connecting and being in relationship with its surrounding community. Missioners wanted to know their specific communities, identify with the wider community, and be active in that community in a variety of ways. This external connection is also seen in service for kingdom transformation and contextualization for a locality. In one sense, the external community connection is nearly all underscored by a motivation of *missio Dei* – the church being a serving, visible, witnessing body in the world. Some expressed being rooted and active in a locality through geographic and demographic research; other missioners described the desire for their churches to be an integral part of their wider communities, being *with* and *for* the place they were located. The vision of the church as making a difference in the lives around them drove a great variety of activities – cafes to crèches, youth clubs to dementia support groups. Missioners' activities were guided by a hope for their churches to relate well to their setting. Connection as a community which had an external direction was an integral part of the imaginary for most missioners.

The subtler aspect of a *community sent together on mission (inside to outside)* was articulated by eight missioners with 13 references. These participants made the explicit connection of the church as a community then together going outward in mission, a directional inside to outside movement. This was generally given a causal notation or grounding of “making relationships” and “being on mission together.” There is a great deal of evidence of mission *activity* by communities which counter-balances to some degree a reduced number who articulated a community together on mission. I think one could make the case that being on mission together was a more significant aspect of the imaginary

than came through in words. Whether this is understood as being on mission together in the sense that each member independently is on mission or in the sense that they are involved in a deeper, more corporate way on mission was sometimes hard to discern. Sometimes one way or the other was stated clearly and sometimes spoken of more generally. I believe both aspects of a close community on corporate and individual mission were expressed and evidenced in action. The purpose of a community on mission together guides the imaginary.

The additional sub-theme of community is inclusive also has both internal and external aspects. Missioners wanted their church communities to be ones which are open to all (external), and where everyone can participate (internal). Both aspects were discussed in different ways as relevant to the congregational life and in connection to the wider community. Participants picture a community which has an openness to others of all types and a welcoming, inclusive spirit. They also envision a community where all can participate within community life, both in terms of all ages and in terms of those who might be considered “leaders” or “laity.” Inclusivity and wide participation is noted by 6 missioners as part of what they envision to characterize their communities.

The least referenced sub-theme is the church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel. Nine missioners spoke to this in some way, with 13 references. The expression of being a contrast community was tentative in some cases, clear in others. It could be said that the categorization of data to this sub-theme was a generous one as it was sometimes more by implication than direct expression. Some missioners spoke of this in terms of the church showing people alternative ways to live, or as their community being a demonstration of God’s presence. One missioner spoke of their church being the presence of God and the tools of the kingdom present in their wider community. No missioner used the language “contrast community” or “demonstrating the gospel” but the sense of being an example of God’s presence within the community was expressed by some missioners.

There were some references to community which use more explicitly theological language, and others that reference biblical or theological ideas. Specific language includes people who: have deep relationships in discipleship, are a family or the people of God, serve together, are the tools of the kingdom, are an overflow of the Trinity, representing the Triune God, and enable the priesthood of all believers. While this is a diverse set of theological concepts, and

some remain fairly general, they all express something of the desire for a congregation with qualities of deep spiritual relationships and purposeful missional relationships with the wider community. All missionaries communicated the importance and priority of being a community, externally and internally, but less frequent was the expression of theological language similar to that around community in the missional literature.

The church as community sent together on mission and being a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel are both theologically rooted and nuanced themes discussed in missional literature. These deeper theological themes were not frequently articulated by missionaries. The idea of a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel is discussed by Michael Frost in *Exiles*, by Graham Tomlin in *The Provocative Church*, and by Lois Barrett in *Treasures in Clay Jars*.⁹⁰³ A more detailed biblical outline describing the church as the people of God is seen in *From Eternity to Here* by Frank Viola.⁹⁰⁴ Viola also discusses the church as the biblical ideal of a family.

In general terms, the importance of being a community is discussed in missional literature, and this was significantly expressed in the theological imaginary of participants. In *Emerging Churches*, Gibbs and Bolger give three core practices, one of which is living as community.⁹⁰⁵ The priority of community is also highlighted in *Being Church, Doing Life* by Moynagh, *Organic Community* by Myers, and *Small is Big, Slow is Fast* by Kalinowski.⁹⁰⁶ The more generalized expression of the priority of community and a community serving together in a location was the understanding of community most expressed by missionaries. This serving community, rooted and active in a location, was both spoken of and demonstrated in activity amongst church planters. This is written about in missional literature like *The Externally Focused Church*.⁹⁰⁷ Participants noted both a sense of geographical connection as discussed in *The New Parish*, and

⁹⁰³ Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Barrett. Tomlin and Society for Promoting Christian.

⁹⁰⁴ Viola.

⁹⁰⁵ Gibbs and Bolger. Pages 43-45 and 89-116.

⁹⁰⁶ Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*. Caesar Kalinowski, *Small Is Big, Slow Is Fast : Living and Leading Your Family and Community on God's Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014). Myers.

⁹⁰⁷ See also Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*. Rusaw and Swanson.

to a lesser degree a network relationship connection centring from a location, as discussed in *Liquid Church*.⁹⁰⁸

An authentic community which is an outward reaching community, or a community sent together on mission (inside to outside) is seen as a significant theme throughout the missional literature. *Everyday Church* and *The Tangible Kingdom* are amongst books where this features heavily.⁹⁰⁹ It is the characterization of a missional community, as seen in Huckins and Yackley's *Thin Places*.⁹¹⁰ A community sent on mission together is also discussed in the literature as seen in the *missio Dei* section. The additional sub-theme of inclusivity is discussed in missional literature. This is an element noted in the literature, particularly in *Emerging Churches* by Gibbs and Bolger, and *The Missional Leader* by Roxburgh and Romanuk.⁹¹¹ The search for deep authenticity in relationships comes through in missional authors James Bielo and Michael Frost, where both authors note the drive for honesty and integrity in relationships reflect a contrast to a hyper-real world and fill a deficit felt in contemporary culture.⁹¹²

The overall theological imaginary coming through in the theme of community is prioritizing a genuine, caring community life, which is active in outreach to the wider community. There is both a focus of intentional energy on the quality of deep, loving relationships in the internal community life as well as the focus of intentional energy to connect as a church body with the external community. Missioners were guided by an image of the church which is deeply communal. It is their expectation that relationships are made and nurtured. Approximately half of the participants connected community and mission – being sent together. Others expressed either community internally referenced and community externally referenced, but not necessarily the nuance of sent together. Community is both for its own sake as a family of God and active for the sake of God's mission – both of which are discussed in missional literature. Community life is most often referenced to theological concepts of being a family or body of Christ and is often oriented to *missio Dei* outreach. Being a family on mission fires the imagination. An emphasis on community was infrequently linked to the

⁹⁰⁸ Sparks, Sorens, and Friesen. Ward, *Liquid Church*.

⁹⁰⁹ Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church : Gospel Communications on Mission.*, Halter and Smay.

⁹¹⁰ Huckins and Yackley.

⁹¹¹ Gibbs and Bolger. Roxburgh and Romanuk.

⁹¹² Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Page 81. Bielo. Pages 16-21.

deeper theological concept of being an intentional contrast community demonstrating the gospel.

5.3 Contextualization in the Theological Imaginary

Missioners conveyed the need for contextualization in their ministries 154 times. All 18 interviews reflected on the changes in culture and the need for their church plants to fit their context. It was the second most referenced theme and includes the following sub-themes:

The need for contextualization in mission

- the need for contextualization for a specific locality
- the need for the church to be contextualized for a changing culture
- frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized
- the need for contextualization for mission in a post-Christendom context
- creativity in contextualization (additional sub-theme)

Many missioners spoke at length about contextualization as a part of the vision for their churches. The overwhelming number of mentions connected to this theme come from the first two sub-themes (122 of 154) of contextualizing for a specific locality and for a changing culture. Contextualization for a specific locality was the largest sub-theme for missioners. During each interview, participants discussed their particular place – demographics of the community, the people, history, and those with whom they were connected locally. Missioners spoke knowledgeably of their location. Some spoke passionately and in detail about the place where they ministered. They spoke of the needs – social deprivation, joblessness, loneliness, single parents and aging pensioners. Some church planters sought out local partnerships to engage and serve their wider communities. They had a heart for their towns, cities or villages. Offering a church and ministry for their specific location is an integral part of church planter’s vision.

Contextualization for the changing culture was the second largest sub-theme with half of missioners speaking of this change. The emphasis shifts here from the local to the change in the wider culture. The recognition of wider changes in culture was noted: two missioners named it postmodernity, a few noted characteristics of cultural change, and some noted just generally it was “new times/new context.” Only a few missioners used the term contextualization or context. Others noted they wanted to be relevant, authentic, organic, indigenous,

or accessible. Participants recognized that the shape of the wider culture has had significant changes and that it was important for their churches to consider this in the shape of their ministries. There is a genuine desire for the new churches to connect with the current shape of the culture. It is a desire for more than half of missionaries to contextualize due to changes in the broader culture.

The third sub-theme is frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized. This theme was expressed once each by six missionaries, with varying degrees of emotion. Only two participants expressed significant emotion with the existing church not being contextualized. This was not a significant aspect of the theological imaginary around contextualization for participants. Frustration is a theme which threads through some missional literature (as discussed in section 2.4.4, Development of the Emerging Church Movement). Emergent authors Dave Tomlinson, Tony Jones and Brian McLaren articulate both frustration with the inherited church and the need for significant re-thinking of theology and ecclesiology in light of the changing culture.⁹¹³

The smallest sub-theme was contextualizing specifically for post-Christendom. Only three missionaries noted verbally the changed position of the church in culture, one by naming post-Christendom. Participants spoke throughout the interviews of the drive to see people reached with the gospel and the needs in their area, but only a few noted a post-Christendom context connected to mission need. Together, the three sub-themes on contextualization for locality, wider culture, and post-Christendom cover the range of contextualization, each emphasising different aspects.

There is an additional sub-theme based on data which is creativity in contextualization. More than half of the interviews included comments on being imaginative, creative, pioneering new things, and being flexible. Not only was this specifically mentioned, but mission activity showed a great deal of creativity. Creativity is a quality – a value for missionaries around contextualization. It expresses a part of the imaginary for how they want to do mission. It was not one of the sub-themes initially selected from the literature, but it is discussed in the literature. ‘Creating as created beings’ is one of the nine patterns of the emerging church in Gibbs and Bolger’s research in *Emerging Churches*.⁹¹⁴ Murray, Drane,

⁹¹³ Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*. Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*.

⁹¹⁴ Gibbs and Bolger. See Chapters 8 and 9, pages 155-190.

and Frost and Hirsch all highlight creativity in missional and emerging church activity.⁹¹⁵ Other texts catalogue creative efforts in mission.⁹¹⁶

In four church plants, missionaries either spoke just a little about connecting with the community, about being accessible in a general manner, or didn't address contextualization much beyond knowledge of the local area. It was not a large part of their expressed imaginary for this small group. A larger group of seven church plants spoke of contextualizing their church activities. This group of missionaries had considered their context, location, and the culture around them and sought to shape church ministry to that context. This included intentional thought processes resulting in modified practices of church including how and where they held church services, the components, size, and focus of content for those services, the communication styles, and the specific engagement with community needs. This group of church plants showed that contextualization is part of their imaginary. The last group of seven church plants not only included the previous intentionality to contextualize but carried this further. Rather than starting with traditional church forms and making adaptations, these missionaries worked as much as possible from the context to shape their church plants. While no church planter can entirely get rid of their assumptions and inherited forms, these missionaries expressed and demonstrated a substantial amount of creativity, energy, and willingness to contextualize. Some of these missionaries spent considerable time in listening to and observing their context before beginning ministry activity. They demonstrated flexibility in having non-traditional forms of church or multiple types of gatherings to suit different situations. Participants in this group meaningfully shaped their expectations of church around their setting. Considering their context was an important aspect of the imaginary for their ministry.

A clear part of the imaginary is that the church is rooted and connected in a particular place. The importance of place is discussed in missional literature like *The New Parish* by Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, and *Parish*, by Andrew Rumsey.⁹¹⁷ In the literature, knowing both a place and its people is considered

⁹¹⁵ Murray, *Changing Mission : Learning from the Newer Churches*. Drane, *The Mcdonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church*. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*.

⁹¹⁶ Sine. Moynagh, *Church for Every Context : An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. Rusaw and Swanson. Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*.

⁹¹⁷ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen. Andrew Rumsey, *Parish : An Anglican Theology of Place* (London: SCM Press, an imprint of Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2017).

by authors Doug Gay, Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren.⁹¹⁸ Few participants spoke of either Christendom or the change in the position of the church in culture. The implications of a post-Christendom culture did not feature as a significant part of the articulated theological imaginary. While this is a more specialized area within the literature, numerous authors deal with the need to contextualize due to the change in position of the church relative to culture, or in a post-Christendom context. These authors include Stuart Murray, Douglas John Hall, Stephen Paas, and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch.⁹¹⁹

Some authors discuss the need for contextualization in theological terms or connected to theological ideas. Jones considers the need to contextualize so that the gospel message is expressed in a way that overcomes the sacred and secular divide and is holistic.⁹²⁰ Ward speaks of the implications of *perichoresis* within the Trinity and contextualization.⁹²¹ *Mission-shaped Church* speaks of the missional nature of the church, the incarnation, the work of the Spirit in the context of new church work and contextualization.⁹²² Kester Brewin writes about the process of change for the church in culture, reflecting on advent and incarnation.⁹²³ Within the area of contextualization, these theological themes were not largely articulated by missionaries interviewed.

The imaginary to contextualize amongst missionaries was often spoken of in terms of mission. Church planters imagined their church ministries to be *relevant, accessible, and connect*. Relevant, accessible and connect were three terms used by 10 missionaries to express a desire for their new church work to be appropriate and fitted to the context in such a way that reduced and removed barriers to people finding the church and finding faith. The purpose of knowing the culture, place, and people was for the sake of mission, for helping people connect with God – an expression of the *missio Dei*. This strand of the theological imaginary came through frequently with most missionaries. Some missionaries used terms like reach people, take the gospel, draw people to God, and develop

⁹¹⁸ Gay, Roxburgh and Boren.

⁹¹⁹ Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World. Church after Christendom*. Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Paas, "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences." Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*.

⁹²⁰ Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*.

⁹²¹ Ward, *Liquid Church*.

⁹²² Cray et al.

⁹²³ Brewin.

organic Christian community. The vision expressed in the theological imaginary is that of contextualization for the core purpose of mission. Contextualization is primarily spoken of in missiological terms rather than theological terms. Some missional authors speak of contextualization in theological terms as above, but missional authors frequently communicate contextualization in missiological terms. The need for contextualization for a changing culture, particularly for postmodernity, for the purpose of mission is a strong theme in the literature. Authors that look at this in depth include Pete Ward, Robert Webber, Stanley Grenz, Robert Greer, Tony Jones, and Brian McLaren.⁹²⁴ Missional authors discuss the need for the church to always be contextual, to be shaped and formed in every context so that the church is an appropriate witness and is effective in being the church for that cultural context.

The imaginary in relationship to contextualization is one primarily driven by a missional impulse. Relevance and accessibility, local knowledge and creativity all are channelled towards making connections for culturally appropriate outreach and forms of church. There was a range of contextualization displayed by participants, from more surface elements like using popular music and having all age services to deeper restructuring of the entire form of church for its cultural context. All missionaries spoke of contextualization in some way, but most voiced at least a desire to engage in culturally relevant ways. Some missionaries were passionate and dedicated to this aspect in their vision of church. Many participants expected church to be meaningfully shaped by engagement with both local and wider culture. Missionaries were guided by an image of a church fit for purpose in their context. The imaginary of contextualization is one theologically driven from mission – an overarching desire for the church and the gospel to be heard and experienced in ways which meaningfully connect with people. This included a willingness for some to go not only to the other, but to the cultural shape of the other. The drive for missional contextualization generated creativity and pioneering of new things. A substantial portion of those interviewed had the expectation that mission to their context would require creativity and innovation. Contextualization in the theological imaginary is strongly motivated

⁹²⁴ Ward, *Liquid Church*. Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals : Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002). Jones, *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*. Greer. Grenz.

by a vision of the church which is appropriately shaped for the local and wider culture so that effective mission can flow outward and draw people inward.

5.4 The *Missio Dei* in the Theological Imaginary

Different aspects of the *missio Dei* were cited 123 times in all 18 interviews. *Missio Dei* as a whole theme communicates the church sent to join in God's mission to restore all of creation. This theme breaks into several sub-themes which together convey the *missio Dei*. Sub-themes for participating in the *missio Dei* include:

Participating in the *missio Dei*

- mission as being a witness in the world
- the essential nature of the church as sent
- mission as emerging from God's activity and agency
- mission as restoring all of creation

The most significant sub-theme within *missio Dei* is that of mission as being a witness in the world, in 17 of the 18 interviews with 62 of the 123 total theme instances. It is a clear and critical part of the theological imaginary for most missionaries. Some participants spoke almost exclusively around the idea of seeing those who do not know God being reached with the gospel message. For these missionaries, it seemed to express a core of what mission in the church was about. Reaching the unreached was a central focus of ministry activities and vision. Phrases which run through the data include: reaching the unreached, reaching out, make disciples, and seeing people come to Jesus or to faith. For half of the 18 missionaries who had some comment within *missio Dei*, there was a clear focus on being sent so as to see people brought to faith. For four missionaries, this was almost the entire focus when discussing their church planting. Sent out in witness for these four was their primary expression of *missio Dei*.

As was mentioned in the data write up in Chapter 4, it could be said that this narrow focus is a reduced expression of *missio Dei*. Some factors mitigate against this. Of these four who primarily expressed being a witness, one spoke of their church planting activities in holistic terms where mission is restoring all of creation. Another one had clear evidence of it in their ministry activities under the theme of kingdom transformation. Two missionaries had what might be considered a reductionist, narrow focus within the *missio Dei* theme based on their interview

data. These two focused almost solely on outreach for bringing people to faith and did not in speech or ministry activities evidence in the interviews a strong sense of holistic ministry or kingdom transformation. Other missionaries who spoke passionately about reaching the unreached also evidenced a fuller expression of *missio Dei* within other sub-themes.

The essential nature of the church as sent is the second sub-theme evidenced by 16 missionaries with 38 references. They used terms like going together on mission, taking church to them, going to, go and make disciples, and sent on mission together. Ten of 16 participants used explicitly directional language (go or sent) while others noted they were joining or on mission or engaging in mission. Most missionaries expressed some sentiment of being sent or going, and the majority of missionaries conveyed that this was a fundamental part of the purpose of the church, or its essential nature. Participants noted the church existed to go out, were called to go, and that mission is all the time and everywhere. These missionaries' comments communicated the essential nature of the church as sent, where others just spoke in more general terms about outreach or being sent. The "being sent" aspect came through clearly in the theological imaginary and the "essential nature" aspect was present with most participants.

Mission as emerging from God's agency and activity is a more nuanced aspect of the imaginary, expressed by 12 participants. Similar to the essential nature of the church as sent, some missionaries spoke in general terms about God's activity in the world with phrases like 'seeing where God is at work and joining him' or 'being sensitive to what God is doing.' It still expresses the agency of God, which is part of this *missio Dei* sub-theme – that God is missionally active in the world. Some participants expressed mission as God's responsibility – again pointing to God's agency before human agency. This is where the very nuanced aspect of this theme comes through – that mission originates with God. Assignment of comments to this sub-theme might be considered generous for five participants where missionaries spoke of seeing God at work. Comments from seven missionaries were directed to joining God in his mission or work, or mission was God's responsibility – more clearly defining God's agency. Only one missionary spoke of God being a missionary God, without further comment. Most missionaries' theological imaginary understands God is at work in the world, and mission is joining him, both emphasizing God's agency in the world. There was little clear articulation that mission originates from God's nature and instigation.

Lastly, the sub-theme of mission as restoring all of God's creation was the least represented in 3 comments by 3 participants. These mentioned God was at work in all spheres of the world, and mission is expressed in all areas of the world. While this theme was not spoken of in words frequently, I believe it is a more expressed aspect of the theological imaginary when missionaries' actions are taken into consideration. As is demonstrated in themes both in community as active in a location, in kingdom transformation which is serving society, and transforming every area of society, many missionaries were very active in a wide variety of ministry to all areas of society. Thirteen church plants showed activity which engaged in a diversity of contexts, from engagement with the arts, social enterprise, care for those with substance abuse, foodbank, running a café, groups for every age span, dementia support groups, and environmental efforts. Most missionaries did not articulate mission as restoring all of creation, but there is evidence of engagement in mission to all creation. Even if it is a stronger sub-theme than indicated by comments, that activity was not expressly tied theologically to God's purpose in restoring all creation. This aspect of the *missio Dei* appears to not strongly motivate missionaries.

Participating in the *Missio Dei* is a consistent theme seen in missional and emerging church literature. Missional authors speak of this both from a biblical overview and in considering the implications of *missio Dei* as the motivation for mission in the church. The overall theme of *missio Dei* is seen in core books like *The Mission of God* by Christopher Wright, *What is Mission?* by Andrew Kirk, and in works by Craig Van Gelder and Darrell Guder.⁹²⁵ A central conviction of *missio Dei* is that mission is derived from the very nature of God and from God's purposes to restore all creation. Mission is something God initiates and continues in the world, which the church joins. These core elements of the *mission Dei* are a part of the theological imaginary for some but not all missionaries. *Missio Dei* in the literature emphasizes a shift in agency from the church to God as the originator of mission – a subtle but important shift of mission from church-centred to God-centred. God's activity and joining him are discussed by participants but linking this to God's missional nature and agency is not a significant aspect in imaginary of missionaries.

⁹²⁵ Wright, *The Mission of God : Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations*. Van Gelder. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*. Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*.

A much more expressed aspect of *missio Dei* for missionaries was the church being sent. It was a key part of their theological imaginary – they are sent into the world. *The Essence of the Church* by Craig Van Gelder and *Introducing the Missional Church* by Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren are just two examples of texts which focus on the nature of the church as sent on mission.⁹²⁶ The outward impulse is often in the literature contrasted with an attractional, “come to us” understanding which is discussed of existing, inherited churches as seen in Frost and Hirsch’s *The Shaping of Things to Come* and Gibbs and Coffey’s *Church Next*.⁹²⁷ Being sent was a part of the imaginary, but was not, on the whole, discussed as theologically rooted in God’s nature.

Mission as being a witness in the world is particularly discussed in missional literature in authors such as Neil Cole, *Search and Rescue* and *Organic Church*, and in Milfred Minatrea *Shaped by God’s Heart*.⁹²⁸ Some within missional and emerging church literature have critiqued the emphasis of the church on individual salvation to the exclusion of a more holistic gospel. Scot McKnight examines this in *Kingdom Conspiracy*; Jim Belcher tackles this in *Deep Church*.⁹²⁹ Going out to be a witness is an important part of the theological imaginary of church planters. While this is a strong emphasis with many missionaries, only two might be considered from their interviews to have a reduced expression of the *missio Dei* focused almost exclusively on individual salvation. Other missionaries expressed a wider, holistic expression of mission along with the emphasis on reaching the unreached, which for some seemed to be a summative phrase for mission generally.

Mission as restoring all creation is a significant theme in the literature, describing God’s mission as all-encompassing. In addition to core *missio Dei* texts noted above, one can see this theme discussed in texts like Alan Roxburgh’s *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* and Martin Robinson and Dwight Smith’s *Invading Secular Space*.⁹³⁰ *Missio Dei* and the arenas of God’s redemption can be found in J. Andrew Kirk’s book *What is Mission?*⁹³¹

⁹²⁶ Van Gelder. Roxburgh and Boren.

⁹²⁷ See for instance Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Gibbs and Coffey.

⁹²⁸ Neil Cole, *Search & Rescue: Becoming a Disciple Who Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Bks, 2008). *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. Minatrea.

⁹²⁹ McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy : Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*.

"What Is the Emerging Church?." Belcher.

⁹³⁰ Roxburgh, *Missional : Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Robinson and Smith.

⁹³¹ Kirk, *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations*.

Whilst this is the least expressed in words, participants evidenced this in actions. With 13 of 18 church plants showing ministry activity which engaged in a wide variety of arenas of life, some element of this comes through for a majority in their theological imaginary. It is not strongly linked with the theology of God's redemption of all creation.

The theme of *missio Dei* is one at the heart of all mission – the church sent to join God in God's mission to restore all creation. *Missio Dei* is a central theme in the missional literature, but it is also, in a sense, supportive of all other themes. *Missio Dei* is clearly demonstrated as central to the theological imaginary of missionaries, but it is not expressed in its theological fullness. Some aspects of *missio Dei* are not widely evidenced, while other aspects are evidenced but not connected to the theological reasoning behind it. Participants had a passion to go out in witness in order to see people come in to relationship with God and a significant understanding of the church being sent on mission but generally did not tie this to either God's missional nature or the essential nature of the church. Some recognized themselves as joining God's activity in the world.

5.5 Kingdom Transformation in the Theological Imaginary

Church planters are active in seeking transformation of society through living out the kingdom of God. This theme is referenced 62 times in 16 of 18 interviews. It is the fourth largest theme, but is significantly smaller than the preceding three themes. Sub-themes include:

Seeking kingdom transformation in society

- church as having an activist faith which is serving society
- eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now
- transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide)

The most communicated aspect of seeking transformation in society is the church having an activist faith which is serving society with 44 of 62 comments. Nearly all participants both spoke of and showed in their activity a desire for their communities to be transformed by God's work through the church. Missioners wanted their churches to be influential in individuals' lives and the collective life of their community. Nearly every interview either spoke of or demonstrated an intentionally active community. Faith was something to be lived out, serving in

such a way that it made a difference. Missioners wanted to see change and made effort towards that end. They acted on their vision for kingdom transformation in their location with energy and planning. A wide variety of activities are seen in the ministry of these church plants. Missioners sought out partnerships with community groups to serve in their locations towards seeing societal change. Missioners expected their churches to be actively involved in activities which served to transform society.

Whilst many missioners were very active in ways which transformed communities, it is harder to discern the motivation or theological reasoning tied to all this activity. Some missioners noted they wanted to serve, to give back to the community, meet practical needs, see wholeness, and to have impact. This desire may be deeply felt, but these participants did not reveal or explicitly make a connection to a motivation beyond serving these goods for society. The language to articulate this sought after transformation was presented as fairly self-explanatory. Some participants said they wanted to see people get a glimpse of the kingdom, transform life into the fullness of the kingdom, bring the kingdom now, demonstrate God's compassion, and see Jesus transform every area of life. These missioners articulated the connection between their activities in transformation and a deeper theological motivation. Transforming lives and communities fires the imagination, but in only some cases is it clearly connected to seeing the kingdom lived out. In some instances, the activity is linked to outreach and making connections, expressing something of the *missio Dei*. In others, it is activity towards building community. The theological imaginary powering missioners towards transformative activity appears to be spread over a variety of theological motivations including kingdom transformation, participation in the *missio Dei*, and building community.

Eschatology forms a part of the theme kingdom transformation. Although six participants had 11 comments, three of the participants in 2 interviews discussed this much more than others. For these three missioners, living out the kingdom in the tension of the now and not yet was integral to their theological imaginaries. They wanted to see the kingdom come on earth here and now. Other missioners described wanting to see the fullness or depth of the kingdom, to proclaim /announce the kingdom, or to bring the kingdom, connecting ministry activity to wanting to enable the kingdom of God to be present now. Anticipating

and living out the kingdom was part of the theological imaginary for a third of missionaries.

The least reference sub-theme is church as involved in transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide). Seven missionaries had seven comments in this field. Participants here wanted to see the ways of God's kingdom lived out and impacting every area of society. These seven discussed seeking wide, diverse involvement in many parts of culture in a way that connected faith to everyday life. Several theological motivations were articulated, including: God's creation of everything, the depth of the kingdom of God, and applying faith to everyday life. One missionary explicitly spoke of how the church can influence every area of society and bring the kingdom to the whole earth. While only one-third of participants *spoke* of transforming all areas of life, most church plants *demonstrated* a wide variety of activities in every area of society as was discussed above. They did not often speak about *why* they were widely involved or offer a rationale for that diverse service in society. The parenthetical shorthand for this sub-theme is overcoming the sacred/secular divide. There were no comments particularly directed towards overcoming the division of life into the sacred and the secular. Mission activity for most participants flows in to all parts of life, but they did not indicate a motivation of engaging in a whole life spirituality *over against* the fragmentation of the world into sacred faith and secular culture. Overcoming the sacred and secular divide was not articulated as part of the theological imaginary. An image of church which transforms in many areas of society connected to seeing God's kingdom was an expressed part of the imaginary for about one third of missionaries.

Missional literature speaks to the need for the expression of an activist faith which transforms society. Examples include author Michael Moynagh speaking about an activist faith community, as do Chester and Timmis in *Everyday Church* and Halter and Smay in *The Tangible Kingdom*.⁹³² Church communities are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of life, towards engaging and connecting with culture to demonstrate what faith looks like. Brian McLaren's *Everything Must Change* and Shane Claiborne's *The Irresistible Revolution* speaks to the need for faith to engage with the problems of today, and

⁹³² Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*. *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communications on Mission*. Halter and Smay.

thus transform all society.⁹³³ This engaged, active church intentionally seeking to transform society is clearly reflected in the theological imaginary of participants.

Other authors like Graham Cray and John Hull make the case that societal change emerges from the activity and overflow of a faith community focused on bringing the kingdom now as an anticipation of the future kingdom.⁹³⁴ Missional authors bring together the active community living out the kingdom and a deeper eschatological theology. Scot McKnight in *The Jesus Creed and Kingdom Conspiracy* contends that both church and kingdom are eschatological – both present and future.⁹³⁵ Eschatology amongst missional churches is also highlighted by Kevin Corcoran and James Bielo.⁹³⁶ Not all participants expressed their theological imaginary in terms of the kingdom now and not yet, but one third referenced their desires for ministry activity to enabling the kingdom to be present. It was an expressed part of some missionaries theological imaginary.

A church which is involved in every area of society with an emphasis on overcoming the sacred/secular divide is a subject of missional literature. *Emerging Churches* by Gibbs and Bolger discusses transforming secular space and overcoming the sacred/secular divide.⁹³⁷ This is also a topic considered in *Slow Church* by Smith and Pattison and *The Shaping of Things to Come* by Frost and Hirsch.⁹³⁸ The division of life into sacred and secular in a dualistic manner is sometimes located in modernity, or understood as an implication of the Christendom era as in works by Stuart Murray.⁹³⁹ Moving beyond this division helps the church to have a holistic expression of faith. A minority of missionaries spoke of this kind of holistic theological motivation and of seeing the kingdom but they did not speak to specifically overcoming a sacred/secular divide. Transforming every area of society is a part of the theological imaginary for a third of missionaries, with a variety of theological or practical motives described.

⁹³³ McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution* (Zondervan, 2006).

⁹³⁴ Cray, Mobsby, and Kennedy. Croft. Pages 114-132. Hull in Chapter “Mission-shaped and kingdom focused?”

⁹³⁵ McKnight, *The Jesus Creed : Loving God, Loving Others. Kingdom Conspiracy : Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*.

⁹³⁶ McKnight et al. Bielo.

⁹³⁷ Gibbs and Bolger.

⁹³⁸ Smith and Wilson-Hartgrove. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*.

⁹³⁹ See also Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World. Church after Christendom*.

Seeking kingdom transformation in society is a strong characteristic of the theological imaginary of church planters, particularly around actively serving their communities. Most missionaries spoke of and acted out an expression of faith which extended to the lives and communities around them. They expected their churches to be involved in changing lives and worked toward that end. The image of kingdom transformation motivated some missionaries, while other motivations like outreach and building community surfaced for their widely active churches. Some missionaries clearly wanted to see the kingdom come here and now with an eschatological vision of ministry. Participants evidenced a wide variety of transforming activities in many areas of life, but only some articulated a vision for why they were applying faith to all parts of society. No missionary verbalized being energized by overcoming the sacred/secular divide, but some spoke of theological rationales for wide involvement.

5.6 Being Incarnational in the Theological Imaginary

The fifth theme centres around being incarnational in mission. A focus on the incarnation and mission threads through missional literature. Sub-themes within being incarnational in mission are:

Being incarnational in mission

- the incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus
- the incarnation models mission
- the church embodies and represents God to others

The total number of references within this theme is 51, within 10 interviews. The data did not fall evenly, with 3 particular interviews yielding the majority of data and the rest spread unevenly over 7 other interviews. Within these three sub-themes, the majority of comments came under a renewed focus on the person of Jesus, with 30 of the 51 total incidents. Five participants in three interviews generated the majority of comments on a renewed focus on Jesus. For some participants this simply expressed the priority for a focus on Jesus with their congregations, with an internal emphasis. Missionaries wanted their new church works to be centred on Jesus. This was an image which shapes their expectation of church. It is a hope they have for their ministries. Three participants particularly focused on this, using terms including: follow Jesus, devotion to Jesus, Jesus-centred, and keep a focus on Jesus. Other missionaries spoke of having

transformative encounters with Jesus which motivated their new church work and which they wanted to see in their church plants. This somewhat internal focus on Jesus came through for half of missionaries, some more strongly than others.

The focus on Jesus is both inward and outward. There is a great desire for missionaries to share Jesus widely. The focus remains on the person of Jesus, but the direction is Jesus for others. They want people to meet, follow, give their lives to, or find Jesus. This focus on connecting people to the person of Jesus came through in six interviews, for some quite passionately. All Christian faith by definition has Jesus Christ at the centre of belief, so in some ways it is not unexpected that the person of Jesus would be a focus. Nor is it a surprise that missionaries wanted others to come to know who Jesus is. This aspect of a renewed focus on Jesus is strongly linked with the *missio Dei* aspect of being a witness in the world, where terms include: reach the unreached, see people come to faith, make disciples, seek the lost. A focus on Jesus is not explicit there, but could be understood. The combined *missio Dei* aspect of “reaching the unreached” and an outwardly directed focus on Jesus has significance in the theological imaginary.

The second sub-theme is the incarnation models mission, with nine missionaries making 13 comments. This sub-theme hits much more at the heart of the implications of the incarnation of Jesus for mission. Only two missionaries used the term “incarnational” in relation to a model for mission – speaking of wanting to be incarnational in their communities. One missionary did not use the term incarnational but describe the theology of the incarnation more explicitly than anyone else. This was clearly a part of this participant’s imaginary and was worked out in detail in their ministry. Other missionaries described how Jesus was a model for their ministry in different ways: in following Jesus’ example, surrendering to his agenda, to doing what he did in mission or discipleship. Some highlighted Jesus’ example in being sent or going, or how Jesus made disciples. They did not speak specifically of the whole of the incarnation, but some aspects of it like being sent to earth. For almost half of missionaries it was the person of Jesus in the incarnation who models mission and inspires their imaginary in ministry.

Few missionaries explicitly spoke of the incarnation as an embodied representation of God to others. Only 6 people made 8 statements related to this sub-theme. This was communicated as being the presence of God in a place or

being Jesus' hands and feet. Some communicated this in more explicit theological terms: one missionary spoke of being an overflow of the Trinity, and one other missionary spoke of reflecting the triune God. One participant described in more detailed terms from John 1 dwelling and being the presence of God among people. This was a clearly articulated aspect of this smaller portion of participants' theological imaginary but the limited expression indicates it was not a large part of what inspires ministry.

Missional literature not only looks at the incarnation, but the relevance of the incarnation for mission to a Western, postmodern, post Christian culture. Some missional literature is detailed, nuanced, and deeply reflective on this theological theme. The sub-theme expressed by missionaries of a renewed focus on the person of Jesus is in some ways the least specific about the incarnation itself. However, similar themes arise in missional and emerging church literature and best fits within the overall theme of the incarnation. The renewed focus on Jesus within the missional literature includes a focus on the historical person of Jesus, and a personal faith relationship with him. The renewed focus on Jesus is one of the three core themes in *Emerging Churches* by Gibbs and Bolger.⁹⁴⁰ Author Ray Anderson speaks of the importance for the emerging missional church of a personal relationship with Jesus, beyond creedal doctrinal beliefs and the work of Scot McKnight focuses strongly on Jesus.⁹⁴¹ Missional authors Frost and Hirsch's *ReJesus* focuses a passionate look at the person of Jesus, as does George Barna's *Revolution*.⁹⁴² Half of participants interviewed shared a similar theological imaginary around the importance and focus on the person of Jesus as is conveyed in the missional literature.

Texts written by missional authors also go into depth about the theology of the incarnation and implications for the church in ministry. Two books covering the incarnation as God identifies with a specific time and place as the embodied representation of God are *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness* by Darrell Guder and *Missional God, Missional Church* by Ross Hastings.⁹⁴³ Both books have extensive content teasing out incarnational theology for the contemporary church in mission. Sparks, Sorens, and Friesen speak at length about the incarnation as modelling the church sent to identify with specific, located

⁹⁴⁰ Gibbs and Bolger.

⁹⁴¹ Anderson. McKnight, *The Jesus Creed : Loving God, Loving Others*.

⁹⁴² Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus : A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*.

⁹⁴³ Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*. Hastings.

people.⁹⁴⁴ Pete Ward's *Liquid Church* discussion of perichoresis, or mutual participation, describes the relationships within the Trinity, which sets the pattern for corporate life in the church.⁹⁴⁵ Darrell Guder also explores the church as reflecting and embodying God to others in *Called to Witness*.⁹⁴⁶

There is a great deal of theological content in missional literature about being incarnational in mission. It covers a wide range of topics. Authors consider implications for the church in the local embodiment of the divine with Jesus in the human image of God. The incarnation speaks to identification in a specific time and place. The incarnation is discussed in terms of the church being sent. The incarnation has many implications as a model for mission – the way in which Jesus came and the message which he taught and enacted. The implications of the incarnation overlaps with other themes. The incarnation speaks to contextualization and to kingdom transformation in holistic mission. Not only is the person of Jesus lifted up as an example but the incarnation as a whole is discussed at length in the literature. Missioners on the whole did not speak to the same depth and degree about being incarnational in mission as is spoken of in the literature. For half of missioners Jesus is spoken of as a model to follow, the centre of their faith community, and the one they wish to bring others into relationship with. Five missioners articulated nothing in the category of being incarnational in mission, seven missioners had only one comment in the category, and one missioner had two comments. Taken together, of the 21 participants, 13 had minimal comments about being incarnational – nearly two-thirds of missioners interviewed. Eight participants, approximately one-third, spoke of the importance of Jesus, how Jesus models mission, and models an embodied representation of God. The incarnation within the theological imaginary of missioners was less communicated than other themes. Some of its articulation was focused on the person of Jesus rather than the incarnation itself. Jesus' life and example is an important aspect of how half of participants imagine their ministry, but it does not evidence as a strong part of the theological imaginary underlying expectations and guiding practice for most missioners.

⁹⁴⁴ Sparks, Sorens, and Friesen.

⁹⁴⁵ Ward, *Liquid Church*. Page 54.

⁹⁴⁶ Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*.

5.7 Portrait of the Theological Imaginary

Bringing the threads together of an integrated portrait of the theological imaginary of missionaries in this research is important to give a sense of the overall themes present and absent, and note how themes tied together. This research seeks to present the ideas which guide ecclesial life in new church work in the UK across a wide range of church streams. While it is recognized other elements contribute to the totality of how missionaries conduct ministry, it is hoped that missionaries' responses reflect their strongest ideas, the hopes and images for the church which immediately come to mind and thus reflect their imaginary to a significant degree. This section gives a composite picture of the imaginary from their own words and concepts, grounded in their particular contexts. It is a depiction of the images, particularly theological images, which fire the imagination for engagement in mission. This portrait of the themes present is then compared to those themes in the missional literature to discern which themes are functional or overlooked in the imaginary of practitioners.

5.7.1 Themes Present and Absent in the Theological Imaginary

Some strong, consistent elements came through in the theological imaginary of participants. Missioners hope to see deeply caring, purposeful relationships both within their churches and reaching outwards into their wider communities. They prioritize energy and activity towards that end. They imagine church to be visible, witnessing, and active bodies which are sensitive to their locality, sent out in mission. There is an expectation that church will impact the lives of individuals and communities as they intentionally serve in a wide variety of ways. There is a deep desire to see people come into relationship with God. Missioners want their churches to be relevant and accessible: meaningfully shaped to be an effective witness to God's presence in the world. Some participants are acutely aware of the context of their ministry and envision a church which is significantly responsive to that context. Many missioners bring creativity and innovation to their churches, as might be expected of those engaging in pioneering church work. Some missioners are motivated by seeing the kingdom expressed here and now, others by forming authentic communities which are sent to reach the unreached.

It is a particular focus of this research to seek the *theological* imaginary of missionaries. I have sought to get at the theological concepts which inspire, the expectations and images around what the church can be and should be as church planters shape their new church works. What theological hopes guide their practices and desires for church in today's context? Missioners have a strong aspiration for the church to be a biblical family – connected by common faith in Jesus and service to him in the world. This desire for a quality of spiritual communal life is notably beyond gathering for an event for a couple of hours on a Sunday. It is a community doing life together, being disciples together, but not just to have a loving church family for its own sake. The church body is to be going on mission – seeing people brought into relationship with God and seeing God's kingdom transformation spread through lives and communities. In order to see people connect with God's good news, become a part of the family of God, and experience his ways, missioners will listen to their context and adapt, seeking to be an accessible, appropriate witness in their setting.

Mission undergirds the theological imaginary. Contextualization for participants serves the missional purposes of connecting others to faith. Involvement in service to society and seeking kingdom transformation is both an expression of a lived out faith and a witnessing demonstration to the wider world what God's kingdom is like. Community life is both an expression of being the people of God and carrier of the good news into the world. A relationship with Jesus focuses the community on a vital faith relationship and compels the community outward to draw others into the same faith. Participants consistently spoke of and demonstrated being sent out to draw people into contact with the church and a relationship with God. To a large degree, their formation of community, contextualization of church, and activist faith in many areas of society are driven from the foundational understanding that their relationship with God through Jesus compels them into mission.

One purpose of this research is to compare the results from the missionaries' data to the theological themes seen in the missional church literature. Is the theological imaginary of practitioners reflective of the theological themes evidenced in the literature? What themes are present and what themes are absent between the theoretical, academic works of missional authors and the experiential, observed world in the lived imaginary of participants? As has been seen above, each of the five overall themes highlighted in the missional literature

is seen in the imaginary of missionaries. However, there are noteworthy differences in which features of these theological themes are expressed or not expressed. In important ways (in some themes more than others) the theological content of the themes found in the missional literature is not articulated by participants.

Missional literature highlights the importance of a community of people who do life together. The importance of being a community is clearly key for missionaries. Missioners want a community which exhibits qualities of connection and love, active in serving its wider specific community. They are guided by a vision of a missional community, sent together from an authentic sense of a people of God on mission. The literature highlights these themes, but further connects them to deeper theological rationales not frequently indicated by participants. The literature emphasizes this spiritual, embodied presence of God which is a witness to the world. The community by its life together can be a demonstration of the gospel, a contrast community. The church together expresses the very divine nature of the relational, Triune God. There was limited expression of any aspect of a community which demonstrates the gospel as a contrast community or embodies and represents God to others. These rich theological concepts can be a source for the character of community life and expand the theological imaginary inspiring communities. Missioners did not clearly express an understanding of the nature and character of the church emerging from and expressing to others the Triune God. There is a strong drive for the missionaries' churches to be witnessing communities, but only half of missionaries communicated in some way that the community itself was called to be a living witness which displayed the gospel message. Both the church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel and the church as representing God to others are theological themes not taken up significantly by participants.

Participants communicated a vision for their churches characterized by service and activity in their wider community to see kingdom transformation rooted in their locations. Missioners imagine churches which are locally active and engaged in serving. This was strongly evidenced within the participants' communities. Missional literature also discusses these themes: church communities which are active in serving, being visible witnesses to God's kingdom ways, expressing the life of faith in the everyday. It is a visible community which is active in witness in normal life, not shut behind the doors of

a church building. However, missional literature also discusses the church living life together which is eschatologically oriented – living out the kingdom of God here and now. The vision or motivation for active, locally connected service in society is an eschatological one – seeing God’s kingdom come on earth now as it will one day be completed in the new creation. This broadening of the vision to transform life now with a forward view of the Parousia is one which missionaries did not speak to frequently. For some the motivation to transforming activity is one of mission connection or community (building relationships with those outside the church and connecting to the local community) but only a few missionaries spoke of seeing the kingdom enacted now.

The eschatological vision addressed in missional literature also carries with it a picture of holistic restoration of all creation. Holistic mission can be inspired by both theological themes which speak of God’s purpose to completely restore all things to himself in the *missio Dei* context and which speak to seeing the kingdom come now. The understanding of God’s purposes in restoring every area of society empowers and envisions the church to be doing the same. Mission as restoring all of creation and the church as involved in transforming every area of society were both very small sub-themes for missionaries. Although there is greater evidence of wide involvement within participants’ churches, very few connected that involvement to God’s all-encompassing restoration for the world. Similarly, although there was evidence of wide activity, few missionaries spoke to God’s full involvement in all of creation, or of overcoming the sacred/secular divide. Seeing all of life as integrated, as sacred and lived out with and before God, is a theological resource in the literature not evidenced with missionaries.

Missionaries envisioned their churches as sent. It was a significant aspect of the theological imaginary for their churches to be sent out to bring people in to God. There was a distinct emphasis on being sent to reach the unreached. Missionaries want to see people come to know God. They envision the church sent and going out into their communities to serve. Being sent and going out is integral to the theological imaginaries of missionaries. Missional literature supports these ideas. Much of the literature addresses the importance for the church in the current context to be going out, rather than relying solely on a Christendom model of drawing people in. Many missionaries see being sent out in mission as a primary calling for the church. They understand being sent as a fundamental character

trait of the church, which is very consistent with the missional literature around *missio Dei*.

A view of the church articulated in missional literature is the church sent by God as part of its essential nature, rooted in God's character and God's purpose. The emphasis is on the *essential nature* of the church as a body which is sent, derived from the core of who God is and what God is doing. Many missionaries expressed the church as sent, but almost no missionaries referenced this in relation to either God's character or as originating in God's purposes. Most participants conveyed being sent to make relationships, to reach the unreached, to make disciples, or to go on mission. Missioners clearly understood "sent" as a core purpose for the church. Only one missionary articulated the reason for this as connected to God's missionary nature. Missional literature discusses the agency of God in relation to the church's mission. The literature makes the clear connection between the church going in mission as originating in God's very nature as missional. The church is sent as a result of God's initiative, of God's agency. Some missionaries spoke generally of seeing God at work or joining God, but most did not communicate mission as emerging from God's nature, purpose, or initiative. Starting theologically with God's nature and with God's purpose in the world grounds the church in the missional Trinity. From that base, the church is sent out to join God already at work in the world. These insightful aspects of the *missio Dei* are largely absent in the imaginaries of missionaries. Connecting missional behaviour to deeper theological concepts can resource the church in mission.

The need to contextualize is a significant feature of the imaginary for participants. Contextualization for participants is primarily driven from a missiological perspective, which is also considered in the literature. Church planters are particularly sensitive to their locality. They exercised creativity and energy to make connections locally and form church practice in ways which are relevant and accessible. Missional authors speak at length about meaningfully shaping mission and communal life for a contextually appropriate witness. Much of missional literature discusses the need for the church to be sensitive to the surrounding culture and seek ways to meaningfully connect the gospel message to those in one's community. Contextualizing for the local setting was a part of the imaginary for all missionaries, while contextualizing for the wider changing culture was only present for half of participants. Considering the broader cultural

changes which might be called postmodernity was not articulated by many missionaries, but is a significant topic in missional literature. Post-Christendom is a slightly more specialist area of contextualization but still threads through missional literature. Authors consider the ongoing effects of Christendom on the church today. Very few of those interviewed expressed any awareness of the need to contextualize for the change in the church's position in society, or post-Christendom. Missional literature has much to offer the church in Western culture on changes to wider culture and changes to the position of the church in culture, which appears not to be taken up by practitioners.

Contextualization is also discussed in missional literature theologically, primarily from consideration of the incarnation. Being incarnational in mission was the least expressed theme for missionaries. The bulk of comments came from the sub-theme of the incarnational church and a renewed focus on the person of Jesus. Missional literature also addresses this topic. Half of missionaries interviewed articulated a theological imaginary communicating the centrality of the person of Jesus for faith and mission today. Within the missional literature, there is substantial consideration given to the incarnation and its implications for mission. There is nuanced reflection in the literature on the incarnation as a model for mission. It considers how the church comes to specific times, places and cultures. The incarnation speaks to how the church demonstrates the character of God in its own life. Authors consider how the incarnation models a church which is holistically engaged in mission. The incarnation speaks to the church sent out in mission. A few participants noted that Jesus provides a model of some aspect of mission. Few missionaries verbalized how the church embodies and represents God to others. The incarnation is a significant theme in missional literature, but there is limited evidence of it in the theological imaginary of missionaries, making it a theological resource not utilized well in mission.

5.7.2 Portrait of the Neglected Imaginary

Less expressed theological themes are a missing resource for the church. The themes seen above which are not highly functional for missionaries can be a means of inspiration for participation in mission. This section considers the theological images which are either absent or less expressed to give a potential portrait of the imaginary with those resources being more functional. Extrapolating the working of the neglected theological themes is in itself an act of

the imaginary, but informed by the literature and interviews. This serves to highlight the potential impact on the imaginary of the overlooked themes reflected in the research.

An imaginary founded on the Trinitarian God and his *missio Dei* brings a deep understanding of purpose for individuals and congregations. God has been and continues to be at work in the world. The church is not going out into mission in the absence of God's activity, but to join in God's already active Spirit at work towards his purposes in creation. This empowers the church in several ways. Individuals and churches can be encouraged to be outwardly focused and watch for God's activity – seeing where God might be at work and joining in expressions of God's kingdom ways. Agency shifts subtly from the church originating and acting – to the Triune God originating and acting in mission. Individuals and churches can confidently watch for God's Spirit at work. This shift in agency can call the church to be first in a posture of listening, to seek God's direction. It can help the church come to mission from a posture of reliance on God and humility rather than reliance on human energy and technique. For the church to begin from God's activity in the world is both empowering and freeing.

The church is not only commissioned to be on mission, it comes from its very nature in participation with God. Encouragement to engage in mission is not originated from outside ourselves, but from who the church is in Christ. The church on the individual and corporate level is missional in its very essence. The being and doing of the church is enabled and directed in God's being and doing. Churches can be guided by an expectation that the church's inner life overflows to its outer life, both sourced from its relationship and union with God. Missional church and missional activity is first about identity. Identity then affects all aspect of church life. "Mission" is not a "programme" but an integral aspect of the being of the church. How we understand the church in its nature then affects how we shape ecclesiology. If the church is a representation of God on earth participating with God's mission – what ways of being best serve those purposes in the present context? It shapes what the church does in its ministry, which then shapes how the church organizes its work. Within the *missio Dei*, a theology of mission is not solely drawn from ecclesiology, where mission belongs to the church, or solely in Christology which emphasizes human obedience to the Great Commission. A theology of mission for the church starts with God's very nature and his will to bring creation to new creation.

God's mission to bring creation into new creation inspires holistic participation in the world. Activity in every area of the world is not simply one of circumstances or opportunity but of joining God's full redemptive work. God is bringing all of creation under his Lordship, restoring his rule over the cosmos and humanity. *Missio Dei* extends into every aspect of creation where there is brokenness. The whole world is encompassed in God's mission: the environment, economics, education, medicine, systems of justice, leisure, art. Therefore, the church is sent to participate with the divine in the restoration of all things. The church can celebrate the diversity of where each member is called and how the diversity of the wider church engages in many areas of God's restoration. A vision for the breadth of God's restoration encourages believers to view all aspects of their world as the place to bring God's healing presence, filling daily life – at home, in work, in leisure, in volunteering – all with eternal value. An understanding of the breadth of God's work in the world fires the imagination of individuals and the church to discern purpose in daily life. It supports the view that every aspect of life is sacred. Whole life spirituality corrects a dualistic view of the world: what is natural verses supernatural; spiritual verses secular; public verses private, body verses mind and spirit. An imaginary with a robust *missio Dei* is an integrative one.

An active church serving society can be rooted in an eschatological vision for the kingdom of God being demonstrated in the life of the church. God's kingdom reign, beginning with Jesus' entry into human history, is seen in his redemptive power at work through the church. The church lives out and demonstrates in its own life the values and transforming power of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is not a construct of the church, but a gift to it. Believers and communities enter into it, experience it, and then are agents of the kingdom, offering it to others as a gift. In this way the church is a contrast community, a "one I made earlier," to show in embodied ways what God's kingdom is like. This vision enables the church to be bold in living according to kingdom ways, even when those flow against surrounding convention. A picture of the church as a sign and foretaste of the presence of God's kingdom is a powerful one, even recognizing the church will be a tentative and imperfect reflection of the kingdom. The church's existence shows the liberating work of God and invites others to consider that work. It is centripetal and centrifugal; it sends the church out and draws people in. An image of the kingdom helps the church to see beyond the

present to the hope of God's fully realized end, while leading the church to engagement in the present world. A full eschatology does not draw the people of God out of the world, but into the world. It fills the vision with the hope of God's coming and complete reign, which when turned towards a hurting world, moves individuals and churches to embody that hope in their communities.

The church as the representation of God on earth shifts the perspective of church from a place or a meeting to a community of being. It is a relational community as a reflection of God's relational nature seen in the Trinity. It is a community overflowing with God's abundant life. The life of the church formed by expressions of the life and fruit of the Spirit encounters the world, demonstrating something of the presence and power of God to transform. The church (imperfectly) mirrors God's nature as the Spirit shapes individuals and community life to reflect God's very being. A theological imaginary which sees individual and community formation as an expression of God's actual presence is a deep and inspiring calling for the church.

An understanding of the church representing the image of God flows naturally into considerations of the implications of the incarnation for the church. Reflection on the incarnation can nourish the theological imaginary. The coming of Jesus in God's redemptive work in and for the world summarizes not only the message of the church but has much to say to the methods of the church in mission. God's action in the incarnation speaks to God's sending nature. God himself came to earth in Jesus. The church is sent into the world as Jesus was sent from God. A missional life based on the example of Jesus in the incarnation is one which is holistic, faithful to the full purposes of God to restore creation. In sending Jesus to dwell in a specific time and place, the church sees an embodied witness. Being incarnational inspires the church to deeply identify with all people, crossing boundaries which otherwise divide. Jesus' incarnation moves the church to reflect on the congruence between the ways in which God revealed himself in the life of Jesus to the expression of that life in the church. This may bring up issues of inclusion, obedience, power, sacrifice, and proclamation. The incarnation speaks to contextualization. Being incarnational can inspire the church to dwell locally, seeking to enter and genuinely identify from within a specific context in ways the gospel can be understood. The church in mission can seek to understand the times and places in which it lives. Creativity paired with reflection on the shape of the surrounding culture can shape the church for

effective witness. An imaginary for the church in mission in contemporary Western culture can be stimulated by understanding the changing wider culture and the changing place of the church.

5.7.3 Summary of the Theological Imaginary

This chapter compares the results of the empirical data to the themes in the missional literature to determine what themes are present in the theological imaginary of missionaries and what is being overlooked. The portrait of the theological imaginary amongst missionaries in this research is encouraging. There is a great deal of reflection, passion, and energy evidenced amongst church planters. Missioners are guided by an image of church as genuinely caring, actively serving, witnessing communities sent to contextually share the good news of Jesus. There is a deep hope to see people come into relationship with God, and missioners meaningfully shape their churches to be relevant and accessible towards that end. Participants want to see their communities transformed by contact with God's kingdom through the church. Strong theological ideas direct the expectations of what church life can and should be like. There are several theological sub-themes within the missional literature which are not well evidenced for participants. As is pictured in the portrait of the neglected imaginary, there are even more theological resources which have the potential to give vision to mission. Theological understandings around *missio Dei*, the kingdom and the incarnation are particularly rich sources for the imaginary. They speak to deep issues of missional identity for the church. They speak to understandings of the character and being of the Triune God. These theological foundations address awareness of the present and coming kingdom of God and the eschaton. While each of the five major themes are evidenced to some degree for either all or most missioners, some themes are only partially functional.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis focuses on the unknown shape of the theological imaginary amongst those at the front edge of mission practice, and the application of contemporary mission theology to current new church work in the UK. It outlines the ideas which inspire missionaries in their new church work, and evidences the connection and the incongruence between those theological concepts embodied in practice and those on offer in the missional church literature. The concluding chapter gives an overall summary of the thesis, implications for training and for future research, and personal reflections on the thesis.

6.1 Summary of the Thesis

The church in Britain faces several challenges. There has been a marked decline in church attendance and in connection to faith over the past 50 years. Church attendance is now at around 5% and those identifying as having no religion is now over 50%.⁹⁴⁷ Widespread cultural changes have brought new perspectives across society. Individuals form identity through consumption and through social media. Spirituality is marked by plurality – one can (and according to some should) pick and choose elements of a spiritual belief system from the wide offerings being marketed. The church is no longer understood as the one centre of spiritual authority, even while remnants of Christian cultural identity linger. It is not possible to “bring back” the vast majority of people into Christian faith, because they have never resided there. The church exists as one of many competing figures which shapes values, offers spirituality, and structures society. The double challenge of postmodernity and post-Christendom bring with it new paths to forge and new opportunities to reflect on the mission of the church.

Two responses of the wider church to the situation in contemporary culture include church planting and missional theology. Church planting has been one significant strand of mission activity intended to reverse the declines and see growth in the church. Denominations, mission organizations, and independent, grass-roots groups have all engaged in extensive programmes of church

⁹⁴⁷ Peter Brierley and Association Christian Research, *Uk Christian Handbook Religious Trends. No. 7 2007/2008. No. 7 2007/2008* (Eltham: Christian Research, 2008). "British Social Attitudes: Record Number of Brits with No Religion," NatCen, <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2017/september/british-social-attitudes-record-number-of-brits-with-no-religion/>. Accessed 15 November 2018.

planting. Considerable resources of time, personnel, and funding have been put into new church work across the breadth of the church in Britain. These church plants show amazing diversity and imagination. Church planting has been a major agenda item for denominations in the past few decades. There has been research into their effectiveness and results in a variety of ways but there has been no research to date on the theological ideas which guide their work.⁹⁴⁸ How are these church planters conceiving church in their context? What theological expectations guide their ministry? This thesis prioritizes the lived experience of church planters to understand their perspectives which are formative for church. It gives a voice to their vision for the church today. This thesis makes a contribution to understanding how missionaries are theologically resourced in this important field of mission for the church.

The missional church movement and the emerging church movement are also responses to the contextual challenges aimed at re-envisioning and equipping the church for mission. Under the banner of these broad programmes, a vast quantity of literature, online content, conferences, and groups of practice have been created. All of this content is expressly directed at helping the church think about how it shapes itself, how it relates to culture, and how it goes about mission today. The missional movement offers an array of concepts for the church to meet the mission challenge in Western culture. Although some of the content is about practices or strategies, as is shown in this thesis, there is a whole stream of theology which runs through the missional literature, of which this research has highlighted five primary themes. There is no research to date which explores how this missional theology has been applied to church planting practice in the UK. Are these ideas influential to missionaries? Is this theological resource being taken into the mission practice amongst those at which it is aimed? This thesis seeks to answer these questions.

Charles Taylor discusses the social imaginary as a framework for understanding the motivations, expectations, and images which guide individuals and groups. This thesis reflects on the social imaginary as one underlying driver of practice. This research takes the idea of the social imaginary derived from Taylor to research motivations, expectations, and images underlying church planting practice – the theological imaginary. It helps identify the connection

⁹⁴⁸ See section 1.3.

between actions and what powers those actions. The imaginary is a powerful factor in setting expectations and direction – it is what one thinks should or could be. When applied to those in mission, this thesis demonstrates the theological imaginary, showing those concepts which are guiding missionaries involved in starting brand new churches. It gives a picture of what ideas are drawn on when envisioning the nature and mission of the church.

During any era, having a clear view of how people understand the church in its mission is important. Perhaps it is now as timely as ever, towards empowering the church to best meet the challenges it faces. A picture of the theological imaginary of church planters makes a contribution to mission theology in understanding what is guiding practitioners in their new church work. This thesis uncovers the theological imaginary of church planters through empirical research with a wide range of missionaries doing new church work. It describes the imaginary, and in doing so, gives insight into the embodied narratives which guide practice. This thesis shows what interaction practitioners have with missional ideas so the wider church is informed, and through that awareness might be better equipped to prepare and move the church into mission.

In order to achieve its aims, this thesis progresses through these topics: Chapter 1 discusses the research as one of practical theology. It considers research limitations, research objectives, and previously completed related research. Chapter 2 considers the contextual factors of postmodernity and post-Christendom through key literature. It outlines the background of the missional and emerging church movements as responses to the current context of mission. Chapter 3 outlines five key themes from the missional literature: the importance of being a community, participation in the *missio Dei*, the need for contextualization, being incarnational, and seeking kingdom transformation. Chapter 4 uses thematic analysis to examine the data from 21 missionaries in 18 new church works against the themes and sub-themes from the missional literature and for other themes arising. Chapter 5 gives a picture of the theological imaginary of church planters as evidenced in the data, and compares this against the themes in the literature for themes present and absent.

As is seen in Chapter 5, the theological imaginary of church planters in the research shows all five themes in the literature at work. Strong theological ideas motivate missionaries around a caring, serving church who are sent into their communities to witness. They want to contextually share the good news and see

people come into relationship with God. Missioners envision their churches as active in transforming their communities for the kingdom. A breadth of theological ideas enriches the imaginary of church planters. However, the missional literature offers resources which are not fully taken up by missioners. The less vocalized aspects of *missio Dei*, the kingdom, and the incarnation have potential to give vision to mission. Images of the church as a contrast community which demonstrates the divine nature, and lives in the ways of the kingdom of God now were not widely evidenced. The incarnation is not integrated well into the imaginary of participants, nor is joining God's own activity in mission to restore all creation. These ideas can ground mission practice in the God's agency in the world, give an eschatological vision for ministry, and inspire the church in mission through God's incarnation in Jesus. The missional literature also has resources about the changing cultural context and post-Christendom which could be further utilized. While all five major themes are seen in most missioners, some aspects of these themes are not nourishing church planters or are limited in their expression. These less accessed theological elements have significant potential for connecting mission activity to deeper theological inspiration.

6.2 Implications for Future Research and Training

There are several areas for further research suggested by this thesis. These are areas outside of the aims of this thesis but have connections to it. The most important area for future consideration is the need for training and theological education. Further research could be done on the actual resources inspiring missioners. Other factors influencing the theological imaginary could be a focus of research including personality factors, denominational influence, contextual factors, geographic context, and training. The intersection of innovation theory and the imaginary could be investigated in future research.

The most significant area for future work highlighted by this thesis is that of training and continuing theological education to resource mission in the church. While it was clear there are significant theological themes running through the imaginary of participants in this research, it also points to further work which can be done. This research shows that there are substantial theological ideas which are either not known or not being accessed by missioners. These are important resources for the church as it engages in mission. Theological education can help

address this gap. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider training models or theological education as a whole. However, the results of the research indicate there are inactive theological resources which can inspire mission, just from comparing data from the themes limited to the missional literature. The results of this thesis indicate that theological education is an area for attention. This is supported by others in the field as will be explored briefly. The term “theological education” in this context is inclusive of the wide range of options for ministry training available today. For some this is degree level studies, for others denominational training, and for still others, courses like those offered at Church Mission Society.⁹⁴⁹ Comments here are directed to the full range of options, flowing from my own reflections on this research in relationship to education and training.

There is a continuing need for the development and diffusion of mission training. Research by David Dadswell and Cathy Ross into church planting notes that training for missionaries needs to be on the agenda of the wider church. They say of their participants, ‘Nearly every person who spoke made the same assertion [of feeling inadequately trained] so it is clear that we need some strategic and coherent training for church planters.’⁹⁵⁰ Their conclusion on training says, ‘It seems that the church needs to take some urgent steps to find and train leaders who can connect with our current society both in terms of understanding the context and being able to challenge the context. A missional imagination, which can be expressed in a myriad of ways, needs to be fostered and developed among leaders.’⁹⁵¹ A report by George Lings and Stuart Murray on church planting concurs, noting that while there have been some encouraging developments, ‘One aspect of church planting in which there has been only patchy progress since 2000 is the provision of training.’⁹⁵² There is a real felt need for suitable training for mission.

Training for mission in light of both new cultural contexts and the theology of *missio Dei* are topics being discussed by those like Lings and Murray who are involved in training. ‘Despite efforts by training institutions to develop appropriate modules and courses, most remained locked into assumptions, priorities and

⁹⁴⁹ www.churchmissionsociety.org

⁹⁵⁰ Dadswell. Page 5.

⁹⁵¹ Ibid. Page 52.

⁹⁵² George Lings, Stuart Murray, and Army Church, *Church Planting in the UK since 2000 : Reviewing the First Decade*, Grove Evangelism Series ; Ev 99; Grove Evangelism Series ; Ev 99. (Cambridge, England :: Grove Books, 2012). Page 20.

patterns that do not equip students adequately for the 21st century mission context or their role as pioneers.⁹⁵³ Robert Doornenbal concludes something similar in his extensive consideration of leadership, theological education, and the missional and emerging church movements. In *Crossroads*, Doornenbal reports the importance of theological education that is focused more intentionally on leadership and more explicitly for a post-Christendom context or mission.⁹⁵⁴ There is a call for mission training and theological education which takes into consideration the current context of mission; others call for mission training which is focused and filtered through a missional theology of the church. Andrew Kirk advocates theological education grounded on mission. He says that if theology is about a God who has revealed himself as a missionary God with a purpose in the world, then these themes must fill theology and education. 'It seems therefore logical that the task of theology – discerning the mode of being and acting of this God – and, by inference, of theological education is permeated through and through by a biblically grounded understanding of the mission of the triune God.'⁹⁵⁵ This research affirms the drive for missionaries' education to be grounded in missional ecclesiology emerging from understandings of the *missio Dei* and critical reflection on the context of mission in the Western world.

This research reveals some disparity between mission practice and a depth of theological grounding for practice. Of particular note is the lack of connection between activity and some of the theological resources which can ground and motivate mission practice. Ministry action took place as evidenced, but apparently not out of connection to the rich theological inspiration available. Brian Stanley in the forward to *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission* has a stark comment on the connection between mission practice and theological thinking:

Christian mission over the last century or more has been plagued by a divorce between action and reflection. The most evangelistically active practitioners have too often been the shallowest theological thinkers, whilst the deep reflectors have frequently been so embarrassed about the demonstrable pitfalls of previous mission practice, and so hesitant about the likely pitfalls of future mission practice, that they have effectively

⁹⁵³ Ibid. Page 21.

⁹⁵⁴ Doornenbal. Page 229, 320. See also Timothy P. Weber, "The Seminaries and the Churches: Looking for New Relationships," *Theological Education* 44, no. 1 (2008).

⁹⁵⁵ J. Andrew Kirk, "Re-Envisioning the Theological Curriculum as If the *Missio Dei* Mattered," *Common Ground Journal* Vol 3, no. Fall (2005). Accessed 28 November 2018.

withdrawn from active engagement in the task of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.⁹⁵⁶

Missioners would benefit from reflection on the connection between practice and theology. A deep grounding in theology is not only important for missioners, but for those they lead. Theological education for missioners and leaders serves the whole church. Christopher Wright says, 'How then can theological education serve the mission of the church? Primarily, in my view, by training those who will equip the saints for their ministry.'⁹⁵⁷ Church planters and other leaders have the unique opportunity to "equip the saints" and inspire the imaginary. Theological training is not only a matter of examining doctrine or of considering mission strategies, although both of these are deeply important to the church. The ultimate aim of that reflection is to enable the church to be what God has called it to be. Theological education has the capacity to expand horizons and enlarge the expectations of what ecclesial life can be, resourced from both historic and current thinking. And it is ultimately not just the small percentage of theologically – missionally – engaged professionals the world needs, but the entire church, empowered and engaged, participating in God's mission to restore all creation. Christopher Wright says:

And consequently, there is also a crying need for institutions of theological education, insofar as they are engaging in training future pastors, to train them to be equippers – to have a high view of the calling and ministries of all God's people, including the vast majority (98%) who are not pastors, etc. but are out there as salt and light in the world....Theological education needs to equip pastors to equip others in this missional understanding and practice.⁹⁵⁸

Alan Roxburgh speaks to this extensively in his book *The Missional Leader*.⁹⁵⁹ For Roxburgh, this is the definition of leadership which is needed – inspiration for others. 'Leadership is not about enlightenment but cultivation of an environment that releases the missional imagination of God's ordinary people,' says Roxburgh.⁹⁶⁰ He writes about the need for empowering leadership in the church in today's cultural context of discontinuous change, where the church

⁹⁵⁶ Stephen B. Bevans et al., *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), <http://scholar.csl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=edinburghcentenary>. Page xiii. Accessed 28 November 2018.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid. Page 141.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid. Page 141.

⁹⁵⁹ Roxburgh and Romanuk.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 29.

finds itself in a very different place than in the past.⁹⁶¹ Leadership is about seeing the congregation enabled. ‘...The key to innovating new life and mission in a congregation is not so much a strategy for growth as it is a cultivation of people themselves. It is from among the people that the energy and vision for missional life emerge.’⁹⁶² A theologically informed imaginary can flow from those who lead and inspire their churches to the whole people of God. Church planters, missionaries, and all types of leaders need to access theologically grounded, contextually aware theological training not only for their own ministries, but to expand the imaginary of the entire church for mission.

The limits of this thesis are to investigate the impact of the theological *themes* within the missional literature but further research could be done on what *actual* resources, if any, in terms of books, web-sites, forums, conferences, or cohorts of practice influenced and inspired missionaries. Would it be possible to discern how impactful and potentially fruitful specific resources have been? Research could be done which asks how missionaries nourish themselves by type of training: books, web-based learning, seminars or courses, personal mentoring, etc. A survey of particular resources could be collated and compared to see if there are patterns of resources being particularly accessed.

Research could be undertaken to understand the impact of other factors which influence the imaginary of church planters. This research focused on the theological aspect of the imaginary of missionaries, but similar research could be done to understand more, for example, about the potential impact of the socioeconomic setting of the church or personality profiles of missionaries. Future research could consider how those factors both shape the expectations of church for the church planter themselves and expectations of the new churches they are planting. Comparative research could be undertaken which seeks to identify a range of factors which potentially influence the imaginary around church, to evaluate the impact of different factors from the missionaries perspective.

Along these lines, research could be done correlating between different church streams and the emphasis seen in the theological imaginary. Some research noted in the literature review (section 1.3) was done within one church

⁹⁶¹ Ibid. Pages 4-14.

⁹⁶² Ibid. Page 145.

stream. Labanow researched something similar to the imaginary in an ethnographic study of one particular church, but research like his and that of this thesis could explore the imaginary in one whole church tradition.⁹⁶³ Cooper and Doel both consider church planting within a stream of churches (New Frontiers and the Baptist Union).⁹⁶⁴ The focus of Cooper's research was on growth based distinctives and Doel's was on attitudes towards secularization and contextualization. Future research could be done similarly within a church stream on the theological imaginary rooted within that church stream. A similar approach could be done based on geography, as in Coulter's research in Northern Ireland.⁹⁶⁵ The factors influencing the theological imaginary could be researched in different geographic locations, looking for and comparing geographic influences.

The idea of the theological imaginary itself may direct future projects. Research could be undertaken into the ways in which the imaginary is transformed from a smaller group like church planters for a wider group in the church. How is the imaginary dispersed or changed, opening up new possibilities for church life and mission? Future research on the imaginary and change could connect with frameworks about innovation.⁹⁶⁶ Paas looks at innovation and church planting.⁹⁶⁷ He considers contemporary innovation theory and the church, noting briefly three elements: distinctions between short-term problem solving through adaptation and long-term challenges which require innovation; if true innovation can actually be planned or must come out of other factors; radical renewal through a focus on processes and not results.⁹⁶⁸ These elements of innovation theory and change within the church could be explored in research connected with theological imaginary. Paas also considers environments (or biotopes) for innovation: free havens, laboratories and incubators.⁹⁶⁹ He goes into more detail with these but there is potential for more research in each of these environments, their functioning in the church, and how contextual elements and the imaginaries involved might be influential. Research noted above by Marti and Ganiel does go into great detail around change in the emerging church through

⁹⁶³ Labanow.

⁹⁶⁴ Cooper. Doel.

⁹⁶⁵ Coulter.

⁹⁶⁶ See section 1.2.1.

⁹⁶⁷ Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West : Learning from the European Experience*. Pages 181-241.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid. Pages 224-225.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid. Pages 225-239.

the concepts of “embedded agents” and “institutional entrepreneurs” who hope to reimagine and replot Christian faith.⁹⁷⁰ These theoretical frameworks which were applied in Marti and Ganiel to the emerging church could be applied in different sectors of the church in mission to understand the interactions of change dynamics within those groups. Also noted in 1.2.1 is the application of an innovation framework to new church work by Michael Moynagh. The six innovation processes (dissatisfaction, exploration, sense-making, amplification, edge of chaos, and transformation) applied to his studies of new church work, could be expanded to interact with the theological imaginary.⁹⁷¹

This research applies the framework of the imaginary particularly to the themes missionaries use to nourish their church planting ministry. The results of this research have implications for training and for further research. As is demonstrated in this thesis, there is a gap between the material offered in the missional literature and what is incorporated into the imaginary of the church planters interviewed. This particularly points to the need for further theological education and training to enable missionary to have a deep theological foundation on which to draw. The imaginary as described by Taylor has significant potential to open up areas of research within the church. Making explicit the expectations and images which guide practice can be fruitful as the church goes forward in its ministry.

6.3 Personal Reflections on Results

How we think matters. How we think about God and his purpose in the world matters greatly. It has the potential to shape our lives and our identity. I believe how the wider church thinks about its identity and purpose is critically important. What does the church look like? What are we to be? As a church planter, I am aware of the challenges of mission in Britain. These sweeping currents of context are largely out of our control, but we are able to respond to them in informed, reflective ways. I want to see reflection in the church enabled and resourced from a depth of biblical, theologically grounded thinking. How are we to think about these shifts in culture? How are we to think about the relationship of the church to it? What does the gospel have to say in this setting?

⁹⁷⁰ Marti and Ganiel. Pages 80 and 84.

⁹⁷¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life - Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*. Page 11. And particularly Part 3, pages 295 – 408.

This kind of thinking is not new or novel but must be the work of the church continually in every context and generation. The missional church dialogue is one strand of the church thinking through these topics. It is one range of reflection for our time on the church, gospel, and culture. The results of this research indicate it is one resource for the church which has not been fully engaged.

The nature of new church work has the potential to bring with it reflection on this intersection of Christian faith, culture, and the church. Those involved in church planting have the opportunity for unique reflection and experimentation in mission. While all interaction with the gospel and culture is “on the front-line,” those doing new church work have the opportunity to think deeply and creatively about how to incarnate as God’s people in a waiting world. This thinking can be a gift in dialogue with the wider church. It is vitally important that all of those who are setting vision and leading for the church access a breadth and depth of theology.

The research results indicate to me that there is more work to be done in facilitating reflection and connection between ministry activity and theological resources. This thesis points to gaps in the full potential of the theological imaginary. A robust, comprehensive theological imaginary has much to offer the church in mission. A deeply rooted theological imaginary can energize the church in its life and mission together. The concepts above are not just to be debated or written about, but can be powerful guides to the practices of discipleship and mission. To be best positioned to move forward in the purposes of God, we need the full range of resources available to the church. It is my hope that the resources considered in this thesis, and many others, can facilitate men and women as they engage with God and with the world.

APPENDIX

Table 2. Prioritizing being a caring community

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview B | We used four phrases that help us communicate a journey for people, so we would say that we look at "Come Home, find family, love others, be the church" |
| Interview C | A body, a family, flock: they're all pretty biblical. ...But I think family in particular, the community turning up the volume on that. |
| Interview C | I said at the beginning I want you to commit to two things a week - a Sunday morning service and commit to a life group. |
| Interview G | Our church centres around fellowship, relationships. We build relationships with people, we build trust through the relationships, we engage in discipleship. |
| Interview G | I think there's probably about 90-100 people there. ... There are some who are in the inner rings and there are some who are in the outer rings. |
| Interview H | Community is important now to people in their 20s and 30s. |
| Interview J | It's really based around relationship, hugely relational, hanging out together, a bit like what we'd read Acts 2:42, the whole thing of sharing life in fullness together. |
| Interview L | I think the hope of our nation and probably the US as well, is the community church. |
| Interview N | Cell church was actually -- the cell is your church. |
| Interview O | We meet on a Thursday evening and we always do food together. It always involves food because it's just such a simple and easy way of building community. |
| Interview O | We really wanted to focus on our neighbours, the immediate people next to us. |
| Interview F1 | We kind of determined at the beginning that we would love and care for the people and lead the ones that we had as best we could. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview E2 | ...we wanted to build a community. We didn't really want to come and I suppose, build something that wasn't centred on family really. A family in terms of wanting to be completely for one another, to calling one another up, and loving one another well, and challenging one another, and actually doing the stuff of the Kingdom. |
| Interview E1 | We have Sunday brunch once a month, games, eating.... |
| Interview D2 | ...just how to give this place some meaning for somebody and that to make it meaningful in a way that they say, this is the place where I could go, where I will be welcome. This is the place where I know I can get help. This is a place I know I can just go and chill out and go get a £1.00 coffee. |
| Interview A | I thought maybe I should put together the new Christians where I'm discipling and the Christians that are not happy with Church and we create a community. |
| Interview K | ...the mutual indwelling, the mutual equality, the mutual love for one another, um, community, that's what we want. |
| Interview K | Church is about community, it's about life, it's not about a programmes. And so that's really changed us dramatically. Yeah, that's affected our way of doing church, definitely. |
| Interview M | ...also for smaller communities who gather and may weekly in-between, which could be in someone's home or it could be in a café space, could be outdoors, but that to be where we share the bible together, very simple prayers together and be more Christian discipleship, overtly Christian discipleship based. |
| Interview P | It's still a place where we go to get alongside people to lead them to the Lord, because we need more relationship time with them... |
| Interview R | Connect means we build in community, we value community. |
| Interview Q | I wanted a lot of young people, so I wanted there to be lots of big friendship groups and kind of community driven, like the friendship element of things, and it to be fun. |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview Q | We say that we have a good food culture which speaks of hospitality. On a Sunday morning, ...to have good food, to look after each other that way. But also, to have... people are relating to each other in a way where they're eating together. |
|-------------|---|

Table 3. Church as being rooted with and active in a location

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview B | We get to know a city, we get to know a people, we get to know a history. |
| Interview G | We're a network church. |
| Interview H | We started a youth club in the estate. |
| Interview J | The whole point of it was to sit down, look at what was going on in the community, how can we help improve some of the areas. |
| Interview L | Yes, I guess our estate is almost like a small town within a city, but it's very close. Everyone's family, everyone knows each other, so that local council call me the community pastor. |
| Interview N | The work God has for me is literally on my doorstep. |
| Interview O | I led a missional community that was geographically based in the area that we were living around. |
| Interview O | I wanted to be really connected to the local community, to really be involved. We had a relationship with a coffee shop in the area. |
| Interview I | I needed something where I could see the physical boundaries of where I was ministering. |
| Interview F1 | [listing the type of community] "low crime, tidy, no burnt out cars, young families, lots of old people, family housing, single mums, mental health issues, vulnerable children" |
| Interview F1 | We have parents and babies groups, to provide a place for them to come with baby, to meet other mums, to be together to talk to some older, wiser church people who have been mums and who have that Christian perspective and could just listen, actually. |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview D2 | But once people came in, it was all about getting to – just trying to build a relationship with them or just trying to get to know our community. |
| Interview M | Building bridges out to the community, but now actually we need people to go and live in those communities and not to build a bridge but to inhabit where people are, and that was really exciting and releasing. |
| Interview R | We've tried lots of things - Messy church, café church, fun days, mother's day, family based - I guess we concentrate on family type events because that's probably a strength there. |
| Interview R | ...and serve the community. We're in a community centre right on the edge of Ross in a residential area, so just serving that community, really with events, fun, with again, quality events. |

Table 4. Church as needing deep, authentic relationships

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview J | ...trying to create a much more vulnerable group of people that were willing to be open with each other, to share proper life together. Because that was the heart of it. To be quite raw and real with each other, to the point where we would be willing to give up anything to do whatever God asked. |
| Interview J | ... to just build authentic, vulnerable, real world relationships. |
| Interview F1 | [Craft and Chat] We start with prayer. They've all started to now turn up about 10 to 10:00 because they want to be here for the prayer.... They're so caring. They're probably more caring than most church people. They love each other to bits. They all come in, there's loads of hugs, there's lots of tears. They've all got issues of some sort going on. It's life. |
| Interview F1 | [Community Choir] It's a real time of community. We sing for an hour, and then we have cake... and we're very much a cake church... which is supposed to be half an hour, but it's turned into another hour because we just don't want to go home. We just sit around chatting." |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview E2 | We wanted to build a community. We didn't really want to come and I suppose, build something that wasn't centred on family really. A family in terms of wanting to be completely for one another, to calling one another up, and loving one another well, and challenging one another, and actually doing the stuff of the Kingdom. |
| Interview D1 | What's really good at both places is people create family for themselves when they've got no family. So you take Nina with Isabel who's got no family. It's Nanny Pat who's one of our volunteers. Pat is her nanny. Isabel said when she draws pictures of her family at school, it's Nanny Pat there instead of the grandma. |
| Interview K | I was like, we don't want you to come [leave their present church to this other church we are moving to]. ...and they said, 'Well actually, you are our church. We've just been attending this other one. Well actually, <i>you</i> are our church.' |
| Interview A | It was just the unreality I think, that was one of the things that I really struggle with, with church, was the unreality of where kind of in this bubble and there's this world out there that is hurting and broken, and we're singing praise songs endlessly and it didn't seem to be making any sense or any difference. |
| Interview A | ...what would church be like where we actually were real? And we got down and dirty in the mess of life rather than pretend everything's fine and that God is great and we can just sing these songs every week and then just go back to normality. |
| Interview A | My vision.... Not going to a meeting in a building, we're going to meet in people's homes. We're going to be genuinely community, so we're not going to do this whole kind of 'how are you?' 'I'm alright.' That actually we're going to be involved in our lives, we're going to share the deep stuff and we are going to do mission . |
| Interview Q | On a Sunday morning, ...to have good food, to look after each other that way. But also, to have... people are relating to each other in a way where they're eating together. |

Table 5. Church as a community sent together on mission (inside to outside)

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview C | It's just all – the Acts 29, three words, and many other churches use as church, based on 'word' – that produce a 'community' of people where 'mission' is not something we say, we do, it's something that we actually live where we are. |
| Interview C | Do you have a heart to make relationships with non-Christians? This is the very reason that we exist, not to have a cosy thing. |
| Interview G | I like it when they 'be church.'" I like it when their life expresses worship, discipleship, fellowship, mission and ministry, in whatever location that happens to be. |
| Interview J | ...around this real raw authentic relationship, it was all based around mission to reach out rather than becoming insular. |
| Interview J | But of course, along the journey, me and my wife would kind of say, "God, so what do you want us to do? What does this look like? We believe you want us to move over here." And it all really was just very simple, very basic really, what I'd shared with you already - just build authentic, vulnerable, real world relationships - that is about reaching out to them., that loves and cares for one another, but its mission is to reach out, not get entrenched looking within. |
| Interview O | It's sort of reaching out to those people groups and trying to get to know them. But really the missional community is more about how we support each other to get to know our friends, to hang out with people. |
| Interview E2 | Whereas if you ask me would I happily go and build community and within that share Jesus, then that's a totally different idea for me. |
| Interview A | That actually we're going to be involved in our lives, we're going to share the deep stuff and we are going to do mission. |
| Interview P | The first phase will be that we encourage people to, is to establish a core team, and we encourage people to enjoy the |

| | |
|--|---|
| | ride, enjoy the relationships, build a community that's open to others. Then from there, begin to reach out to friends. |
|--|---|

Table 6. Church as a contrast community which demonstrates the gospel

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview K | We want to see a community transformed by Jesus. How he has transformed our lives as a family. We want to see that with our friends, with our families, our community. And we know that we aware dwelling in the community. That's so important... we wanted to be right smack bang in the middle and we just said, God here we are. |
| Interview K | We're just really showing them what it is to walk as a Christian, to be a Christian. In 2016, what it looks like being as an example and we're not pushing people to hard. |
| Interview M | Particularly the idea that in the OT people see themselves as sojourners, travellers and even when they enter the promised land, they are tenants. It's not theirs, hence, it's God's land and the responsibility to welcome the stranger comes with it. |
| Interview M | Building bridges out to the community, but now actually we need people to go and live in those communities and not to build a bridge but to inhabit where people are, and that was really exciting and releasing. |
| Interview M | But I'm looking, and "how then shall we live?" How do you want to live? Maybe you don't have to live as you are, maybe there is another way of living is possible. Do you want to join us in finding out what that is? |
| Interview M | ...that's why it's a question of "who is it you seek and how are you going to live?" |
| Interview B | Again, we would start to talk about our kingdom, the kind of now and not yet, the kingdom we believe in the Vineyard, and the gifts of the Spirit and hearing from God, responding to God and being Jesus' hands and feet in our community, seeing our community transformed by demonstrating the compassion of |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| | God, to living lives, seeing the power of God at work, almost the tools of the kingdom being active in the church. |
| Interview B | We're placing ourselves among the people day in and day out, constantly filling the city with the story of who Jesus is and what he has done for us at the end. Doing that practically through serving the needs of the city. |
| Interview F1 | I thought about this being on a crossroads, the whole thing kind of wanting people to come and ask about where the good way is for them, and we want them to kind of find peace, and we want them to come be at a crossroads, and make choices and decisions |
| Interview F2 | Certainly the Salvation Army, our legacy, our DNA is about going to people who've got nothing to do with church, nothing to do with God, whose lives are chaotic and going the wrong way, and being able to get close enough just to say there's another way to live. For us, it's the ultimate test, though, and we're a long way from thinking that we're winning on that one." |
| Interview I | I suppose that I have said about being with people, being alongside people, being – this is what I read the other day, “Anyone who follows me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” I was like, “what is the light of life?” |
| Interview P | We want to be a door of hope. We had a verse from Hosea, I'll give the people in the valley of despair and I'll make them into a door of hope. So that has really informed our mission |
| Interview O | It is really important because God showed us compassion, how do we show compassion to those around us? |
| Interview C | It's just all – the Acts 29, three words, and many other churches use as church, based on 'word' – that produce a 'community' of people where 'mission' is not something we say, we do, it's something that we actually live where we are. |

Table 8. Community is inclusive.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview F1 | My view (has changed) about who I want to be included, who I want to bring in...who I have a heart for, who I feel like I can love. |
| Interview F1 | I dislike anything that says to somebody you can't be a part of this. I don't like it. ... I don't like it when it becomes a them and us, or if people feel that makes you better than other because they wear it [the uniform]. I just don't like that. It's just the whole part and parcel of the idea of inclusivity, reality, is much more on my radar than it ever would have been. |
| Interview F2 | "Well these newcomers are coming in can have an effect on the core family," and you want to say to them that's because they are the core family. |
| Interview F2 | Everybody is us, as far as we can make out. |
| Interview E1 | Everyone's involved in worship but we won't do like a token children's song. It will just be worship and then a talk... Then we'd eat together because we do it at 5 o'clock.... So you can create community that way. |
| Interview D1 | The key thing at Clapton is that we're a community. If you're homeless and you come in for lunch, we'll give it to you free, but you'll sit next to a toddler mum who can afford to pay. You won't be treated differently or separate. ... Everybody else still seems to be doing separate things whereas we just do community. |
| Interview D1 | [uniform]... Everybody wants it. They don't wear it all the time, but they want to buy. They want to belong. Everybody wants to belong. |
| Interview D2 | It's really nice to be able to say to anybody – it's all about inclusive. You don't have to be anything to preach at church. Salvation Army would say that we believe in the priesthood of all believers. What you don't see is that lived out. Whereas I am happy to facilitate that being lived out to the end degree. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview D1 | What we've got is a culture where anybody who comes for anything, we'll expect to pray with each other. In Clapton, if we're doing something all together , the kids will all sit and pray with each other. |
| Interview D1 | So we know we are building random community and crossing a lot of boundaries there. |
| Interview K | There's an openness within the congregation, people are speaking, the preachers interrupted and everybody's involved. There's an active part for people to play. |
| Interview K | We need to be all less and just learn together, read scripture together, just move together in the same direction. |
| Interview K | Yes, the mutual indwelling, the mutual equality, the mutual love for one another, um, community, that's what we want. |
| Interview K | We meet, we chat, we preach the word of God, and we stay away from uplifting anybody on a stage. We kind of see all the people as equal, and that was a real big decision for us. I think that we wanted to be more about a community and friendship and relationships rather than entertainment or performance. |
| Interview K | It's change my outlook, in that I'm not there to above people, to shout out at them. I'm there to link arms with them, to be on the floor with them, and I'm an equally and just to encourage one another, build on another up. |
| Interview M | Simplicity but it also got the whole community being involved, and when you are a community of maybe 20 adults, everybody can be involved.... But actually the whole community, it was the community, including the children.... |
| Interview M | Particularly the idea that in the OT people see themselves as sojourners, travellers and even when they enter the promised land, they are tenants. It's not theirs, hence, it's God's land and the responsibility to welcome the stranger comes with it. |
| Interview Q | I think people get that, the "why" is that small is good for us. The "why" is that if you're small everybody gets to have a go. The "why" is because we're actually a church of about 300 |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| | adults, but if we were all one together only about four of five of us would get to preach, lead worship, anchor meetings, and we'd get that kind of leadership stretching. Whereas this way, actually, dozens and dozens of people - we've trained a hundred preachers and probably about 40-50 of them have preached. And dozens of worship leaders and musicians. |
| Interview Q | I've realized, okay, well if I can do it then actually this has got to be a much more open playing field for lots of other people to be able to do this. |

Table 9. Contextualization for a specific location.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview B | But was that sense of -- we were really aware of contextualization. |
| Interview B | What would it look like for a bunch of followers of Jesus from that community, in that background, to gather together, to worship, to allow the Bible to inform them and shape them and apply it to their lives... to be Jesus' hands and feet where they are? |
| Interview C | It is a predominantly white, middle to lower families... socially pretty monolithic, but increasing diversity... renowned for its affluence with derby, yet it has two of the most deprived electoral boards in Surrey, so that it's obviously by a degree, but there are pockets of social lives here. |
| Interview G | They will not be extracted from that community into a separate church community. |
| Interview J | food bank... There's a real need, trying to really meet practical needs where people are at. |
| Interview H | There's 3/4 million people living in Leeds, it's officially the third largest city in the UK. It's bigger than the city of Manchester. |
| Interview L | Ok, I need to start a working class church, with a working class feel, working class etiquette, on a council estate and see what happens. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview L | We have secular music in church, and we don't have a dress code at all. I'm just a normal guy, so I have my socks, and sandals, and my flat cap. I preach on a Sunday. |
| Interview N | They had a vision for youth work, but none of them were equipped for the kind of youth work we were talking about. It was on the street youth work. |
| Interview N | I learned very quickly to listen well to the context and not just with my ears but with my eyes and my senses. Realizing that the context changed every year, and working with that context, working with the values that we worked with. |
| Interview O | I led a missional community that was geographically based in the area that we were living around. |
| Interview I | The working class local population didn't engage with the church. |
| Interview I | But it may be that we have to reinvent that thing to work in the context. |
| Interview I | It's a council estate, very traditional council estate. |
| Interview F2 | We realized there was no community space here. |
| Interview F1 | We got involved in the estate work right away - running a children's club at the school, chair of the Tenants association, youth council. |
| Interview D1 | There was a difference between inner city and working in a city in the midlands. The two are completely different because the level of deprivation and the level of need. Also the level of resources available. |
| Interview D1 | The vision was literally - people need to access church , God, around the corner from where they live. |
| Interview A | I really want to create some kind of alternative worship type thing for them [artists] in the future. |
| Interview A | What we need is we need fresh expressions of church in the culture that we're doing mission. So what does it mean to be a follower of Christ as a steampunk and what does church look like for steampunks? So I don't want you to come out of that world and then come into Sacred Space.... I want you to |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| | be a follower and disciple in that culture and I want you to create church in that culture. |
| Interview K | It's working class, outsiders not very welcome. |
| Interview M | We couldn't really engage with -- they didn't know what was going on, and then we started to have questions: why are we expecting them to be like us? ... We started to do something in the local primary school on a Sunday afternoon, which was looked like Saturday morning kids' TV but for all ages and very simple. |
| Interview M | In an area like Market Harborough where a lot of people have everything they want. |
| Interview M | We soon realized that [contemporary style church] wasn't possible, wasn't what people are asking for, and thinking to see where God was going to be leading. |
| Interview N | There are a few monthly groups that we met with, one which I'm still involved with which is the barefoot. Which is for people of faith, not faith, different faiths where we meet up in the park once a month and we take our shoes off. We walk round the park for half an hour in complete silence. Then we come together and share what that felt like. We might read a little bit of poetry or catch up with each other or we might make something. |
| Interview P | We have a Friday night congregation exclusively for people with life controlling needs. |
| Interview P | We saw a need. ...Started a meeting out of how are we going to reach these people, how they won't come to Sunday morning. If they did it will be difficult. |
| Interview P | I think what we've done is more looked at the kind of people, get to know a community, look at the kind of community, what would they do? So we've helped another couple of churches start ministry with the poor, and get involved with food, and then a meeting, which is obviously a different style. |
| Interview Q | Different suburbs of Manchester are very different - so we have one site which is in a very poor part of the city, another |

| | |
|--|---|
| | site which is in a very student-y part of the city. It's very transient. And a couple of sites in quite middle class areas of the city. |
|--|---|

Table 10. The need for the church to be contextualized for changing culture.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview B | I guess I feel over time is as a church planter, my job is to reimagine church for the next generation and that doesn't mean doing the next fad or the next thing, but it means trying to reach more people. |
| Interview B | I'm going to have to as a leader, be willing to sit there to enable us to reach the communities that are yet unreached in our city, and some of that is contextualized to our time in history, and I haven't got a model of that... |
| Interview G | They would never set foot in a church building for a whole host of reasons - Hence Church without Walls. |
| Interview G | He pitched his tent among us, and he became a particular man, in a particular context, in a particular culture, in a particular place, in a particular country, at a particular time. I decided to model my church planting and mission on Jesus." |
| Interview H | I was basically, okay, well the cultural context back then that we were in the UK, obviously we are moving more to post-modernism, but the cultural context which in some courts in the church has been demonized because of the rejection within the postmodern culture of meta-narratives, and one of those being the gospel. |
| Interview H | Let's not get panicky about this. Let's find how we contextualize the gospel into this culture so it makes that connection where people can understand and begin to be drawn to God. |
| Interview H | I think your specific things you look at things like community, now I would talk about people in their 20's and 30's year olds – the importance of call, connecting with a sense of call on their lives. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview J | We wanted it to be culturally relevant, to be able to connect with people where they were. So contemporary maybe in style. |
| Interview J | I think we ended up trying to do is, put too much framework around it. We tried to make like very accessible to people, we do like snappy videos, really short sermons, and all this kind of stuff. |
| Interview N | This church was totally revitalized because they feel that they can do that there. Just different ways of engaging with the way in which culture has moved on. So what might that look like? |
| Interview D1 | We attempt to be relevant and that means we have no set formula. So it's whatever is needed and whatever will engage. We do café church here once a month...We did Christian festivals. |
| Interview D1 | It needed to be relevant. It's a coffee shop for now. Who knows what it'll be in five years' time? It might be a tea shop. Tea's a big thing now, it's not coffee anymore, is it? So we must never see anything as static. |
| Interview D1 | People at Christmas want carols with a brass band. |
| Interview A | But it opened my eyes to this interest in spirituality. Sort of, it made me aware of the fact that in the culture there was so much going on in terms of phone-ins about hauntings or a plot line of a programme that involved going to the medium, tarot cards being used to advertise cars. I was like, oh my goodness, everywhere I look it seems to be there some type of spiritual mechanism that's being use in the culture... |
| Interview A | What we understand of the culture has been really significant. |
| Interview A | Actually, as opposed to all superficial changes is where actually I think there needs to be some new theology or some reframing of theology for the fact that we live in changed times. |
| Interview P | There was a desire to see if we could make things less religious, more contemporary. |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview N | This church was totally revitalized because they feel that they can do that there. Just different ways of engaging with the way in which culture has moved on. |
| Interview Q | I think I wanted them to get that it's non-Christians to be there and be comfortable, actually. |
| Interview Q | I think realizing that if you want young people in church, the kind of millennial age range, you need to talk to them much more differently than you do people over 40. Gen X people, you need to... millennials need... it's just a different conversation. |

Table 11. Frustration with the existing church for not being contextualized.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview G | I sensed that God was calling me out ... because if I was to reach that category, that class of unchurched people, I couldn't do it from within a regular church. |
| Interview N | They were rejecting the church because it became irrelevant....but to just not see it as relevant, that's not good enough. |
| Interview F2 | I could see what was needed: a church which is flexible and not rigid, a church which is open and to closed, a church which adapts and looks outside, a church which embraces mystery rather than imposing truth. |
| Interview A | ... I think of one of the dangers or one of the problems is that as I said before, is like we want pioneering, but we only wanted to go so far. I don't think that you can do that, I think if our serious about wanting a new thing, you've got to rethink everything. And at the moment, the church is saying like, "you're a pioneer, you can fit into the way that we do it." It's like, No, that's not going to work. |
| Interview M | We soon realized that [contemporary style church] wasn't possible, wasn't what people are asking for, and thinking to see where God was going to be leading. |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview P | There was a desire to see if we could make things less religious, more contemporary. |
|-------------|--|

Table 12. The need for contextualization for a post-Christendom context.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview G | Christendom is an anarchism.[sic] It's getting smaller and smaller and smaller. |
| Interview H | now a missionary context in the UK |
| Interview Q | ...people's engagement levels, the fact that less and less people go to church now in Britain, the fact that church is culturally, is beginning to take a different place in British culture. |

Table 13. Creativity in contextualization.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview B | I guess I feel over time is as a church planter, my job is to reimagine church for the next generation |
| Interview B | I'm like, okay, well, therefore, what I'm saying as a leader, I'm willing to go on a journey of innovation and wrap my ecclesiology around the expression through the kingdom, rather than going "this is our ecclesiology of our church - fit in, once we see the fruit." |
| Interview G | We have to be a chameleon, change it readily if it is not working. |
| Interview E2 | We have to be pioneering, we have to be pushing ourselves because that's what God called us to do and as soon as we set out building our own little empire then it's not going to, if it something that won't satisfy us then that's not what God called us to do. |
| Interview G | Who we are today is quite radically different to who we were when we started out. We do change from season to season. We change from maybe half-year to half-year, maybe from year to year. |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview C | Yes, so we've got our premise, you got to be creative with that. |
| Interview D1 | It needed to be relevant. It's a coffee shop for now. Who knows what it'll be in five years' time? It might be a tea shop. Tea's a big thing now, it's not coffee anymore, is it? So we must never see anything as static. |
| Interview D1 | We attempt to be relevant and that means we have no set formula. So it's whatever is needed and whatever will engage. |
| Interview J | As soon as we moved into Teignmouth, again I just knew that God wanted to start something new. |
| Interview N | I learned very quickly to listen well to the context and not just with my ears but with my eyes and my senses. Realizing that the context changed every year, and working with that context, working with the values that we worked with. |
| Interview A | [The ministry] has always been arts focused, it was also very much about our creativity. So how do we express what's going on for us through art? Writing our own liturgy, doing our own painting, making space for us to -- so like one evening we kind of did our own art. We painted and prayed as we painted. And people have led us to different things. It's just sort of to open up, an opportunity to experiment and to try things. |
| Interview A | ... I think of one of the dangers or one of the problems is that as I said before, is like we want pioneering, but we only wanted to go so far. I don't think that you can do that, I think if our serious about wanting a new thing, you've got to rethink everything. And at the moment, the church is saying like, "you're a pioneer, you can fit into the way that we do it." It's like, No, that's not going to work. |
| Interview A | So therefore, the organization needs dissent, but it hates dissent. So it's this, and I think that's what pioneers -- that's the role of pioneers in the church. It's like "we want pioneers" and so all the time I'm asked to do things, and it's like, "Oh yes, come and do this. Oh yeah, we think what you're doing is |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| | fantastic." Then I say things and they say, "oh, we really didn't like what you did." It's like, well you wanted it, but not you don't want it like that. Yes, it's like, "Can you be edgy, but stop here?" |
| Interview K | We've always said, we'll just try new things with openness. We'll just try new things; we just don't want to get stuck in a rut and say "this is the way we're going to do it." |
| Interview M | We gather people to do environmental work, creative work, making bird boxes, planting trees, bonfires and then use that as a vehicle to start talking about life and faith and that's in its very early stages. |
| Interview Q | I think we need to be more imaginative even, on the front end. I think church planting is one of the ways we can do that because it puts you on the front by the very nature of what it is and forces you to think about why people aren't turning up and therefore, what can we do to change it. |

Table 14. Mission as being a witness in the world.

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview B | We're placing ourselves among the people day in and day out, constantly filling the city with the story of who Jesus is and what he has done for us at the end. Doing that practically through serving the needs of the city. |
| Interview C | "Do you have a heart to make relationships with non-Christians? This is the very reason that we exist, not to have a cosy thing." |
| Interview G | "The call is to reach out to the unchurched, to the second and third generations of people whose parents didn't go to church..." |
| Interview G | For me what sustains me is the Engles scale. I'm not looking for a crisis conversion. I'm not looking to give the A B C of salvation, have that person drop to their knees and commit their lives to Christ momentarily. I'm looking for progress. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview H | We felt God stir us about, okay, it's about seeing people come to Christ, about people being rescued. That was the primary motivation. |
| Interview H | God speaking to us about lost people in Leeds. |
| Interview H | ...surely the Kingdom of God is about growth and expansion, this is about rescue. |
| Interview J | How are we going to reach out to them?... But more about recognizing where God has them, and equipping them to reach out to friends, colleagues, and all that kind of stuff. |
| Interview J | when we made that dramatic changes when we started. We saw people coming and being saved all the time. God was really gracious, crazing things would happen. |
| Interview L | Yes, basically I just saw a need. ...If you had 100 people on every estate saved, then that's going to make a huge difference. |
| Interview N | "You just work where you sense God is at work, and go and join him. You don't necessarily know what it's going to look like." |
| Interview N | Luke 10 - take not bags, shoes, speak to no one on the road, go to the house, eat what's put before you, proclaim the Kingdom of God." |
| Interview F1 | I think what has changed is... the idea of what it means to be saved is less formulaic and more about people starting on the discipleship journey with God, whatever stage they're starting at, and moving along that journey. |
| Interview E1 | ...I think for me, I just got excited about how to actually impact a place, and see people come to faith. ... But it's not how, again, it's hard to say, how it could impact the town for Jesus. |
| Interview E1 | Yes, we want the end goal that they give their lives to Jesus and they follow him wholeheartedly and stuff. |
| Interview D1 | People said, what's your vision and I would walk them outside the front door and say, 'That block of flats over there, if we reach everybody in that flat with the gospel, we'll be full. |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview A | It's great to have these one-off conversations, but how are we actually going to see people come to faith? What does discipleship look like? How do we do church? |
| Interview A | Right, how do we engage with the seekers when it's not a fair? How do we get this more ongoing type contact? We decided that the arts was the way to go. |
| Interview I | ...so there is the hope, is that you're able to develop relationships and engage with people in church activities or faith, and stuff like that. I was like, "Oh, what do we do if people come to faith?" ...and we're prepared for that. |
| Interview O | It's sort of reaching out to those people groups and trying to get to know them. Bur really, the missional community is more about how we support each other to get to know our friends, hanging out with people. |
| Interview K | We've bought a birthing pool, and we've seen three people profess faith in Christ, baptized them, and other sights. |
| Interview P | Our motivation is going to all the world and preach the Gospel, make disciples, at Matthew 28, really that's what we're trying to be a part of, along with many other groups |
| Interview P | I think the great commission, would be one [theological ideas] , the book of Acts will be the other, the desire to make disciples of all national alongside you must remember the poor. |
| Interview R | We wanted to impact Ross with the gospel |
| Interview Q | We talk about everything that we do to be about devotion, devotion to Jesus, building community and mission together. |

Table 15. The essential nature of the church as sent.

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview B | The vision is to be a people who are captivated by Jesus, and abandoned to his mission to love the communities of Bath and beyond. |
|-------------|--|

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview C | Actually convicted as a recapturing of an apostolic thing - that a guy called Paul was pretty keen on. The church lost that , and its being re-captured. |
| Interview G | When I said I had to take church to them, rather than attracting them to church, that meant - I didn't realize how literally I had to do that. |
| Interview H | Well, God is primarily a missionary God. We are now in a missionary context, wake up and smell the coffee that things have got to be different. We've got to find ways in which we can reach out to lost people, because we are a minority group in a missionary context. |
| Interview J | That [sharing life together] I suppose was at the heart of it, and being sent on mission. |
| Interview J | They [connect groups] were supposed to have a missional outlook that's based around their locality, so we congregate them in regions, so that they are especially missional in those regions as well. |
| Interview F2 | ...this idea of going to the unchurched, and go to the worst of the unchurched, in a post-Christian, postmodern society. |
| Interview E1 | But why wouldn't they come in? It never crossed my mind that we should go out. |
| Interview D1 | I have always believed the established church needs to wake up and realize it's not about what they like. Their eternity is secure, and that their salvation sorted. Actually, they need to then care about other people around them. So I've always believed that church needs to be looking out and engaging. |
| Interview A | So the focus is outward, and then we kind of have opportunities where we then reflect on that together, and then what are we learning from that? |
| Interview K | No just planting a church but as Jesus says, go and make disciples. We're very missional and we always say that a church, that we want to disciple people but we're finding that's hard work. |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview M | We won't expect them to come to us. We're going to them, we'll change our ways. |
| Interview P | Our motivation is going to all the world and preach the Gospel, make disciples, at Matthew 28, really that's what we're trying to be a part of, along with many other groups. |
| Interview R | We're here to sow out. We're here as a group who believe God's call is to be a resource church... we're not here for ourselves, we're here to spread the gospel.... |
| Interview R | ...a kind of sense that we need to take the gospel out to the villages in some way. |
| Interview Q | We talk about everything that we do to be about devotion, devotion to Jesus, building community and mission together. |

Table 16. Mission as emerging from God's activity and agency.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview B | We get to know a city, we get to know a people, we get to know a history. We see what God is already doing there and we joining with him in that and be a part of that. ... Wow, what is God doing there? What are we joining? |
| Interview C | You want to be sensitive to what God is doing, you want to be aware of the fact that we are modelling missional engagement, how many non-Christian friends have I made in the last year and are they only targets or do I actually love them? |
| Interview G | I made the point that a lot of missionaries say, 'we went into such and such a place and we took the holy spirit with us.' and I say, 'No, the holy spirit was there, alive and well before you came. |
| Interview J | Actually, realizing the mission field is every minute, every day, and how do we recognize what the Holy Spirit is doing so we can walk in step with that? |
| Interview J | ...so that God can still do what he wants and we're not so driven by our ideas that we'll be crushing what the Holy Spirit's doing. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview N | The seminal text I've been dwelling, certainly for the last five years, is Luke 10, the sending of the 72, and just how that talked about what we need to do, the challenges involved in that, the joys involved in that, and the ultimate, that's my missional text if you like because actually, it's also a text tells us that the responsibility of what happens isn't ours. The responsibility is God's. He calls us to go. |
| Interview N | So one group particularly that we've got which was established to reach into a new housing estate - that didn't happen at all. In actual fact, that revolutionizing the life of the old village. That's fine. God's at work. We just misplaced where He was at work for a little while. |
| Interview E1 | It's Jesus' job to convict people. He'll build the church. We just want to be faithful to what God's calling us to do. |
| Interview A | I like the idea of being an encounter, being between you and the other person, but also the Holy Spirit as involved in that, and bringing something out of that which you didn't necessarily imagine or plan. Or that there's some dynamic work of God that goes on beyond what we conceived of. |
| Interview M | They seem to remain faithful to what God has called them to and then they encounter people, God sends people their way. |
| Interview M | ... finding people of peace and people you can experiment in mission with, not to but with, the people who aren't a part of your church but who get your values or you share values with that you start putting them together. |
| Interview P | It's encouraging - and God is doing more behind our back that we know of. |

Table 18. Mission as restoring all of creation.

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview J | People are reaching out into all their spheres of influence, whatever part of society they're in, or work seeing they're in, people are reaching out to colleagues and friends." |
|-------------|--|

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview F2 | Also the attractational thing of Jesus. When he sent his disciples into the worked, he sent them to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the good news, to bring good news to the poor, to feed the hungry - that is what we came to do. We came to go out. |
| Interview R | One thing that has changed over there the last ten years is how the church can influence every area of society. ... people that are involved in the arts, as artists, as managers in theatres, we have people involved in politics, people in business, and to understand how the gospel can influence and infiltrate those areas, be salt and light and bring the kingdom to the whole earth. |

Table 19. Church as having an activist faith which is serving society.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview G | I want them to become servants, to serve. I want them to become people with servant hearts. |
| Interview H | The first thing we did was we started a little youth club football club. Actually we said it was a charity in the end - it became the largest youth group charity in the area, working with the council and regeneration and all. |
| Interview J | We helped out within the learning centre, adult learning centre that was. Had volunteers going in there and doing bits and pieces. Within a couple of years, there were a couple of discussed shops on the estate which we took over, converted into a community cafe called Pow Wow. |
| Interview J | [Food bank] There's a real need, trying to really meet practical needs where people are at. |
| Interview N | I came up to Leicestershire at that point to start a youth work which had a lovely vision of being a Fresh Expression of church in some way. But it's primary function was to be a safe place for young people in quite a rough part of Leicestershire. |
| Interview O | The coffee shop wanted to give something back to the local community, and is there something we could do as a group that |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| | would enable them to do that? That was really my big vision, to see that happen. |
| Interview I | We started a homework club last year and that's for parents and their children. |
| Interview F2 | Thursday lunchtime we have a meal for anyone. Traditionally, 10 years ago, we started out for homeless people; and then it was homeless and anyone that needs it. |
| Interview E1 | ...how we're transforming Mansfield, does it look different since we've been here. That's very important to us. |
| Interview E2 | We wanted to come under the radar and just work out actually what are the other gaps and what this town needs. |
| Interview D2 | Transforming spaces into kingdom places - belonging, taking a place and giving it meaning. |
| Interview D1 | [café] If you can't afford it, you see a member of staff or a volunteer and they will authorize that you're on free lunch, but nobody else in the place would know whether you were paying. ...We do food parcels. |
| Interview A | I also feel that actually we as the church need to stand with the artists who are the prophets and who are challenging the status quo and who are presenting alternative possibilities. ... We as the church I think need to make spaces for those voices and we need to stand with those voices. |
| Interview K | That's what we want to see. We want to see a community transformed by Jesus. How he has transformed our lives as a family. We want to see that with our friends, with our families, our community. |
| Interview P | The verse in Galatians has been massively inspirational for us to build churches that affect communities rather than just build churches that hold meetings. |
| Interview R | And serve the community - we're in a community centre right on the edge of Ross in a residential area, so just serving that community, really with events, fun, with again, quality events. |
| Interview Q | And in terms of vision, we talk about we want to see people's lives transformed and the city transformed. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview B | ...to love and serve the community of Bath and beyond. |
| Interview F1 | [parents and babies group] We started that. Our purpose for that is to provide a place for them to come with baby, to meet other mums, to be together to talk to some older, wiser church people who have been mums and who have that Christian perspective and could just listen, actually. |
| Interview Q | The vision is, ultimately, we want to start a church. Most churches want to do the same thing. They want to see people's lives change. They want to see the city they're in change in some way or another. |

Table 20. Eschatologically focused on living out the kingdom of God here and now.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Interview B | The whole Vineyard philosophy of tension, sitting in the tension, now and not yet, but also with some of the past tensions that I feel we sit in are being -- that phrase that we use is scandalous grace and yet founded on scripture. |
| Interview B | I'm like, okay, well, therefore, what I'm saying is, as the leader, I'm willing to go on a journey of innovation, and wrap my ecclesiology around the expression through the kingdom, rather than going, "this is our ecclesiology of our church, fit in," once we see the fruit. |
| Interview B | Again, we would start to talk about our kingdom, the kind of now and not yet, the kingdom we believe in in the Vineyard, and the gifts of the Spirit and hearing from God, responding to God and being Jesus' hands and feet in our community, seeing our community transformed by demonstrating the compassion of God, to living lives, seeing the power of God at work, almost the tools of the kingdom being active in the church. |
| Interview I | It was more about wanting to see wholeness. I think the verse is, they are on our website. Our mission focus is seeing young people playing on the street, old people, lonely and families, |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| | so it's kind of about shalom really. There isn't necessarily a strategy. You have to just live. |
| Interview I | So I suppose that's something that we've always talked about being "with" and not "for" in terms of being alongside people rather than doing things for them. |
| Interview F1 | And the whole idea about being saved. Saved for what? Saved for Heaven? Saved from Hell? Or saved from the life that you were living to a transformed life now? That would be more in my thinking. ... much more saved so that you understand the fullness of the kingdom of God in your life now. |
| Interview E2 | ...and actually doing the stuff of the kingdom, and that how we wanted to be a church, that does the stuff of the kingdom. |
| Interview E1 | I suppose kingdom theology is obviously what Vineyard could go off, and thus bringing the kingdom to place everywhere. ... Yes, it's being God's Kingdom and on Sunday's that's what we celebrate everything that's happened in the week, but we have to be able to because, we have to be looking at Mansfield. ... we're bringing God's love and everyone's bringing it whether they're in farms or at work or at home or at play and stuff. |
| Interview E1 | This is the expression of the church that I loved, which was out in the community. Doing community things, serving the poor, and not reading the bible... how to actually apply the bible in my everyday life and take what was written in the bible and to do it and not just say it or think it. |
| Interview E1 | We often talk about the now and not yet of the Kingdom and we very much believe a lot of people, more kingdom now, held that tension. I pray for people, I expect God to move. He might not move every single time. That's been the big shift, the whole Kingdom theology... the fact that God can use us and work through us. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview D2 | Clapton's much more about giving people respite.... It's about safe space, so that you can then go back and face your lousy life in a little bit, knowing that next week, you'll be coming for some more safe space. It's just giving people these glimpses of the Kingdom of God to them in the hope of what then happens is people then turn up for church service, and there find God for themselves. |
|--------------|--|

Table 21. Church as involved in transforming every area of society (overcoming the sacred/secular divide).

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview J | We've got involved in setting up a community group, I suppose it would be called. It's based around residents and service providers. We got people from fire, police, council, adult learning, education, all of those kinds of things that are there. The whole point of it was to sit down, look at what was going on in the community, how can we help improve some of the areas. |
| Interview N | God made everything. He saw it, he loved it, he created it. All of that, the whole image right, and that particular work with people, working with people that have mental health issues, a transformational text. |
| Interview O | I suppose sometimes church, big church on a Sunday can feel a bit detached from the real world and real life. And working out how Christian faith is applied in the everyday, where I'm sort of at. |
| Interview F2 | What we actually learned was the depth which is the Kingdom of God, rather than the question of have you been saved, yes or no. That was a big change for us. |
| Interview F2 | But also the attractational thing of Jesus. When he sent his disciples into the worked, he sent them to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the good news, to bring good news to the poor, to feed the hungry - that is what we came to do. We came to go out. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview E1 | ... we're bringing God's love and everyone's bringing it whether they're in farms or at work or at home or at play and stuff. |
| Interview M | We gather people to do environmental work, creative work, making bird boxes, planting trees, bonfires and then use that as a vehicle to start talking about life and faith and that's in its very early stages |
| Interview R | One thing that has changed over there the last ten years is how the church can influence every area of society. ... people that are involved in the arts, as artists, as managers in theatres, we have people involved in politics, people in business, and to understand how the gospel can influence and infiltrate those areas, be salt and light and bring the kingdom to the whole earth. |

Table 22. The incarnational church has a renewed focus on the person of Jesus.

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Interview B | I spent a year assessing my leadership of the previous three, four years, and it was like, "Is Jesus at the centre of any of that? What was fuelling that?" And so what came out for us is just how can we birth a community that is Jesus centred? |
| Interview B | ...it means coming home and engaging and meeting with Jesus. That's the starting point, and we would talk a lot about the, as the church, our job is to creation home, create environments, create our lives in a way that people can engage and meet Jesus at the front door. |
| Interview B | That came out of a sense of we want to have a community that is really clear on its purposes of what we're about but most of all that it's been fuelled and founded and centred and grounded in Jesus. |
| Interview C | So you've got the theological grit to understand, be reacquainted with Jesus, be reacquainted with his priorities, passions. |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Interview G | We really do need to start with Christ because Jesus said, "wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there will I be among them." |
| Interview H | About a month goes passed, and all I can do is read the gospels. It is like gospels I've never read before. Every other bit of the bible is dry as anything, but the gospels - it's like they are all new and Jesus is like I've never seen him before. |
| Interview J | Again, all these things we're talking about, we wanted to be Christ-centred, we want to rely on the Holy Spirit. |
| Interview J | I'm passionate to see people find Jesus. For the church to be the church that Jesus called it today. |
| Interview F2 | There has to be a reason why people have Christianity that just doesn't look like Jesus anymore. ... |
| Interview F2 | I think this theme of peace encompasses it much more, because I think what we've discovered is that the Jesus way is the way of peace. |
| Interview E2 | We are here to make an impact for Jesus, not only being Mansfield's best friend doing all these nice things, we're doing it because Jesus is calling us to do it. |
| Interview E1 | I know that if it is more people in Mansfield who're following Jesus, that can only be for the better, that's my heart. |
| Interview D1 | I absolutely believe that people getting to know Jesus is the answer. |
| Interview K | That's what we want to see. We want to see a community transformed by Jesus. How he has transformed our lives as a family. We want to see that with our friends, with our families, our community. |
| Interview Q | We talk about everything that we do to be about devotion, devotion to Jesus, building community and mission together. |

Table 23. The incarnational models mission.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview G | I didn't do anything. I didn't do any church planting for the first 18 months. And here's the theology, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He pitched his tent among us, and he became a particular man, in a particular context, in a particular culture, in a particular place, in a particular country, at a particular time. I decided to model my church planting and mission on Jesus." |
| Interview G | I decided to model my church planting and mission on Jesus. Lots of people model on Paul, but I would assert that Jesus was the first missionary and church planter.... |
| Interview G | We start with Christ - the first missionary. |
| Interview G | [inspiration] Without sounding super spiritual, the Gospels - Jesus Christ. He did it. Let's look at the Gospels and say how does the way Jesus did this transfer to the 21st century UK? Some of it doesn't. Some of it does. I would say the gospels is first and then the other literature [inspires] as a practitioner. |
| Interview F2 | But also the attractional thing of Jesus. When he sent his disciples into the worked, he sent them to heal, to cast out demons, to preach the good news, to bring good news to the poor, to feed the hungry - that is what we came to do. We came to go out. |
| Interview E2 | We often bring our church back to Acts, and talk about what kind of, what the disciples went out to do when they were commissioned by Jesus. Obviously, looking at the gospels and how Jesus kind of went around and ministered to the broken hearted and showed his emotion and showed his thought processes and took them back to his Dad, really. I suppose we draw people back again and again to the Bible, but particularly the gospels and all the Jesus was doing when he was out in his own community and the communities around him. |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview D2 | Being in Clapton was really similar to that but it was more, you know, rather than having church in your homes, we were just there everyday in a coffee shop or charity shop. ...It is incarnational because, like what you'd find inside Clapton is just an overflow from the street, isn't it? Whoever's walking around in Clapton, in Hackney, you find in here in Clapton. |
| Interview A | When I look at Jesus, Jesus did discipleship by living in community, and be doing mission and then reflecting together on what they learned. So that is what I'm trying to do in my community |
| Interview K | How did Jesus disciple? Did he just hold a bible study? No. Did he ever go into people's homes? He moved into people's houses and he sat with them. He ate with them, had parties, he lived life with them and that's really kind of affected our church. |
| Interview M | Lastly, learning how to do church as a guest rather than the host? The idea that Jesus was always a guest. It was never on his terms or in his house or his food... |
| Interview R | And Jesus, he said that the disciples looked up, looked for him and said, everybody's looking for you. And he said, let's move on to other towns and villages. And I'm sure they wanted him to stay there and build a church and set up something, but it's now moving on. And so the kind of idea that you have to move, otherwise you're going to probably get stuck. |
| Interview Q | If you look at the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was starting a church planting movement. ...you look through the gospel, Jesus went through the countryside.... How Jesus was obviously going around the countryside, starting small communities of believers. |
| interview Q | Jesus actually, he just kept going. He disciplined people by sending out the 72 and some of them got beat up, so you think, well okay. |

Table 24. The church embodies and represents God to others

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Interview B | What would it look like for a bunch of followers of Jesus form that community, in that background, to gather together, to worship, to allow the Bible to inform them and shape them and apply it to their lives... to be Jesus' hands and feet where they are? |
| Interview B | Again, we would start to talk about our kingdom, the kind of now and not yet, the kingdom we believe in the Vineyard, and the gifts of the Spirit and hearing from God, responding to God and being Jesus' hands and feet in our community, seeing our community transformed by demonstrating the compassion of God, to living lives, seeing the power of God at work, almost the tools of the kingdom being active in the church. |
| Interview G | I didn't do anything. I didn't do any church planting for the first 18 months. And here's the theology, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." |
| Interview K | To change that view of the church is, where we turn up on a Sunday: "that's the church" to "we are the church." We are the called out ones. We are God's people. We are the ones that are supposed to be reflecting who God is to our neighbour. |
| Interview K | We know we are the church and we are supposed to be reflecting this triune God to our community. What does this look like? |
| Interview A | I see very much that we're trying to be an outflow of the Trinity. |
| Interview F1 | And also, we learned in college theologically much more about being incarnational. I think that's what we were able to put into practice. Although we didn't have this building, we would still be able to be incarnational in this community. |
| Interview E2 | If it's a glimpse of Jesus within us and what we're doing, then that's what we do. |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Addison, Steve. *What Jesus Started : Joining the Movement, Changing the World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012.
- Anderson, Ray Sherman. *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*. Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007.
- Barna, George. *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*. Vereeniging: Christian Art Pubs, 2006.
- Barrett, Lois. *Treasure in Clay Jars : Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series; Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004.
- "A Basic Reading List on the Subject of Missional." Friend of Missional, http://www.friendofmissional.org/reading_list.html.
- Baum, Gregory. "The Response of a Theologian to Charles Taylor's a Secular Age." *MOTH Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010): 363-81.
- Bednar, Tim. "We Know More Than Our Pastors: Why Bloggers Are the Vanguard of the Participatory Church." scribd.com, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/47331/We-Know-More-Than-Our-Pastors>.
- Belcher, Jim. *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Pr, 2009.
- Bevans, Stephen B., Teresa Chai, J. Nelson Jennings, Knud Jørgensen, and D. Werner. *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016. <http://scholar.csl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=edinburghcentenary>.
- Bielo, James S. *Emerging Evangelicals : Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.
- Boren, M. Scott. *Missiorelate : Becoming a Church of Missional Small Groups*. Houston, Tex.: Touch Publications, 2011.
- Bosch, David J. *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture*. Christian Mission and Modern Culture. Leominster, England; Valley Forge, Pa: Gracewing; TPI, 1995.
- Bosch, David Jacobus. *Transforming Mission : Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. American Society of Missiology Series. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. *Successful Qualitative Research : A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London: SAGE, 2013.
- . "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.
- Brewin, Kester. *Signs of Emergence: A Vision for Church That Is Organic/Networked/Decentralized/Bottom-up/Communal/Flexible/Always Evolving*. Grand Rapids: Baker Bks, 2007.
- Brierley, P. W. *Future Church : A Global Analysis of the Christian Community to the Year 2010*. Crowborough, East Sussex; London: Monarch Books ; Christian Research, 1998.
- Brierley, Peter, and Association Christian Research. *Uk Christian Handbook Religious Trends. No. 7 2007/2008. No. 7 2007/2008*. Eltham: Christian Research, 2008.
- "British Social Attitudes: Record Number of Brits with No Religion." NatCen, <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2017/september/british-social-attitudes-record-number-of-brits-with-no-religion/>.

- Carson, Donald A. *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2008.
- Chester, Tim. "Thursday Review: Rejesus by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch." Tim Chester, <https://timchester.wordpress.com/2010/03/11/thursday-review-rejesus-by-michael-frost-and-alan-hirsch/>
- Chester, Tim, and Steve Timmis. *Everyday Church : Gospel Communications on Mission*. North American ed. ed. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012.
- . *Total Church : A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2007.
- Claiborne, Shane. *The Irresistible Revolution*. Zondervan, 2006.
- Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People : The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Cole, Neil. *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- . *Search & Rescue: Becoming a Disciple Who Makes a Difference*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Bks, 2008.
- Cooper, Barry. "Newfrontiers Church Planting in the Uk an Examination of Their Distinctives and Practices." Thesis, University of Wales, 2009.
- Coulter, Paul B. "Church and Mission in Four Aspects: Church Planting within a Missionary Ecclesiology for the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in Contemporary Northern Ireland." Ph.D., University of Aberdeen (United Kingdom), 2016.
- Cray, Graham. "An Introduction." Fresh Expressions, <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/introduction>.
- Cray, Graham Bp, Moira Astin, John Clark, Lyle Dennen, Damian Feeney, Robert Freeman, Sally Gaze, et al. *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. London: Church House Publishing, 2004.
- Cray, Graham Bp, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy. *Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God*. Ancient Faith, Future Mission 3. London, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012.
- Croft, Steven J. L. *Mission-Shaped Questions : Defining Issues for Today's Church*. London: Church House Publishing, 2008.
- Croft, Steven J. L., Ian Mobsby, and Stephanie Spellers. *Ancient Faith, Future Mission : Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Traditions*. New York: Seabury Books, 2010.
- Cronshaw, Darren. "The Shaping of Things Now: Mission and Innovation in Four Emerging Churches in Melbourne."; Archival Material, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009.
- Dadswell, David and Ross, Cathy. "Church Planting." (2013). http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports.
- Davie, Grace. *Religion in Britain : A Persistent Paradox*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.
- . *Religion in Britain since 1945 : Believing without Belonging*. Making Contemporary Britain. Oxford ; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994.
- . *The Sociology of Religion*. London: Sage Publications, 2007.
- Davie, Grace, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead. *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures*. Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective. Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2003.
- Davison, Andrew, and Alison Milbank. *For the Parish : A Critique of Fresh Expressions* [in English]. London: SCM Press, 2010.

- Davison, Andrew Paul, and A. G. Milbank. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. London: SCM Pr, 2010.
- DeYoung, Kevin, and Ted Kluck. *Why We're Not Emergent : By Two Guys Who Should Be*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008.
- Doel, Graham John. "Church Planting in the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1980-2010: A Critical Study." University of Manchester, 2010.
- Doornenbal, R. J. A. *Crossroads : An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and Its Challenges for Theological Education*. Delft: Eburon, 2012.
- Drane, John. *After Mcdonaldization: Mission, Ministry and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008.
- Drane, John William. *The Emerging Church*. Milton Park, Oxon, UK: Routledge Journals, 2006.
- . *The Mcdonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2000.
- Dreier, Mary Sue Dehmlow. *Created and Led by the Spirit: Planting Missional Congregations*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Driscoll, Mark. *Confessions of a Reformission Rev: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2006.
- DuBose, Francis M. *God Who Sends : A Fresh Quest for Biblical Mission*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1983.
- Expressions, Fresh. "Introduction." <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about/introduction>.
- . "Reading List." <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/reading>.
- Finney, John. *Emerging Evangelism*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004.
- Fisher-Høyrem, Stefan Tørnquist. "Time Machines: Technology, Temporality, and the Victorian Social Imaginary." Ph.D., Oxford Brookes University (United Kingdom), 2012.
- Foust, Thomas F. *A Scandalous Prophet : The Way of Mission after Newbigin*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith : The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. 1st HarperCollins pbk. ed. ed. New York, NY: HarperOne, 1995.
- Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Hendrickson, 2006.
- . *The Road to Missional : Journey to the Center of the Church*. Shapevine. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011.
- Frost, Michael, and Alan Hirsch. *Rejesus : A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009.
- . *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.
- Gay, Doug. *Remixing the Church: Towards an Emerging Ecclesiology*. London: SCM Press, 2011.
- Gibbs, Eddie. "Church Responses to Culture since 1985." *Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2007): 157-68.
- . *Churchmorph : How Megatrends Are Reshaping Christian Communities*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009.
- . *Leadershipnext : Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

- Gibbs, Eddie, and Ryan K. Bolger. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. SPCK, 2006.
- Gibbs, Eddie, and Ian Coffey. *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Pr, 2001.
- Giddens, Philip. "A Mixed Economy for Mission – the Journey So Far." (2010). <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1237677/gs%201761%20web%20version.pdf>.
- Goheen, M. "Liberating the Gospel from Its Modern Cage. An Interpretation of Lesslie Newbigin's Gospel and Modern Culture Project." *Missionalia* 30, no. 3 (2002): 360-75.
- Goheen, Michael W. "Historical Perspectives on the Missional Church Movement: Probing Lesslie Newbigin's Formative Influence." *Trinity Journal for Theology and Ministry* Vol. IV, no. Fall 2010 (2010): Pages 62-84.
- Goodhew, David. *Church Growth in Britain : 1980 to the Present*. Farnham: Ashgate Pub., 2012.
- Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM, 2005.
- Greene, Colin, and Martin Robinson. *Metavista: Bible, Church, and Mission in an Age of Imagination*. Colorado Springs, Colo: Authentic Media, 2008.
- Greer, Robert. *Mapping Postmodernism : A Survey of Christian Options*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996.
- Grenz, Stanley J., and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Pr, 2001.
- Guder, Darrell L. *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology*. Gospel and Our Culture Series. 2015.
- . *The Incarnation and the Church's Witness*. Harrisburg, Penn: Trinity Pr International, 1999.
- . *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Gospel and Culture. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Guest, Mathew. *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007.
- Hall, Douglas John. *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2002.
- . "A Theological Proposal for the Church's Response to Its Context." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 6 (1995): 417-25.
- Halter, Hugh, and Matt Smay. *The Tangible Kingdom : Creating Incarnational Community : The Posture and Practices of Ancient Church Now*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- Haney, Richard L. "Charles Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries* in Light of Michael Polanyi's *Tacit Dimension*." In *Polanyi Society Annual Meeting*. San Diego, California, 2014.
- Hastings, Adrian. *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*. 3rd ed. London: SCM Press, 1991.
- Hastings, Ross. *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2012.
- Hill, Graham. *Salt, Light, and a City : Introducing a Missional Ecclesiology*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2012.

- Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.
- Hollinghurst, Steve. *Mission Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture*. Norwich: Canterbury Pr, 2010.
- Huckins, Jon, and Rob Yackley. *Thin Places : 6 Postures for Creating & Practicing Missional Community*. Kansas City, MO: House Studio, 2012.
- Hunsberger, George R., and Craig Van Gelder. *The Church between Gospel and Culture : The Emerging Mission in North America*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996.
- Hunt, Stephen. "The Emerging Church and Its Discontents." *Journal of Beliefs & Values-Studies in Religion & Education* 29, no. 3 (2008 2008): 287-96.
- Hunter, George G. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*. Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 2010.
- Jackson, Darrell, and Tim Herbert. "Missions and Church Planting in Europe." <http://togetherinmission.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Eurochurch-report-2012.pdf> Eurochurch.net, 2011.
- Jamieson, Alan. *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches*. London: SPCK, 2002.
- Jones, Andrew. "Emergant.: A One Week Tour." http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/03/emergant_a_one_.html.
- . "Emerging Church Movement (1989 - 2009)?" <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2009/12/emerging-church-movement-1989---2009.html>.
- Jones, Tony. *The New Christians : Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- . *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*. Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- Kalinowski, Caesar. *Small Is Big, Slow Is Fast : Living and Leading Your Family and Community on God's Mission*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014.
- Kallianos, Ioannis. "The Subversion of Everyday Life: An Anthropological Study of Radical Political Practices: The Greek Revolt of December 2008." Ph.D., University of St. Andrews (United Kingdom), 2012.
- Keller, Timothy. *Center Church : Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Kim, Seung Soo. "Imagining Religion and Modernity in Post-Colonial Korea: Neo-Liberal Brand Culture and Digital Space." Ph.D., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2016.
- Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church : Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003.
- Kirk, J. Andrew. "Re-Envisioning the Theological Curriculum as If the Missio Dei Mattered." *Common Ground Journal* Vol 3, no. Fall (2005): 23-40.
- . "'A Secular Age" in a Mission Perspective: A Review Article." *transformation Transformation* 28, no. 3 (2011): 172-81.
- . *What Is Mission? Theological Explorations*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999.
- Labanow, Cory E. "The Challenges of Reconstruction : A Congregational Study of an Emerging Church." Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2006.
- Larson, Bruce, and Ralph Osborne. *The Emerging Church*. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1970.

- Lincoln, A. T. "Spirituality in a Secular Age : From Charles Taylor to Study of the Bible and Spirituality." *Acta Theologica* (2011): 61-80.
- Lings, George. "Church Growth Research Program." 2014.
- . "The Day of Small Things." <https://www.churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204265>.
- . *Reproducing Churches*. Abingdon, England: BRF, 2017.
- Lings, George, Stuart Murray, and Army Church. *Church Planting : Past, Present and Future*. Grove Evangelism Series, 1367-0840 ; Ev 61; Grove Evangelism Series ; Ev 61. Cambridge :: Grove Books, 2003.
- . *Church Planting in the Uk since 2000 : Reviewing the First Decade*. Grove Evangelism Series ; Ev 99; Grove Evangelism Series ; Ev 99. Cambridge, England :: Grove Books, 2012.
- Lyon, David. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000.
- Marti, Gerardo, and Gladys Ganiel. *The Deconstructed Church : Understanding Emerging Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Matthey, Jacques. "Willingen 1952-Willingen 2002 the Origin and Contents." *IROM International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003): 463-68.
- McAlpine, William R. *Sacred Space for the Missional Church : Engaging Culture through the Built Environment*. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- McKnight, Scot. "The Ironic Faith of Emergents." (2008). Published electronically September 26, 2008. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/september/39.62.html>.
- . *The Jesus Creed : Loving God, Loving Others*. Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2004.
- . *Kingdom Conspiracy : Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*. 2016.
- . "What Is the Emerging Church?" In *Fall Contemporary Issues Conference*. Westminster Theological Seminary, 2006.
- . "What Is the Emerging Church? Pro-Abundance." In *Jesus Creed*, 2005.
- McKnight, Scot, Peter Rollins, Kevin Corcoran, and Jason Clark. *Church in the Present Tense : A Candid Look at What's Emerging*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2011.
- McLaren, Brian D. *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- . *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- McNeal, Reggie. *Missional Communities : The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- McNeal, Reggie, and Network Leadership. *Missional Renaissance : Changing the Scorecard for the Church*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Middleton, J. Richard, and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be : Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995.
- Milbank, John. "Reviewarticle: A Closer Walk on the Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor's a Secular Age." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 1 (2009): 89-104.
- Miller, Brian Vann. "Images of the Missional Church Leadership, Culture, and Practices in Context." <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/ecommonsatsdissertations/397/>.
- Miller, Vincent Jude. *Consuming Religion : Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

- Minatrea, Milfred. *Shaped by God's Heart : The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Moynagh, Michael. *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens*. 2014.
- . *Church for Every Context : An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. London: SCM, 2012.
- . *Church in Life - Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*. London: Scm Press, 2017.
- . *Emergingchurch.Intro*. Oxford: Monarch, 2004.
- Murray, Stuart. *Changing Mission : Learning from the Newer Churches*. London: CTBI, 2006.
- . *Church after Christendom*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004.
- . *Church Planting : Laying Foundations*. Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2004.
- . "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian ... does the Label Matter?". *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3 (2009/08/01 2009): 195-208.
- . *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004.
- Myers, Joseph R. *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.
- Nelstrop, Louise, and Martyn Percy. *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church*. Norwich: Canterbury Pr, 2008.
- Network, Gospel and Our Culture. "What and Why." Gospel and Our Culture Network, <http://www.gocn.org/network/about>.
- Newbigin, Lesslie Bp. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids; London: Eerdmans; SPCK, 1986.
- Paas, Stefan. *Church Planting in the Secular West : Learning from the European Experience*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.
- . "Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences." *Mission Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011): 3-25.
- Percy, Martyn. *Shaping the Church the Promise of Implicit Theology*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.
- Perriman, Andrew. "Liquid Church." <http://www.opensourcetheology.net/node/992>.
- . "Review of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, Rejesus." P.OST, <http://www.postost.net/2009/03/review-michael-frost-alan-hirsch-rejesus>.
- Punch, Keith. *Introduction to Social Research : Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches*. Third edition. ed. Los Angeles, California: SAGE, 2014.
- "Reading List." The Urban Mission Centre, <http://www.urbanmissioncenter.com/reading-list/accessed>
- "Reading List." Missional Church Network, <http://missionalchurchnetwork.com/reading-list/>.
- "Recommended Missional Resources." Allelon, http://allelon.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=96&Itemid=89.
- "Recommended Sites." Fuller.edu, <http://blog.fuller.edu/churchthenandnow/>
- Reeves, Scott and Kuper, Ayelet and Hodges, Brian David "Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography." *BMJ* 337 (30 AUGUST 2008 2008): 512-14.

- "Religious Affiliation by Birth Decade, 1900-9 to 1980-9." British Religion by Numbers, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/affiliation-and-attendance-from-1983/religious-affiliation-by-birth-decade-1900-9-to-1980-9/>.
- "Remembering Stan Grenz." Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/marchweb-only/12.0b.html>.
- Robbie, Byron. "Beyond Inclusion: Transforming the Educational Governance Relationship between First Nations and School Districts in British Columbia." Ed.D., Simon Fraser University (Canada), 2005.
- Robinson, Martin, and Dwight Smith. *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*. Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2003.
- Rogers, Everett M. *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York; London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1983.
- Roxburgh, Alan J. *Missional : Joining God in the Neighborhood*. Allelon Missional Series. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011.
- . *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997.
- Roxburgh, Alan J., and M. Scott Boren. *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*. Grand Rapids, Mich: BakerBooks, 2009.
- Roxburgh, Alan J., and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Rumsey, Andrew. *Parish : An Anglican Theology of Place*. London: SCM Press, an imprint of Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd, 2017.
- Rusaw, Rick, and Eric Swanson. *The Externally Focused Church*. Loveland, Colo: Group Publishing, 2004.
- Scharen, Christian Batalden, and Aana Marie Vigen. *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*. London ; New York: Continuum, 2011.
- Schwarz, Christian A. *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*. Carol Stream, Ill: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996.
- Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline : The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday/Currency, 1990.
- Shelley, Marshall. "Spencer Burke on the Church That Consumerism Built--and Why I Fled." Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2006/may-online-only/spencer-burke-on-church-that-consumerism-built-and-why-i.html>.
- Shenk, Wilbert R. "Mission, Renewal, and the Future of the Church." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 4 (1997): 154-59.
- . *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed*. Christian Mission and Modern Culture. Leominster, England; Valley Forge, Pa: Gracewing; TPI, 1995.
- Sheridan, Tim M., and H. Jurgens Hendriks. "The Emergent Church Movement." *ngtt Dutch Reformed Theological Journal = Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 53, no. 3 & 4 (2012): 312-23.
- . "The Missional Church Movement." *ngtt Dutch Reformed Theological Journal = Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54, no. 3 & 4 (2013).
- Silverman, David. *Interpreting Qualitative Data : Methods for Analysing Talk, Text, and Interaction*. London: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Sine, Tom. *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Pr, 2008.

- Smith, C. Christopher, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *Slow Church : Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2014.
- Smith, Graeme. *A Short History of Secularism*. London [u.a.]: I.B. Tauris, 2010.
- Smith, James K. A. *How (Not) to Be Secular : Reading Charles Taylor*. 2014.
- . *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? : Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. The Church and Postmodern Culture. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Sparks, Paul, Tim Sorens, and Dwight J. Friesen. *The New Parish : How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Steele, Hannah. *New World, New Church? : The Theology of the Emerging Church Movement*. London: SCM Press, 2017.
- Steele, Hannah Mary. "A Critical Appraisal of the Theology of the Emerging Church - : With a Particular Focus on Its Eschatology, Missiology and Ecclesiology." PhD, King's College London., 2014.
- Stetzer, Ed. "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Part 1: The Missionary Stream." Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-part-1-missionary-.html>. .
- . "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Part 2: The Mission Stream." Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-part-2-mission-str.html?paging=off>.
- . "3 Historical Streams of the Missional Church Stream Part 3: The Missio Dei Stream." Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/3-historical-streams-of-missional-church-stream-part-3-miss.html>.
- . "Church Leadership Book Interview: Alan Hirsch " Edstetzer.com, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2009/01/interview-with-alan-hirsch.html>.
- . "The Evolution of Church Growth, Church Health, and the Missional Church: An Overview of the Church Growth Movement from and Back to, Its Missional Roots." *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* 17 (2006): 87-112.
- . "First-Person: Understanding the Emerging Church." Baptist News, <http://www.bpnews.net/22406/firstperson-understanding-the-emerging-church>.
- . "Guder: "Missional" Church as a Scaffolding Term." Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/august/guder-missional-church-as-scaffolding-term.html>. .
- . "Monday Is for Missiology: Missional Voices." Edstetzer.com, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2010/04/monday-is-for-missiology-10.html>
- . *Planting Missional Churches*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Alan Hirsch. "Missional Manifesto." <http://www.libertynetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Missional-Manifesto.pdf>.
- Swinton, John, and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Pr, 2006.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard Univ Pr; Belknap Pr, 2007.

- Todd, Eleanor M. "Liquid Church (Book)." *Expository Times* 115, no. 11 (2004): 376-78.
- Tomlin, Graham, and Knowledge Society for Promoting Christian. *The Provocative Church*. 2014.
- Tomlinson, Dave. "Post Evangelical." Dave Tomlinson, <http://www.davetomlinson.co.uk/post-evangelical/>.
- . *The Post Evangelical*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Van Engen, Charles Edward. *God's Missionary People : Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991.
- Van Gelder, C. "Postmodernism and Evangelicals: A Unique Missiological Challenge at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century." [In English]. *MISSIOLOGY* 30 (2002): 491-504.
- Van Gelder, Craig. *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker Bk House, 2000.
- Van Gelder, Craig, and Dwight J. Zscheile. *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011.
- . *Participating in God's Mission : A Theological Missiology for the Church in America*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Pr, 2003.
- Viola, Frank. *From Eternity to Here : Rediscovering the Ageless Purpose of God*. 1st ed. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009.
- Walker, Andrew, Luke Bretherton, and Richard Chartres. *Remembering Our Future : Explorations in Deep Church*. Deep Church. London ; Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2007.
- Wallis, Jim. *Faith Works: Lessons on Spirituality and Social Action*. London: SPCK, 2002.
- Ward, Graham. "History, Belief and Imagination in Charles Taylor's "a Secular Age"." *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010): 337-48.
- Ward, Pete. *Liquid Church*. Carlisle: Paternoster Pr, 2003.
- . *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church*. London: SCM, 2008.
- Webber, Robert. *Ancient-Future Faith : Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999.
- . *The Younger Evangelicals : Facing the Challenges of the New World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002.
- Weber, Timothy P. "The Seminaries and the Churches: Looking for New Relationships." *Theological Education* 44, no. 1 (2008): 65-91.
- White, Dan, J. R. Woodward, and David E. Fitch. *Subterranean : Why the Future of the Church Is Rootedness*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015.
- Whitesel, Bob. "Recurring Patterns of Organic Churches : An Analysis of Twelve Emerging Congregations." Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.
- Woodward, J. R. *Creating a Missional Culture : Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012.
- . "A Primer on Today's Missional Church." jrwoodward.net, <http://jrwoodward.net/2008/11/a-primer-on-todays-missional-church>.
- Woodward, James, and Stephen Pattison. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God : Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006.

———. *The Mission of God's People : A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010.